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GENDER AND NATIONALISM: THE MASCULINIZATION OF HINDUISM AND FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN INDIA

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Synopsis — Feminist analysis has revealed the gendered nature of nations and nationalism. Adopting such a perspective, this paper analyzes the relationship between the masculinization of Hindu nationalism and female political participation. The image of an aggressive male warrior is central to certain versions of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva in contemporary India. This image is embedded within a political narrative, which declares its affinity for ideas of resolute masculinity through an array of symbols, historic icons, and myths. Given that Indian women are very visible in the politics of Hindutva, this paper interrogates how women have created a political space for themselves in a very masculinist narrative. This interrogation focuses on historical and cultural processes that enabled this masculinization, certain ideals of femininity implicit within this narrative which opens the door for female participation, and womens' use of images and icons drawn from a common cultural milieu to enter the political landscape of Hindutva. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The political doctrine of nationalism is based on the idea of a nation or a people, and it usually locates an "other" who is used to reinforce ties uniting the nation. In other words, a coherent community exists because "we" are ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and/or ideologically distinct from "them." It has become a truism to acknowledge that nationalism, in the oft-quoted words of Anderson (1991), is imagined. The theoretical rooting of the process of nation building in imagination denies malicious intent to deceive or falsify, but rather highlights the creative attempts on the part of communities to build an intersubjective identity marked by common cultural myths, symbols, heroes, and heroines.

Identity draws on the grammar of everyday life. In other words, daily communication takes place because ordinary people have a shared cultural context that forms the basis for why they feel an affinity for a certain identity and for other members who share this identity. Identities are fluid and multiple. They are fluid in that, over time new interpretations of an identity may emerge. For example, the meaning of the American, Canadian, and Indian nations has been renegotiated in the last hundred years within a context of changing immigration patterns and emerging identity politics. Identities are multiple in that during one

particular period in a specific nation state there may be various interpretations of identity contesting for dominance or new readings of an identity may emerge to challenge a dominant interpretation. For example, currently, the categories American, Canadian, and Indian are open to multiple interpretations as minority communities resist the official, mainstream view of nation within these states. Thus, the process of imagining a nation is contested as well as being historically, socially, and politically constituted.

It has not been until the emergence of feminist analysis that the gendered nature of imagined political identities has been uncovered and deconstructed (Blom, Hall, & Hagemann, 2000; Enloe, 1983, 2000; Mayar, 1999; McClintock, 1995; McClintock, Mufti, & Shohat, 1997; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). But how precisely does gender play itself out within forms of nationalisms? Usually, a nationalism is gendered in that it draws on socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity to shape female and male participation in nation building, as well as the manner in which the nation is embodied in the imagination of self-professed nationalists.

Women as social reproducers of cultural forms teach children rituals and myths aimed at locating them within a specific national context; in other words, by learning about brave warriors or courageous pioneers through song, stories, or pictures

children can develop a loyalty to a certain idea of nation (Peterson, 1998). Further, motherland or nation as woman to be protected by brave citizen warriors is a common metaphor of nationalisms. For example, the *Marseilles* implicitly calls upon soldiers to protect the French nation embodied by the beautiful young Marianne. In a similar manner, many Indian nationalists vow to protect *Bharatmata* or "Mother India." Nation as woman also intersects the nationalist discourse through socially constructed ideas of honor. In many contexts, women symbolize national honor, thus any act (e.g., rape) that defiles and violates women's bodies becomes a political weapon aimed at destroying the enemy nation's honor. Consequently, the point of departure of an analysis of the social construction of gender and how it informs nationalism is the relationship between woman as signifier of the nation and the warriors exhorted to defend the homeland. Further, the gendered manner in which the image of the warrior is constructed within nationalist narratives as well as the notion that women embody national honor, influences to a certain extent, how women will participate in nationalist politics.

The above ideas shape the gendered lens I employ to analyze the narrative of Hindu nationalism as it unfolds in contemporary India. I draw upon the role and construction of masculinity within Hindutva or Hindu nationalism in the Indian context to examine the influence of the masculinization of nationalism on female political participation. I argue that while there are multiple interpretations of Hindu nationalism, an image central to the more militant of these views is that of a male warrior. It is important to acknowledge that the notion of militancy, within the context of Hindu nationalism, is contested. Social organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and political parties such as the Shiv Sena and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) all represent some aspects of "militant" Hindu nationalism. However, there are ideological differences among them. For example, VHP members will define their nationalist mission as conserving tangible representations of Hindu religion (i.e., temples and idols) and participating in religious rituals while RSS activists visualize themselves as social workers who are building a strong nation with education and discipline. Although it celebrates Hindu spirituality, protecting temples, preserving idols, and celebrating Hindu rituals are not the primary features of the RSS' nationalist vision. This difference is succinctly illustrated by an RSS activist in New Delhi, "My first allegiance is to *Bharatmata* and not Ram (a Hindu deity revered and used by the VHP to justify many of

its militant activities)"(Interview with author, February 2002).[1]

However, all these organizations do have some overlap in their ideology because of close inter-personal relations. For example, Ashok Singhal, an important VHP leader, was a member of the RSS. Similarly, many activists of the Sena, BJP, and the VHP all have close ties with the RSS. The idea of the Hindu warrior referred to above is one of these ideological commonalities. This image rooted in a notion of masculinity defined by attributes such as decisiveness, aggression, muscular strength, and a willingness to engage in battle, is opposed to a notion of femininity that is defined by traits such as weakness, non-violence, compassion, and a willingness to compromise. This image of a warrior—reflecting (as I term it) masculine Hinduism—is the culmination of a series of gendered historical and social processes playing themselves out in the Indian context.

Such a process of masculinization does not necessarily have to erase women from active nation building; after all one of the great contributions of feminist analysis has been the separation of sex and gender. Within feminist analysis, "sex" refers to the physical attributes that construct a biological man or woman while gender refers to the group of culturally endorsed traits—aggression, strength, weakness—that are deemed necessary for socially accepted "masculine" and "feminine" behavior. Most feminists agree that there is no biological link between sex and gender; it is possible for women to take on "masculine" traits and for men to take on "feminine" traits. Thus, women may simply join the project of masculine Hinduism by taking on the masculine traits approved by this interpretation of nation and it is indeed possible that some women may do so. But we must not forget that when women challenge societal ideas of femininity by taking on masculine traits, they may face censure and sanction from the (usually male) elite leading the project of masculinization who may not welcome such women, seeing their female presence as "diluting" the resolute masculinity of the nation. Therefore, it can be argued that women as political actors may become invisible when faced with such a process of masculinization. In reality, however, women—within the many interpretations of Hindu nationalism—have created a space within this process, delicately negotiating their way through culturally dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity in ways that are powerful and visible.

One important way in which they do so is by taking on masculine traits to become citizen warriors defending the nation. Women become warriors to defend the nation in two ways. One, by protecting

national possessions (goods and land) and two by fending off attacks on their bodies. The latter act is crucial because according to the conceit of "nation as woman," women actually embody national honor, which can be sullied, if enemy soldiers rape women. Women also intersect the masculinized discourse of Hindu nationalism by playing on their role as wife and mother as well as culturally endorsed ideas of "wifehood" and "motherhood." In addition, militarism has not necessarily been a masculine trait in India. Goddesses such as Kali and Durga illustrate that violence, militarism, and anger have been associated with the divine figure of the feminine. The cult of the mother goddess as a symbol of martial strength and prowess inspired some nineteenth century nationalist movements. Indeed, the existence of multiple ways of mapping gender and militarism in India has, to a certain extent, enabled female visibility in the Hindu nationalist project. However, as the discussion below will highlight, women who participate in this project are aware of and use various strategies to deal with masculinist fears that female political presence may challenge socially prescribed gender roles and hence weaken (read feminize) the image of the powerful (read masculine) nation.

There is a body of work analyzing female participation in militant Hindu nationalism (Sarkar & Butalia, 1995) as well as gender and nation in India (Chowdhury, 2001; Gupta, 2001; Jeffery & Basu, 1998; Roy, 1998; Sinha, 1995). The Sarkar and Butalia book offers a collection of studies on women's activism in the Hindutva movement; however, most of the authors do not draw on current feminist theorizing on gender and nation for their analysis. In fact, most authors who have discussed gendered nationalism in India have predominately focused on colonial India, have not explored some vital aspects of the historical evolution of masculinity in colonial times and its continuity within modern India, and/or have not explicitly linked feminist theorizing on gender and nation to the modern Indian context. My work adds to these studies in three ways. One, while these works do allude to ideas of masculinity, I find that many of them do not provide a detailed examination of an important cultural construct: Christian manliness. This concept forms a vital party of my study, as it plays an integral role in illuminating the masculinization of the Hindu nation. Two, although I do discuss colonial India, this is done primarily to highlight the historical evolution of masculine Hinduism. The main focus of my study is on gender and nation in modern Hindutva. Three, by explicitly locating the gendered Hindu nation within contemporary feminist theorizing on nationalism, I hope to provide cultural depth to current work on gender and nation.

I will approach my argument in three parts. One, I will briefly trace the historical evolution of masculine Hinduism by emphasizing the gendered impact of British colonialism on Indian society. Two, I will highlight masculine Hinduism in modern ideas of Hindu nationalism, and three, I will analyze the relationship between the masculinization of Hindu nationalism and female participation. My argument will be based on the following organizations espousing Hindu nationalism—the BJP, the dominant party in the coalition governing India; the Shiv Sena, a political party based in the Indian state of Maharashtra; the socio-cultural organizations VHP and the RSS; and the women's wings of each organization: the Mahila Morcha, the Mahila Agadhi, the Sadhavi Shakti Parishad, and the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, respectively. It is important to acknowledge that although these organizations may not represent the entire spectrum of Hindu nationalist activism in India, currently, they are the most visible and powerful.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN INDIA

Jeffords describes masculinity as a "set of images, values, interests, and activities held important to the successful achievement of male adulthood" (Jeffords, 1989, p. xiii). Femininity is the corresponding set of values and images held important for female adulthood. Although there may be many competing images and values of male and female adulthood in society, there is always a hegemonic definition of masculinity/femininity. Since the nineteenth century, aggression, and militarism have formed an integral part of British hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 213). And conversely, being not aggressive and not militaristic were ideas associated with the opposing notion of hegemonic femininity. In this paper, I use the terms hegemonic masculinity and femininity to refer to these interpretations of manhood and womanhood.

Research has linked hegemonic masculinity in Britain to the institutions of empire (Alderson, 1998; Chowdhury, 2001; Gilmore, 1996; Gupta, 2001; Hall, 1994; Inden, 1990; Roper & Tosh, 1991; Sinha, 1995; Vance, 1985). Colonial administrators scoffed at Indian men for being weak and non-martial. In the words of Edward Said (1978, p. 207), such criticism can be related to a process of feminization wherein the Orient (non-western colonies in South Asia and the Middle East) was created as the weak, irrational, non-martial "other" in contrast to a rational strong,

martial European "self." Ronald Inden (1990, p. 17) alludes to the European masculine hero who would conquer and create order out of the feminized chaos that was India. Said and Inden both imply that the feminization of the Orient encompassed a disparagement of Arab and Indian men who were conquered because they were effeminate and seen as effeminate because they were conquered. Their conquered status constructed them as not muscular, not aggressive, and not skilled in militarism, which were values associated with hegemonic femininity. Thus, gender was a politically salient aspect of colonialism. More specifically, the idea of Christian manliness formed the bridge connecting Empire and gender both in terms of emphasizing the British need to guide Indians (who were not aware of these values) as well as presenting India as the ideal venue for the practice of Christian manhood.

CHRISTIAN MANLINESS AND EMPIRE

In 1866, the Religious Tract Society of London published a monograph titled, "Christian Manliness: A Book of Examples and Principles for Young Men." In this publication, the author outlined several characteristics necessary for constructing an ideal Christian man: faith, personal will to decide, resolve, fidelity, courage, energy, perseverance, strength, gentleness, self-mastery, and prudence. The title as well as the language of the tract very clearly assumed a male audience (Religious Tract Society, 1866, p. 95).

This text made a clear distinction between mere muscular Christianity (conceptually almost identical to the ideas underlying hegemonic masculinity) and Christian manliness that included physical strength/ martial prowess but also went beyond mere "muscularity" to emphasize moral dimensions. The British saw Indian men as feminized beings in need of instruction and exposure to the moral and physical dimensions of Christian manhood. Norman Vance (1985, p. 10) suggests that "'manliness' may relate to physical vigor and prowess...or to patriotic and military qualities, or to the traditions of chivalry, or to a variety of moral qualities ranging from...general benevolence to the most awe inspiring moral rigor...." This multifaceted definition of manhood partly constructed the gendered lens the British used to look at India and its male inhabitants. Although colonial references to Indians commonly conflated effeminacy and lack of martial prowess in the tradition of hegemonic masculinity, critical observations about Indian manhood were also based on the multidimensional notion of masculinity underlying Christian manliness. For example, the martial ability of

some groups of Indian men may be acknowledged, yet simultaneously these same groups would be condemned for being "unmanly" because of a lack of patriotic fervor and/or honesty.

The intersection of Christian manliness and Empire was not an isolated cultural phenomenon. The monograph published by the Religious Tract Society refers to British colonial administrators and military leaders such as Warren Hastings, Henry Lawrence, and General Henry Havelock as living examples of Christian manliness. General Havelock was a favorite icon representing Christian heroism and books such as *General Havelock and Christian Soldiership* by the Rev. Frederick S. Williams (1858) and *General Havelock or the Christian Soldier* by Lt. Col. B.D.W. Ramsay (1871) celebrated this valor. Further, adventure books written for British school boys incorporated the message of Christian manliness by celebrating its alliance with imperialism while simultaneously emphasizing patriotism and military courage as potent traits in this intersection (Green, 1980).

In addition, well-known English intellectuals— Charles Kingsley and William Pater—debated these ideas in public fora (Hall, 1994; Vance, 1985), while colonial military historians classified Indian soldiers using ideas of both hegemonic masculinity (or muscular Christianity) and the multifaceted notion of Christian manliness. Sikh men were praised as being "martial" and manly in the sense of both physical and moral rigor. However, some groups fulfilled the criteria of physical hardiness but fell short of the moral criteria of manliness. For example, Shivaji and the Marathas, who were able warriors and harassed colonial troops, occupied much of the British imagination, but even as historians spoke of their prowess in battle, these achievements were denigrated by references to the moral laxity of Maratha troops (Tone, 1818; Waring, 1810). Such comments are relevant to this narrative because the Hindu nationalist groups forming the basis of this analysis focus on Shivaji as a fundamental icon of Hindu martial power and celebrate the military history of the Marathas. In other words, an aspect of the masculinizing project of Hindu nationalism includes reclaiming and celebrating warriors who were dismissed as "unmanly" by the colonial rulers.

A popular image of Indian effeminacy was the Bengali *babu* or clerk who worked in the vast imperial bureaucracies (Alter, 1994). Lord Macaulay, a highly placed colonial administrator stated:

> The physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy.... During many ages

he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds (Lord, 1931, pp. 109–110).

Other colonial observers made similar claims:

We do not speak of the martial races of Britain as distinct from the non-martial, nor of Germany, nor of France. But in India we speak of the martial races as a thing apart and because the mass of people have neither martial aptitude nor physical courage... (MacMunn, 1933, p. 2).

In British eyes, the greatest proof that Indian men could not live up to the standards embedded in ideas of Christian manhood was that "more than one hundred and thirty million people" in a "region of Asian equal in extent to the whole of Europe (exclusive of Russia)" was ruled by "forty thousand British" (Duff, 1840, p. 22).

INDIAN RESPONSES TO BRITISH GENDERED OBSERVATIONS

Certain sections of the Indian elite internalized this British colonial criticism. They began to ridicule themselves for their weaknesses and inability to defend their motherland. Indian elite including B.C. Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, and V.D. Savarkar called upon Indians to be men and wrest their motherland from the British with force if necessary. *Vandemataram*—the theme song of past and present Hindu nationalism—published in Chatterjee's influential nationalist novel *Anandamath* (1882) valorized martial prowess:

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
When the swords flash out in twice seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,
To thee I call, Mother and Lord (quoted in Hingle, 1999, p. 79).

The following speeches by Vivekananda illustrate the intense desire to create an indigenous Indian model of manhood built on ideas of hegemonic masculinity:

I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in tamas (darkness), to stand on their own feet and be men (emphasis mine)... (Vivekananda in Rahbar, 1995, p. 181)

What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, *Kshatra-Virya* (author's note: warrior courage).... We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is man-making religion we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all around that we want...take away my weakness, take away unmanliness, and make me a man. (Vivekananda in Jyotirmayananda, 1986, p. 29).

This obsession with manliness carried over into an admiration for India's conquerors, the Muslims and the British. Vivekananda often proclaimed that he wanted to build an India with a Muslim body and a Vedantist brain, and maintained that no race understood as the British did "what should be the glory of a man" (Kakar, 1978, p. 175). The Swami called upon the Hindu men of India to assert their masculinity. To do so they must emulate the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Implicitly, he placed in opposition the values of hegemonic masculinity to a femininity defined by weakness, indecisiveness, and a lack of virility. In his view, those men who embodied these feminine attributes were and are Hinduism's greatest enemies. Vivekananda, it should be noted, did not always define "manhood" as merely muscular (read physical strength and power) but also tried to create a multifaceted interpretation by combining moral values—honesty, tolerance, chivalry—(also found in Christian manliness) with Hindu spirituality. Savarkar in his influential books, *The Indian War of Independence* (1909), *Hindu Pad Padashahi* (1925, a history of the Maratha empire), and *Hindutva* (1923), expressed similar views of Hindu masculinity. Thus, Hinduism was reconfigured to embrace the ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Note that I am **not** arguing for an unbroken mechanistic continuity between the nineteenth century and contemporary Hindu nationalism. In other words, I am not assuming that the leaders of the present Hindu nationalist parties/organizations read Savarkar, Vivekananda, and Chatterjee, and then self-consciously apply these ideas. Rather, because these thinkers introduced such ideas of masculinity into the common cultural milieu, these ideas were available for use by Hindu nationalist organizations, regardless of whether the leaders and activists were cognizant of the origin of such thoughts. In the politics of contemporary Hindu nationalist parties and organizations, masculinity has become codified in terms of a warrior tradition; the multifaceted idea of manhood

has been erased. As argued in the opening paragraph, the creation of a nationalist political doctrine usually includes the construction of an ''other'' who is seen as the enemy of the citizen warriors defending nation as woman. Before independence, this ''other,'' for certain proponents of a Hindu nationalism constructed with ideas of hegemonic masculinity, was the British. But now that India is independent, followers of this brand of Hindu nationalism have chosen another enemy: Islam.

As we move onto the examination of how masculine Hinduism manifests itself in contemporary Hindu nationalism, it is important to note that members of a nation constructed with ideas of hegemonic masculinity described by symbols of war and warriorhood, can easily justify physical aggression against ''the other.'' Indeed, this is the case in some interpretations of Hindu nationalism. Often, day-to-day political participation has become equated with being a warrior and measured by involvement in violence against the enemy. If so, then how do women negotiate a space in this context of masculinization and potential aggression? The next sections address this question by outlining the relationship among contemporary Hindu nationalism, masculine Hinduism, and women.

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.

M.S. Golwalkar, influential RSS leader, gives the following account of the organization's mission:

Therefore, when we say that our nation should be taken to the pinnacle of glory, it also means that people should be made alert, organized, and powerful. After all, nations can stand only upon the solid foundation of their organized strength. . .. Then, what are the qualities required of individuals who will form the living limbs of such an organized strength?. . .. The first thing is invincible physical strength. We have to be so strong that none in the whole world will be able to overawe and subdue us. For that, we require strong and healthy bodies. . .. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'I want men with muscles of iron and nerves of steel.' . . .he would thunder, 'That is not *bhakti* (author's note: faith in or devotion to the divine). That is nervous weakness. Don't sit down and weep like little girls.' What do we see today when we look at ourselves in a mirror? Do we find any sign of manliness and strength?. . .The present-day fashion of our young men of decorating the skin and discarding the sinews must be given up and they should, with proper exercises and healthy habits, develop strong bodies capable of. . .undergoing all the hardships of life with good cheer. (Golwalkar, 1981, p. 66).

Golwalkar's reference to Vivekananda highlights the continuity of ideas of reconfigured Hindu masculinity.

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 tradition. 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. . . (http://www.bjp.org/manifesto).

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 *Vandematarm*). The manifesto goes on to interpret nationalism as based on the idea of ''one nation, one people, and one culture.'' One may ask what will be the basis of this monolithic nation?

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" (http://www.shivsena.org). 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 comprise 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 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 endeavor highlights 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 unmuscled; his curves are definitely feminine in terms of a British gender dichotomy based on hegemonic masculinity (Kapur, 1993, p. 86). Further, he is ethereal and unfocused, not really engaged in the tensions of the human world (Kapur, 1993, p. 88). But recently, Ram has become aggressive and masculine, engaged in the process of human desires and violence (Kapur, 1993, p. 105). 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.

A male Shiv Sena leader makes the following observation during the Hindu–Muslim riots of 1992/1993:

> At Radhabhai chawl they (author's note: Muslims) bolted the door from the outside and set it on fire. And all our (author's note: Hindu) children, families, they were roasted. When this hit the headlines the next day...my wife told me, 'I should offer you bangles now. What are we? In our own country, Hindus are being burnt.' (Interview with author, January 1993).

Note that in the above quotation, the male leader describes Hindu weakness in the face of Muslim aggression with feminine images, i.e. bangles offered by his wife. 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.

Another Shiv Sena leader examines the idea of a Hindu nation:

> ...India is our country, whoever is against India— Hindu or Muslim—hang him. India and Pakistan

play a cricket game. The Indian team loses and Pakistan wins. Firecrackers go off in Bhendi Bazaar. Bhendi Bazaar [is a] Muslim area. That means what? Their loyalty is not for India but for Pakistan. They have no right to live in India. . .. This country is Hindustan. It is Hindustan of the Hindus. What is wrong with calling it Hindustan? Like Pakistan which is a Muslim country. This is a country which belongs to Hindus. . .riots will increase in the future." (Interview with author, December 1992).

This leader begins by adopting a view of nationalism that seems to accept both Hindus and Muslims. However, by emphasizing India as *Hindustan* or land of the Hindus and portraying Muslims as foreigners and necessarily traitors to India (read *Hindustan*), he clearly demonstrates his bias. The language of aggression and potential violence is implicit in his view. If one examines both these quotations, the first during Hindu–Muslim riots and the second in the absence of such violence, it is reasonable to make the inference that if the imagined Hindu nation is in danger, it is appropriate for Hindu warriors to defend it.

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, 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 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 recent (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?

MASCULINIZATION AND WOMEN IN THE HINDU NATION

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs women enter the political landscape of Hindu nationalism as passive symbols of the nation as woman as well as active participants in the role of masculinized warrior, wife, and mother.

Nation as 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, p. 44).

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 woman, 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 —clearly linked nation as woman, honor, and rape: "The souls of. . .millions of aggrieved women might have perhaps said, "Do not forget. . .Shivaji Maharaj (author's note: the role of Shivaji as a symbol of masculine Hinduism has been discussed above). . .the unutterable atrocities committed on us by. . .Muslim noblemen and thousands 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 which saved the Muslim women. . . . Their womanhood became their shield. . ." (Savarkar quoted in Agarwal, 1995, pp. 51–52).

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 in order 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 sub-continent'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; Butalia, 1995).

Women as Active Participants in Political Identity Struggles

But the passive role of nation as 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 Lakshmibai 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, p. 24).

In April 1998, I attended a large meeting of the Samiti in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) India. The Mumbai meeting took place in a local school. At the back of the room where we met, a large poster depicted a beautiful woman embodying India, the lion by the woman's side marked her as the goddess Durga. For an hour I watched 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 illustrated the female representation of the citizen warrior. It must be noted that these young women were not really practiced in martial arts,

rather their moves were 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 immediate reason given for a woman's need to protect herself is the fear of rape. The Samiti's official publications (Rai, 1996, p. 23) emphasize this rationale by retelling a well-known story about founder Lakshmibai 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 nation as woman, I 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 actually 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. If Samiti members are then questioned as to whether this means women occupy a rather ambiguous position within a masculinized Hindu nationalism, they provide evasive answers, not willing to address this potentially contentious issue. This, it seems to me, is an indication of the tensions that may arise when women claim to take on "masculine" traits within the context of a militaristic and aggressive Hindu nationalism.

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 actually 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, provide a response 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 this 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..." (*Telegraph*, April 5, 1993). 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, pp. 189–191). 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.

Sadhavi Rithambhara,[2] 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 a 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 arguing 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, p. 207). 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 (author's note: the founder of the Mughal empire in India. The Mughals were Muslim) then the Hindu youth will deal with as Rana Pratap and Chatrapati Shivaji did with your forefathers (author's note: Rana Pratap, like Shivaji, is a Hindu warrior celebrated by Hindu nationalists as a popular symbol of Hindu resistance)" (Kakar, 1995, p. 205). Her speeches continue in this vein skillfully 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 Rithambhara, along with two other important female participants of the Hindu nationalist movement—Uma Bharati[3] and Vijayraje Scindia[4]—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, p. 161). Widowhood implies celibacy because in certain interpretations of Hinduism, women who are widowed 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.

Malathi de Alwis (1998, p. 266) describes women warriors fighting for the liberation of the Tamil nation with the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Elam (or LTTE) as "masculinized virgin warriors," wherein "...the LTTE woman's internal body is expected to be 'pure,' 'chaste,' and 'virginal,'" while "her outer body is marked as masculine; her hair is cut short and she wears a beret, combat fatigues, boots...but no makeup or jewelry...." Now one should not push this parallel too far. Obviously, none of the aforementioned Indian women participants are actually involved in armed combat but a case can be made that they are indeed a part of a metaphorical battle for the Hindu nation. It seems to me that given the masculinization of the Hindu nationalist narrative

and the fact that these three prominent icons are celibate, do not have flowing locks, have eschewed traditional outer Hindu markings of the married woman (vermilion, bangles), and are reaching for prominence in a masculine political landscape, de Alwis' model does become pertinent.

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 (hereafter Parishad). All active members are celibate female renunciates with short hair, no jewelry, and 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. In order to enter the masculinized reality of Hindu nationalism, many women are symbolically and practically shedding outer markers of their femininity.

Women as 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 the femininity to become political actors, they can play complementary roles which 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 mother intersect with the nation-building process in three ways. One, women have the physical ability to bear children, especially sons, who will become the citizen soldiers ready to defend the nation as woman. Two, as primary caregivers of children they socialize future warriors by passing on culture, rituals, and nationalist myths to the next generation. Finally, the concept of "motherhood" assumes that women are able to 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 (author's note: members of the Samiti) were not after power, if the occasion demanded they must have the capacity to become able administrators. It is mother who can

train the children to shoulder any responsibility in life. Hence, she herself 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, p. 45). 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 *matri shakti* (author's note: maternal power) infuses the BJP's policies" (Kapur & Cossman, 1995, p. 100). 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 Lakshmibai, 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 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.

To sum up, gender is politically salient in Hindutva. As warriors and mothers women have entered its masculinist political landscape; the nation is imagined as a woman and national honor is located in women's bodies.

CONCLUSION

A series of gendered historical and social factors influenced the reconfiguration of Hinduism with ideas of hegemonic masculinity and, as a result of this process, the image of a physically hardy warrior became central to some visions of the modern Hindu nation. This paper interrogates the manner in which women and ideas of femininity intersect this process of masculinization. Indian women have created a space for themselves within this masculinist narrative by casting themselves as warriors, utilizing ideas of nation as woman, and focusing on women's role as mother as well as culturally endorsed ideals of motherhood. Indian women have been forced to negotiate a delicate balance between seizing a space for themselves and reassuring the male elite that activities playing out in this area will not radically retool culturally dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity in Indian society. This is demonstrated by the Samiti's unwillingness to pursue the implications of their view that Indian women face violence from all men (Hindu and Muslim), the sadhavis erasure of all outer markers of their femininity to gain access to a masculine political landscape, and the womens' organizations celebration of motherhood.

ENDNOTES

1. All interviewees have requested anonymity. These interviews were conducted during various research trips to India in the last decade.
2. Sadhavi Rithambhara is prominent as a spokesperson for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.
3. Uma Bharati is presently a BJP member of parliament and a member of the cabinet.
4. Vijayraje Scindia died in 2001 after a long career in politics, most recently as a BJP member of parliament.

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