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Editors' Note

The *Journal of Studies in History and Culture* (JSHC) is publishing its second issue this year. Our concept note revolved around secularism and what it meant in times of growing fundamentalism and religious intolerance all around us. Secular polities in India, the United States, many countries in Europe, are under being increasingly questioned. OED's acceptance of post-truth as the word of 2016 has only reaffirmed our concern with demagogues and their politics the world over. The time therefore was right to question what secularism means today.

The papers JSHC Issue 2 though come from different fields of scholarship and thematic, not necessarily in tune with our current theme. All of them however, have one thing in common – our belief in emerging scholarship all over the world.

Despite the numerous submissions we received, we could only accommodate a handful of them. Our focus remained on those which showed a definite bend towards an interdisciplinary paradigm.

Michal Bartocz photograph, used on our cover page, conveys more about our concept note than mere words can.

The special article and reprints in this issue speak to the notions of history, state and secularism. The interviews in this issue elaborate on the crucial linkages between the academia and what is the role of a public intellectual in these trying times.

The review Jordan's book, which despite being a white centred rendition was a brilliant piece of scholarship when first published, is timely and may still be relevant for some.

The Editors – JSHC

Special Article/ Harbans Mukhia

What is Communalism?

At the outset, let us understand the distinction between community identity and communal identity.

Our very birth endows us with a community identity. Each of us is born into a Hindu family, or Muslim family, a Sikh or Christian family, etc. and that identity stays with us through our life in most cases barring the very few who opt for another religion later in life. Indeed, each of us is born with several identities: gender, class, economic and social status, even the colour of skin and so forth and all these identities last our life time. We might call these our community identities. Each of these establishes both the similarities and differences between and among us. However, no adversity inheres in these differences. Difference is given to us by nature; adversity is a human creation.

When any of these existential identities or differences gets mobilised by others for a given objective that is outside of ourselves, it takes on an adversarial hue. Thus when the SanghParivar seeks to mobilise the Hindu community identity for building Ram temple at Ayodhya or for collecting votes or demonizing the other communities, the Christians, but more pointedly the Muslims, and when the Muslim leadership seeks its community's backing for votes or engaging in riots involving other communities, adversity takes the place of difference. The community identity gets mobilised into communal identity. It is thus a definitive defiance of what nature had intended for us.

It is then left to each one of us whether or not to allow our community identity to be converted into communal identity. There are invariably stories of devout Hindus and devout Muslims giving shelter, succour and support to individuals and families, even groups of the other community when communal fires are raging in their locality. Clearly,

those giving out help preserve, even cherish their community identity, yet do not allow its transformation into a communal demon.

In many significant ways, this lesson comes to us from medieval India's great saint poets like Kabir, Nanak, Dadu Dayal and others. When Islam arrived in India through various routes and many agencies, its concept of one God in lieu of many gods (*La ilaha ill illah*) and its unique form of worship stood face to face with the Hindu concept of numerous gods and goddesses and its own forms of worshipping them. There was bound to be tension at the theological as well social levels. For, each religion's God stood as a rival to the other's God or gods and each demanded stern, unshared loyalty. The illiterate and semi-literate saint poets, Kabir above all, put forth a resolution of this tension: they conceptualized one universal God for all of humanity in lieu of separate sectarian Gods who stood as each other's rivals. They recognised differences, but did not let them turn into hostilities on behalf of their faiths and their Gods. It was for this reason that during the five and a half centuries of medieval India, when Muslim rulers were at the helm over most of India's territory, when a large number of violent conflicts occurred at the political level between the Sikhs and the Mughal state, the Marathas and the Mughals, the Jats and the Mughals, yet social peace prevailed. For, the first recorded evidence of a communal riot (as we know it today) occurred in 1713-14, seven years after Aurangzeb's death, when the Mughal empire was beginning to decline. The riot happened in Ahmedabad on the occasion of Holi when some Muslims objected to the throwing of colours on them. There was also another angle to it: rivalry between a Hindu and a Muslim jeweler who both added to the communal tensions. The disturbance was controlled within two days by a Muslim administrator of the city. Prior to that there is no record of any communal riot. In the whole of the eighteenth century there is record of five such riots. I would attribute to the preservice of social peace for so many centuries to the ideology of one universal God for us all, enunciated and promoted by the saint poets. It greatly diminished the space for tensions arising out of religious differences.

Today we are being led into the opposite direction on all sides. Differences are constantly being constructed as irreconcilable hostilities and therefore one witnesses tensions and violence all around. Tensions and violence as an integral element of state policies and the political process. What is the aim of this politics?

Partly the aim is to win elections, through the famous policy of divide and rule. Its success was patently demonstrated in Gujarat in 2002 and after under the able leadership of Shri Narendra Modi. But winning elections is the not the final objective; it only helps one along the path of the final objective with the exercise of state power through the bureaucrats, the police, the army. The final objective is to change the language of society, to change its manner of, its categories of thinking, to permanently lose respect for differences and turn these into permanent hostilities. To turn the glorious plurality of Indian society and culture into the single vision of Hindutva. In some ways one has to admit that when the RSS was founded in 1925, it had the vision of transforming India in the very long run through first creating social bases for itself, the RSS shakhas, and gradually to enforce its vision through the use of state power; that long term vision is now being realized. It is also being helped by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the world, even though the Indian Muslims have by and large remained immune to it. Islamic fundamentalism and the RSS share the basic premise of antipathy towards any sort of pluralism.

The fight against communalism then is the fight for the preservation and the celebration of pluralism; it is the fight for cherishing difference and not allowing it to be turned into hostilities. That has been the greatest strength of Indian society and culture through its millennia long history and it is this greatest strength which faces the severest threat. Can we, for the sake of India, let go of this strength?

Locating Dalits in the Midst of Partition and Violence

by

Akanksha Kumar

The partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 and its socio-economic impact has engaged the attention of historians and scholars ever since the sub-continent was divided. When speaking of partition violence, women and gendered aspect of partition cannot be ignored. Women were central to partition and violence, questions of 'honour', rivalry and abduction all resulted in violence against women. Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Karuna Chanana have exactly done that on the gendered narratives of partition refugees, through personal interviews and so have traced the histories of woman refugees from Punjab. However, the present paper tends to probe into an area largely unexplored. In similarity with the exploration of gender and partition through personal interviews, the present paper attempts to explore the question of dalits and their position during partition.

Where Menon and Bhasin explore the gendered experiences of Partition, Butalia included the experiences of untouchables, children and orphans during partition. Ravinder Kaur makes a similar attempt by studying the partition experience of untouchable migrants of Delhi.

Based on oral history and government reports, the paper will look at the position of dalits during partition. Were they victims of communal violence? What led to the migration of dalits from West Punjab and Pakistan to Delhi and Punjab? The first part of the paper would look at incidents of violence and fear among dalits through the study of East Punjab government reports and evacuation records. The second part would consist of three narratives of Bhilsat Kala Pahar in Baljit Nagar, New Delhi and Sansis at Timarpur, North Delhi, as mentioned in the Schedule Caste Survey of Delhi this area is where they mainly settled after partition. Lastly, the story of a Valmiki woman from Karachi who came to Delhi during partition, what made her migrate in the midst of partition violence will be explored.

Dalit refugees from Pakistan have been mentioned in the archival records as 'displaced harijans'. Ravinder Kaur gives a useful account for the history of dalit refugees in particular. She refers to them as untouchable migrants of partition. The absence of dalit refugees from the present historiography according to her does not mean that they were 'physically absent from the partition drama'.¹ The numbers of the dalit refugees were sometimes included in the government statistics to show the size of non-Muslim population that needed to be evacuated from Pakistan but the statistical category of 'non-Muslim' did not make them full Hindus, according to Kaur.

Also the history of partition is 'popularly imagined as the history of upwardly mobile upper caste Hindus and Sikhs, who were forced to move in the middle of all the chaos and violence. She also mentions that there is an absence of untouchable migration accounts from the studies of resettlement colonies figuratively as well as physically. Therefore, the partition migration stories that we know of till now are mostly of the upper caste, middle class refugees stories that have contributed to post-colonial historiography. In her study therefore, Kaur proposes two questions, Did untouchable non-Muslim migrate at all from West Punjab or West Pakistan? And if they did then where did they resettle?

The East Punjab evacuation records mention, that the government had started paying special attention to the problem of evacuation of dalit refugees for many reasons. One was the forcible conversion among dalit refugees, the other was that the dalits were being held back by the government of Pakistan as they were required for essential services. Apart from all these reasons the government was compelled to pay special attention to the evacuation of dalit refugees due to the pressures built by Ambedkar and other dalit organisations. The evacuation work of the dalit refugees had begun in November, 1947.

In November 1947, a letter addressed to the Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore from B.G Rao of Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, stated that 'reports have been pouring in of the disabilities of which members of Schedule Castes are experiencing in the matters of evacuation.'² According to the government there were two reasons why the dalit refugees were experiencing difficulty in migration to the East. One was that the Pakistani local officials and Muslim National Guards were hindering their evacuation process; the other was that they maybe '*easy prey to conversion tactics*'.³ These two

were the main reasons why dalit refugees stranded in the villages and cities of Pakistan, one reason was, as mentioned by Ambedkar, that they were required for essential services and the other was forcible or easy conversion of the remaining dalits in Pakistan. However, as mentioned by Ravinder Kaur there was also a campaign launched by the liaison officers for the evacuation of these refugees, therefore it was also the role played by liaison officers and not just desire alone that led to these migrations.

A letter related to the intentions or the role played by liaison officers is reflected in a complaint against DLO, Montgomery who had been charged of inducing dalits to leave Pakistan due to a possibility of a war. In response to this complaint made by the Pakistan Refugees and Evacuees Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner of India Lahore, Sampuran Singh states that, *'I have been informed that the depressed classes are leaving Pakistan for India not due to any pressure of the District Liaison Officer but of their own accord'*.⁴ As this source reflects, some instances of forcible evacuation of dalit refugees comes up in these records. However, in other cases the stranded dalits needed assistance for evacuation as they were victims of communal violence. The violence and forcible conversion faced by these stranded dalit refugees was also due to the fact that their evacuation took place at a later stage of the whole evacuation process.

The government had appointed RL Jadhav as a special representative to look into the evacuation of Schedule Caste refugees. Jadhav was sent by the government of India to help in the evacuation of members of the Schedule Castes who were willing to move out of the West Punjab. He visited the refugee camps in all the districts and worked closely with the local DLOs to get in touch with the Schedule Caste refugees. Jadhav reported the condition of dalit refugees from district tours, from these reports it was apparent that quite a large number of dalit refugees were stranded in the villages of West Punjab and they required government's help for evacuation. Secondly the dalit refugees were forcibly being converted and faced communal violence.

A report of Sialkot district tour mentions that 68,700 dalit refugees were stranded in about 17 districts. R.L Jadhav, officer on special duty for the Schedule Caste evacuation travelled to the different districts of Sialkot. He reported that many dalit refugees were stranded in these districts of Sialkot. A section of the report states that

R.L Jadhav personally checked the figures of the non- Muslims and Schedule Castes, he mentions that the total number of Schedule Castes in the camp was 28943. Jadhav alleges that lesser number of Schedule Castes have left the camp, and there is a large number of dalit refugees stranded in these districts. The report states the following:-

I personally checked the figures of the evacuated non-Muslims for this camps from 6th of September 1947 from the register kept up-to-date by the D.L.O (copy attached). From this it will be seen that total Non-Muslims evacuate from this camp comes to 38590 up to the 3rd January 1948. Taking for granted that 25 % of this total of 38590 were caste Hindoos, the total No. Of schedule castes evacuated from that comes to 28943. Actually less no. of schedule castes have left Sialkot than 28943, as the scheduled castes started coming in the camp very late.⁵

It is established from the liaison records that special attention was paid by the Ministry of R&R on the evacuation of dalit refugees, thus special officers recruited for the purpose and operations were launched. Sialkot district had, any dalits stranded who awaited evacuation, they were mostly from the Megh caste, who migrated to East Punjab in large numbers.⁶ The report mentions that these refugees started coming in the camp during the later phase of the evacuation process R.L Jadhav mentions that date of evacuation was over and he could no longer evacuate them. Later he appeals for the date of extension of evacuation, the date of evacuation was therefore extended to 31st January after his request. After this Jadhav continued to stay at Sialkot in order to evacuate these refugees. The report mentions that:-

They started coming in large numbers from the last week of October 1947, or from the first week of November 1947. The total population of the schedule castes from Sialkot, Pasroor and Daska is 38,000, 12,000, and 1000 are respectively. The total of this comes to 51,000. These figures are from census report. The actual population of schedule castes is much more than the census figures which is estimated about on lac by the schedule caste local leaders. Even if we stick to the census figures it will be seen that there are still to evacuate from the pockets of these tehsils. According to the figures available from local people and

schedule caste leaders there were about 18, 751 schedule castes persons still to be evacuated till the 3rd January 1948.⁷

R.L Jadhav Officer on special duty visited many of the refugee camps and reported the condition of dalit refugees who were to be evacuated. He visited Jaranwalla Refugee camp, Lyallpur refugee camp, along with the Sialkot district tour. Jadhav reports that most of the dalit refugees are still stranded in the villages. Those who have been able to reach the refugee camps need to be evacuated as soon as possible. Another significant point that emerges in the reporting of Jadhav is that many of these dalit refugees faced violence, threats and were forcibly being converted to Islam. These refugees according to him needed to be evacuated immediately, the report states the following:-

Many of the Schedule Caste people are still in the villages. Those who are in the villages are very anxious to leave their villages. They are forcibly converted by the local Muslims and their daughters and women are being abducted. When they try to leave their homes for Hindustan they are beaten and some are killed and they are deprived of all their belongings.

The Ex Criminal Tribes refugees (presently part of the schedule caste community of Punjab today) were also victims of communal violence during this period. Some communities who practiced Hinduism strongly and identified themselves as Hindus, such as Laubana or Mazhabi Sikhs also faced communal violence during partition riots.

Report on the Administration of Criminal Tribes in The East Punjab mentions that in Talumba district of Multan Criminal Tribes were victim of communal violence, an agricultural settlement chak 16-9/R inhabited by 'Bauria (Sikh) tribe was killed by furious Muslim mobs by adjoining *chaks*, which surrounded the settlement on 22nd September 1947. This *chak* was the wealthiest amongst all the Criminal Tribe institutions in the West Punjab.⁸ According to the report, incidents such as these led to an extensive migration of non- Muslim Criminal Tribes from West Punjab to East Punjab. "The refugee members of Criminal Tribes were resource less and suffered untold hardships till steps were taken to rehabilitate them. A carefully planned

scheme for the rehabilitation of the refugee Criminal Tribes was chalked out and put into action.’⁹

The brutal incident of violence mentioned in the report on the administration of Criminal Tribes states that 3,500 people of the Bauria tribe from Multan district in an agricultural settlement were killed and the remaining have been waiting to get land allotted to their name. Apart from this about 25 women from their community are missing, and need to be recovered.

The dalit refugees, faced communal violence and forcible conversions also they were from weaker economic and social backgrounds, thus did not have the resources to flee immediately therefore required government’s help in evacuation. These two points are very significant when we deal with the question of dalits during partition violence, since these refugees were the ones who were being held back by the Pakistan government for various reasons, mentioned earlier. On the other hand, as the reports reflect they were forcibly being converted and many dalit women were also abducted. Dalits migrated to the East Punjab mainly for two reasons one was the general fear associated with partition riots and the other was to escape forcible conversions.

I

Personal Experiences Dalit Refugees

Urvashi Butalia’s book is entirely based on personal interviews with the families of Partition refugees in Punjab. She mentions that there are some major differences in the speeches of men and women. There is a difference in the way the two types of refugees choose to remember the past and the behaviour of the two towards the interviewer also differed. The dalit refugees who were not living in the posh colonies of Delhi, were more responsive and contented about being interviewed, which gave them a sense of pride and importance. Some wondered how this interview would benefit them, while others responded with great enthusiasm.

Similar to Butalia and others, interviews I have conducted are not based on a sample or a structured questionnaire. I gave them the liberty to speak in whichever direction they wanted to take the conversation to tell a story. The portions of transcriptions quoted here are not translated in a manner which would change the meaning. To

maintain the originality the interviews, translations and transcriptions were kept as close as possible to the oral narratives.

The interview of Sansi and Bhil refugees studied in the present paper were categorized as criminal tribes under the colonial rule, an attempt has been made here to trace their history. The concept of 'dangerous' classes or 'criminal' tribes was a 'product of bourgeoisie fears of the west.'¹⁰ And this according to Mukul Kumar found suitable refuge in the institution of caste.

It is necessary to have a glimpse at how modern caste developed out of its interactions with the colonial rule, and so argues Nicholas Dirks that caste was fundamental to colonial knowledge. After the direct crown rule of 1857 he argues; that as the colonial governmentality unfolded, caste emerged as a fundamental importance for 'colonial struggle to know and to rule India'.¹¹ Dirks points out that post mutiny the British organized the army, police, and military for which they used the "criminal" castes as the "martial" castes to 'where there was an intimate relation between martiality and criminality'.¹² All these reforms post mutiny represented 'athropologization of colonial knowledge' according to Dirks.

Meena Radhakrishna in her study of the criminal tribes and the British colonial policy points out that the Criminal Tribes Act had its roots in the local systems and structures for political control rather than the social concern for escalating crime. She also points out that in the late nineteenth century there was a 'renewed interest in, and admiration for the Indian caste system in the British administration and intellectual circles'¹³ (in similarity with Dirks). The narratives of the dalit refugees constantly throw light on the British and how they were of help to them in the pre partition or colonial period.

II

The Sansi Refugee

The schedule caste survey of Delhi 1961, mentioned a number of castes who migrated from West Pakistan. It mentioned that the 'The Bhils in Delhi have all migrated from west Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur'.¹⁴ It mentions that 'Civil Lines Subzimandi has the

maximum number of Bhils, second largest are in rural area and Delhi Cantt. Karol Bagh and Patel Nagar rank third in their number of residents, and their main settlements are in Timarpur and Baljit Nagar on Kala Pahar near West Patel Nagar. These are temporary settlements near the quarry site where they work¹⁵. My field work revealed that caste Sansi from West Pakistan along with Bhils lived in these areas.

I visited Timarpur which is near Majnu Ka Tila in North Delhi. This area contained a small colony of Sansis who had come from West Pakistan, the colony consisted of semi pucca shanties which were originally allotted to these refugees for the purpose of rehabilitation. I met a couple of families, mostly women were alive from the time of partition. These women told me that they came by foot from Pakistan. One man who belonged to the same family gave me a long account of his life journey. He had much information to share and had many grievances as well, his account is very interesting since he made interesting statements about his caste, economic and refugee status.

Mangat Ram was a 78 year old retired technician. He worked in the railway department and was an active member of the workers union. I asked him to firstly tell me about his journey from Pakistan as a refugee. He told me 'I was around 16 when I came from Pakistan, district Montgomery tehsil Okara Mandi and the village was chak. He said "I used to study Urdu. My father did agriculture and we had land in Pakistan. We have grievances can you do something about it?" This is something he kept mentioning throughout his interaction with me. He continued:-

We still have not gotten our claim for the houses and land that we had in Pakistan. We owned land in Pakistan. We were in Okara Mandi, it was a Hindu area, when partition took place a kafilah of 90,000 collected in a common place. That was the first time I had seen Nehru ji, he had come to OkaraMandi to do the examination of the kafilah. Nehru ji is really worth being praised, he picked up small kids and did not discriminate them. At that time people were dying of hunger because of the riots. Military brought whoever they could gather, they brought them walking all the way from Pakistan. There were Sikhs, Hindus and so on. Nehruji had given the order that this kafilah should be kept alive and it should

reach India in a good condition, although people faced many problems on the way.

Mangat Ram narrated his journey and in between he kept telling me to take up the question of his grievances as a refugee, he continued to tell me about his journey.

We walked for four to five days, day and night under the supervision of the military. The kafila was so long that the first person was at Ferozpur, Sulemanki head and the last person was at Okara, many were killed amongst us also. Young girls were picked up, those days were really bad, I hope god does not show anyone such days. But I can say that yes, congress helped us to some extent when we were in camps, tents and so on. We were provided with ration and blankets were also distributed in those days. All this was there but the aid that we required had not been given. After all we left everything behind, we did not bring anything except one pair of clothes, we did not have the strength to carry anything, humare pairon mein chhaale pad gaye the (we got blisters in our feet because of walking). We got some land allotted in district Ferozpur, Hindu malkot and tehsil was Fazilka Bangla but that has also become a district now. Apart from this in Delhi we did not get enough aid form the government even being a refugee did not help us. Although Nehru ji had been very helpful since he helped us reach India safely from Pakistan. The helicopters threw rotis for us while we were walking.

Ravindar Kaur in her article 'Exploring Social Class in the 1947 Migration' talks about a variety of transport modes used by migrants from West Punjab. In which she mentions that 'fastest and safest means were seldom available to under privileged sections'.¹⁶ Kaur states that 'The safest and quickest means of transport was also the least widespread. It was available exclusively to the upper crust of society, mainly high-ranking bureaucrats or rich people who could afford to pay their passage'.¹⁷ Mangat Ram's narration of the foot journey from Okara Mandi to Ferozpur perhaps corresponds to this argument made by Kaur, this was the social class that she refers to while exploring social class and migration of 1947.

Kaur used oral narratives from refugees to explain how people remember the past. She emphasizes how people travelling by air, train and foot bullocks have different

memories. For example, people on train experienced loot fear and violence. She narrates an incident where a women is pushed through the window with the help of a strange man, this highlights how the gendered barriers were challenged in crude ways at this time. The dalits also narrate that they opted to cross the border with foot columns rather than train because of this fear of violence. Mangat Ram told that they walked a long distance and it was a difficult journey. Through the modes used by these refugees it is clear here that they belong to the social class Ravinder Kaur is referring to.

Although he is praising Nehru and the congress, he expressed apathy as a dalit refugee who was unable to get claim for land he owned in Pakistan. He kept mentioning about a claim he was unable to get. He said, "Till now we have not been able to get our claim." We got less than what we should have gotten. I request you to take this question up in your research. The Hindustan government told us at that we cannot give you the claim right now because we are not in a good condition due to partition. We were told that we will get our claim later but till today we have not gotten it'.

Mangat Ram requested me to take up this question of claim he kept mentioning, he said that some land was supposed to be given to them that the government had promised. Most of these refugees had grievances with their present lives more as compared to the past, they were not happy about many circumstances they had to deal with throughout their lives. In most of the studies that I have conducted shows that Partition did not bring about a rupture or a positive change in their lives unlike Kaur's study in which she states that the dalits experienced a change in their lives even though they got a small amount of relief and rehabilitation from the government. Although the government and the Harijan Kalyan Board in Delhi worked for improving the conditions of the dalits, it seldom fulfilled the requirements of the dalit refugees from West Pakistan or dalits from other places. Mangat Ram finally said that everything he has told me is absolutely true and that it can be cross examined by anybody and still kept mentioning his claim for land which was never met.

Our voices cannot reach up. Even you will not make our voice reach up, because you also are doing this for good marks in your project. But let me tell you that everything

I have told is absolutely true. So, I can still say we have grievances and complaints because even till today we have not gotten any help or aid. Till today! And we belong to the Sansi caste, we are schedule castes we were criminal tribes under the British, we were schedule tribes in Pakistan, but here in Delhi we have not been converted into schedule castes, this is another injustice done to us. Our fore fathers were criminals and you know why we were criminals? Because we did not get education, neither were we allowed to go to the temple, neither did we get services! Therefore the British gave us land which had supervisors allotted by the British government in West Pakistan.

Here Mangat Ram talks about how the British assisted them by allotting land to them for improving their status from criminal tribes to the status of a cultivator. The British government had allotted land to criminal tribes for the purpose of 'reform' in the nineteenth century this was done for 'the urge to 'reform' these communities which emerged out of a 'compulsion to raise revenue from land and the administrator's commitment to private enterprise'.¹⁸ And this could be achieved by giving them work on land and or in private enterprises according to Meena Radhakrishna. But on the other hand Mangat Ram's testimony reflects the positive impact of this 'reform' Radhakrishna discusses.

Mangat Ram was a conscious man, politically as well as socially. Since he was a union leader he had good knowledge of his rights and was aware of his caste history, he had much to share about the discrimination his caste had to deal with. According to him being backward and deprived was the biggest reason why his caste was branded as criminal tribes. His second grievance was also that they had been included in the schedule caste although they are schedule tribes in other states. This point can be linked to the study of Sher Singh's in which he mentions that this was often done to include this caste with the Hindu population. Lastly, Mangat Ram said:

Being a schedule caste did not help us here at all, nobody actually takes interest in us why does anybody not come here. Why does anybody not inquire whether our children get education or not? Whether there is a night school here or not? You people don't help us, I am asking for your help but you people don't write about us. Even media persons have taken interview from us before, but even that did not have any effect. I have been in the union, I have been a leader also. Everybody is going ahead

our children will only study till eighth or ninth class and they will never become a lawyer or a doctor like other people's children. Because they will be treated as Sansi, Schedule Caste and Harijan. Even till today people believe in untouchability, and that is why we are not able to go ahead!

This account of Mangat Ram was very useful, as questions related to his identities are reflected here firstly, his experience as a refugee, then as a schedule caste/untouchable. His interview reflects a multi layered experience of partition as a refugee who belonged to particular social class representing a narrative that carries its own social baggage when referring to partition refugees.

His account speaks for itself and many features about his refugee status and dalit status come out here. Mangat Ram spoke about the misuse of government policies and how the aids of Harijan Welfare Board do not reach his colony. He had a social vision and talked about a night school which should be opened for children so that they can get education and improve their conditions. His interview reflected that affirmative action and reservation policies of the government are not effective in these areas.

It is important to go into the caste history of this community here, Punjab is the main province where this caste lives but the largest number of Sansis in Northern India are in Delhi, and 'this has especially increased after the Partition of Punjab in 1947 because hundreds of families have settled in Delhi which were uprooted for West Pakistan'.¹⁹ Sher Singh has done an extensive study on this tribe and chose to work on the colonies in Delhi. Singh collected data from family to family in all the major colonies where this caste is living and majority of these colonies were resettlement colonies. He collected data from Kasturba Nagar, Majnoon Tila, Amrit Kaurpuri, Rameshwari Nagar, Prasad Nagar, Prem Nagar, Motinagar, Tihar, Andha Mughal, Naya Bazaar, and New Rajinder Nagar.

Although Sher Singh was not studying the history of partition refugees, almost all the colonies he studied are resettlement colonies of the dalits and where majority of schedule caste population of Delhi still lives today. He points out that number of displaced families from West Pakistan is 365 out of which 362 belong to West Punjab, 31 from Peshawar and two families are from Sind. He also informs that these

families from West Pakistan who live in Delhi today had gone to Peshawar and Jacobabad (Sind) about thirty years before partition of India.

III

Bhil Refugees

The Bhils are one of the oldest tribes of India which have vast spatial distribution over Rajasthan and parts of Gujrat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The Bhil migrants to Delhi are mostly from Rajasthan which accounts for 33% of the total Bhil population who are scattered all over south of Rajasthan in the districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Chittorgarh and Bhilwara.

I met Bhils at kala pahar in Baljit Nagar (as mentioned in the schedule caste survey of Delhi this area is where they mainly settled after partition). 'The Bhils of Delhi have all migrated from Pakistan, though they all originally belong to Rajasthan where their settlements are near Jodhpur and Udaipur, Only two or three families of the Bhils are Gujrati Bhils'.²⁰ They were mostly labourers on the kala pahar an industrial area in Delhi. These refugees had a different story to tell. They were not allotted houses or even huts from the government but mostly lived in Jhuggies when they came from Pakistan, they worked at the quarry site where they temporarily settled down. Today this colony is called Bhil Basti in Karol Bagh area with pucca constructed houses. I interviewed an 85 year old man who came from Sind Hyderabad during Partition riots. He said:-

We came from Nawashaha Gaon (village) in Hyderabad. I was 25 when I migrated in 1947. We used work on agricultural fields. We came by train, from Hyderabad to Mirpur, then Barmer to Jodhpur by train, and then to Delhi. We did not have money so we had to rely on labour. I used to work here in this pahar and we used to live here in jhuggies, I got married here also. I got this jhuggie allotted but not anything else. After that I made it a pucca house. After sometime the stone work finished here at kala pahar we lost our labourers jobs. My wife also used to do labour with me. My children are doing this job till today!

He told me that they used to work as agricultural labourers in Sind which was a better job than what they did here. He stated reasons of why he was not happy with this change and shift in his life as partition refugee.

I came here because there was no requirement for labour in Rajasthan and I did not get work so I came to Delhi. The contractors brought us here. We stayed at Pusa Gate for 5 years. We did not get much help from the government. We were supposed to get land in Alwar but that land never got allotted on my name.

Pahlash was a simple labourer and had not received any education, unlike Mangat Ram. The story of the two are similar in the sense that, both of them were supposed to get land allotted after being displaced from West Pakistan. Pahlash was not as politically conscious as Mangat Ram and narrated his story with less emotion and grievances although his life journey had been a difficult one, partition did not have a positive effect on his life he narrated:-

My father moved to Pakistan because of drought conditions in Rajasthan. Therefore, I was born in Pakistan we lived a really happy life there, coming here was a real pain for us. I had to do a lot of labour. We had no disputes with the Muslims our women were also not picked up during the partition. But we were told that it would be better if we move to Hindustan because we witnessed violence, 2 miles away from our village a train of the Sikhs had been brought down by the Muslims there were three bogies full of Sikhs and they were all murdered. But we were safe, so all the Hindus in that village left for Hindustan out of fear. We came almost with nothing! I had a little bit of money with me because we sold our cattle, my old mother was also with us. We did not get anything in Jaipur, the Sindhis and Baniyas got a lot we did not get anything as compared to them. We were four brothers who came, 2 of my brothers are in Jodhpur. This quarter that we are living in was not allotted to us by the government this was owned by a Bania, we used to live on rent here in the jhuggies, for which we paid 1 rupee per month for this.

From this account of Pahlash, it is reflected that these refugees were not at the midst of the violence that took place and their women were not vulnerable to the violence that took place between the Hindus and the Muslims. However, they were compelled

to leave their homes because they were in fear of being attacked. For Pahlash migrating to Delhi did not have a positive change in his life as we see in the case of other refugees. It is also reflected that the government's relief and rehabilitation did not reach Pahlash in anyway.

This Bhil basti was a small and congested one, there was no provision for electricity here, it functioned on stolen electricity. The colony had many people who had come from Pakistan at the time of partition. I met Heeralal in the same colony he had a slightly different story to tell. Heeralal was also a labourer he had travelled in a lot of cities with the contractor and finally settled down in Delhi. He told me:-

“I was born in Mirpur Pakistan but our village was called Khan. I came to Hindustan at the age of 17 or 18. We used to do agriculture there, we had 5 bigha land there that was much better than the labourers job that I did here.”

Heeralal said he had to leave his village because he saw a lot of violence and he did not want to stay back, out fear they left their village. He narrated:-

We saw so much violence due to which we did not want to stay back, in front of me, I saw four children being killed in Mirpur, and we just wanted to run away from there to save our lives. We had seven cattle and two carts but we left it all there only, we faced a lot of difficulty.

Firstly we came walking to the city Mirpur from our village. The first place where I saw violence was in Amritsar. Here we saw dead people in the trains around 2 to 3 bogies of the train was full of slaughtered people. We finally arrived to Barmer district near Jodhpur there we stayed for three years. We travelled all around India due to our profession i.e labourer. I was alone my parents passed away earlier, so I was the only one from my family, there were many others with me but we all got separated. I came to Hindustan because I were scared to live there alone. We had to spend a night there in the jungles without any food or water. Then finally we caught a mal gadi(goods train) in that we came till Barmer. In Barmer we did not know what to do, we had no work nothing, so from there I went to my grandfather's village which was near Barmer, there a thakur told us that you can do agriculture and

earn a living by farming. But the weather conditions are not good there for agriculture, it is dry without any rainfall. So there was no option left for us but to do labour.

We travelled around Rajasthan for work, firstly we came to Samdheri there also we did not get much work, we only stayed there for about six months after that we went towards Bhilmal. There I got one paisa for throwing three baskets of stones. We could not even buy ration from this amount, so we used to buy chickpeas which was for one rupee kilo, and that one piece of chickpea had around hundreds of holes. There was no chakki we had to grind it by hand my wife used to do this by hand, poor women had to do this job for two to three days we had to boil and eat that only. After that we went to Jhansi, from there we went to Lalitpur which is 25 kms from Jhansi. We travelled a lot, the contractor used to take us by filling us up in trucks. Then we travelled to Panni a village 125 kms away from Lalitpur. After that Peelibhit near Nainital, eventually we landed up in Kota Rajasthan. We have even eaten grass, those times were so difficult. After all this travelling I finally got married, my wife was also from my village we used to work together and that is how we got married. After marriage we had children, so it became very difficult to work.

Finally we came to Delhi in Baljit Nagar Bhil Basti. This land was of a Gujjar called Baljit he gave us this land. I did not receive any help or aid from the government in this regard we used to live in a jhuggi. At that time it was so difficult for us because the wind used to blow away our jhuggies my wife and I used to hold the top of the Jhuggie so that our children could sleep, I had five children when I came here.

Caste as well as class angle of partition stories arises in this narration of Heeralal as this testimony represented a lot of poverty and hard life. How did partition affect the migrant or contractual labourers is also another aspect that comes to light here. I asked Heeralal if his children received any education he said that he could not afford education he said "I could not afford flour for ten rupees how could I purchase a notebook for my children to study? We used to get only 16 rupees at that time how could I eat or educate my children at all? But I always voted for the congress since

the day I came to Delhi.” Although these poor labourers had nothing to benefit from by voting, they all chose to be loyal to the congress.

I asked Heeralal what was the original work of his caste. He told me that the work of his jati ‘was bow and arrow and to loot money our forefathers used to do this work and take money but they took money and only after they made the person bleed!’

This account of Heeralal was a different one since he was a contractual labourer. He did not arrive in Delhi as a refugee immediately after partition but came after being taken around as a contract labourer. His account narrates that these refugees were surrounded by a lot of violence that took place during partition. All these refugees from Sindh i.e. Heeralal and Pahlash witnessed a lot of the partition violence, which was the main reason they had to leave their village, both of them left their village solely out of fear.

Heeralal and Pahlash were both labourers, it is important to see here how this history of labour and caste were connected. According to Michael Anderson during colonial period labour was conceptualized through the lens of land, caste, and family ingredients of the pre-colonial framework, and it was not until 19th century did labour receive state concern. According to him colonial labour policy if at all was mired in the contradictions of between an ideology of free labour and legal paternalism. On the other hand PrabhuMahapatra disagrees with the formal recognition of labour for the purpose of ‘workers welfare’ that Anderson talks about. Mahapatra points out that ‘An alternative narrative of legal development in colonial India will make it clear that regulation of labour was not just episodic but in many ways much more pervasive than figures of ‘legal enforcement or disputes may indicate’²¹

A large number of the Bhils who came to Delhi post partition were labourers, this position of labourer and contractual labourer continued for these Bhils.

IV

The Valimiki Refugee

The Valmiki or the sweeper caste is traditionally involved in human scavenging or sweeping. They are scattered over the vast area of North Western India and are called chuharas in Punjab, Domra in Rajasthan and Mehtar in Bihar. In some parts of U.P

they claim to be called 'valmiki'. In this section I will study an oral history narrative of a Valimki woman from Karachi who came to Delhi during Partition. Although Sona Devi was originally from Western U.P she was among the dalit families who migrated to different parts of the country during colonial period. As stated earlier that many Dalit groups migrated to different parts of the country for reasons such as employment (arising out of the 'reform' policies of the British for the criminal tribes) or droughts (in case Bhils of Rajasthan).

A file especially dedicated to the evacuation of Christians in the liaison records, corresponds to the question of evacuation of dalit refugees as many of these were recent converts. The government intended to evacuate only those Christians who were converted after March, 1947. The large part of this community was left behind in Pakistan for reasons mentioned by Ambedkar in his letter to Nehru. A good number of this community had therefore converted to Christianity in Pakistan to escape the violence during riots. The correspondence of liaison records, stresses on the point that Pakistan government was preventing or interrupting the evacuation of communities who had converted to Islam or Christianity due to fear of riots.

Following letter dated, 16th July, 1948, from T.K Kaul, East Punjab Civil Secretariat, to Ram Rattan Chief Liaison Officer, East Punjab Government. States that the Mazhabi Sikhs or members of other Scheduled Castes, who embraced Christianity after March, 1947 can be evacuated by the government. However, others who are old standing will not be considered by the government. The following quote from the letter stresses on the planning of evacuating Christians who wished to come over to India.

Government agrees with you that it will not be worthwhile to evacuate Christians of old standing from west Punjab though for whatever reasons they might wish to come over to our province. Government, however, consider that every effort should be made to evacuate the Mazhabi Sikhs or members of other scheduled castes, who embraced Christianity after March, 1947.

Any Christians, who are anxious to come over to this province and who approach you for evacuating them, should be advised to come over to the

D.A.V. college camp, Lahore, from where arrangements might be made to send them over to this province.²²

The large part of this community was therefore left behind in Pakistan for reasons mentioned by Ambedkar in his letter to Nehru regarding the dalit refugees from West Pakistan. A good number of this community had therefore converted to Christianity in Pakistan. Pieter Streefland in his study of Christian Punjabi sweepers in Karachi states that the condition of the Christian Punjabi sweeper in Pakistan is as stigmatized as their ancestors, chuhra. He mentions that their profession after partition was reduced to a sweeper or a human scavenger from an agricultural labourer because their Hindu landowners had abandoned their farms as well as those who worked for them, this community therefore did not have work so they took up their caste professions. This explains that a large number of this community did not succeed in migrating to India, except for those who were originally from places in northern India such as U.P. such as Sona Devi.

Lajpat Nagar is one of the most well-known colonies where the partition refugees had settled down. VinobhaPuri was one colony which was built by the Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board at the time of partition. I visited this colony as I was told that this was built for the dalit refugees from Pakistan. I figured that it was very difficult to find dalit refugees living in this colony presently. I met a Sindhi man in the same colony, who had a namkeen business in the Lajpat Nagar market. He had a double story house which was newly renovated and reconstructed. However his neighbour's house was totally the opposite of this, it was old, single story and had a tin roof. I inquired about this house from the Sindhi business man he told me that it was a schedule caste family.

I visited this house and found that an old woman from Karachi was allotted this house in 1948. Sona Devi was above 85 years of age and belonged to the valmiki community.

She was around 25 when she came from Pakistan during partition. Her story was similar to the other dalit refugees interviewed. Similar to Bhil refugees in the sense that the generation before Sona Devi had also migrated to Karachi from U.P during

colonial period for employment opportunities. She was born in Karachi and told me about her whole journey from West Pakistan.

I was born in Karachi, my father went to Pakistan at the age of 15. Somebody who knew him had taken him there. He was told by a British man why do you live in filthy conditions? Why don't you people get educated and live better lives? My father used to work at a bijlighar. And as I grew older I started working in British man's house, as a cook and nanny for his three children.

What about your experience during partition?

During partition riots it was difficult to come out. But when the riots were at an ease we had to leave. We used to live in the area of the British people, they told us to negotiate with the Muslims and let those people go who wish to go to Hindustan. Everyone was called to the camp, people from every caste Brahmin, Baniya etc. collected in a common place and a decision was taken as to whoever wishes to go to Hindustan may go. Then finally the congress brought us here. I was with my father, uncle and I had a little daughter. I was around 25 at that time. First they took us to Bombay and we stayed there for 3 days in a camp. I don't know why we were taken to Bombay first, maybe it was because we came by ship from Karachi. The journey from Bombay was very difficult, the railway line was broken we stayed in Jhansi for one night it was a very difficult night but we got off our ship and went to the camp. The Muslims had taken everything from us all our belongings and even my earrings were taken. They said that even we left our belongings in Hindustan why can't you leave yours behind? Even a copper ring of mine was taken away, they had snatched these away from us. So we had nothing of ours when we reached Bombay. Not even clothes. We got clothes at the camp, we stayed there for three days and then we were sent in a train to Delhi. Even in Delhi we came to a camp first, at LodhiRaod. We got no work initially, but finally we worked as labours at a construction site near Bhogal (Delhi). We lived in a rented jhuggi (shanty) for around three years working as labourers. Then Mata Rameshwari called us to Lodhi road again and we got this house allotted in this place at vinobhapuri.²³ Baba VinobhaBhave had

given these in charity to us. But after sometime after his death we were told that this house is on lease and you will have to pay the rent. We kept giving 25 rupees per month for this house. After 15 years we got the ownership papers for this house.

Sona Devi was one of the very few dalit refugees who managed to stay in the house allotted to her during partition. She paid the rent with great difficulty as she had no family, her father passed away soon after she came to Delhi, her infant daughter also passed after sometime. Therefore she started living with her sister's son who worked in the sewage department of the Delhi Jal Board like her father. She told me:-

It was actually very difficult we had to deal with a lot, the fact that we had to leave our houses was difficult. My father worked with a factory he used to work as a labourer, and he also worked with the Delhi Jal board sewage department, and presently my grandson (her sister's son) is working with this too.

About the colony Sona Devi said:-

This was a Harijan colony. But all the Punjabis have taken over their houses, they bought them for a very low price from the Harijans, all of them left this colony, but we did not leave our house! Those people who sold off their houses did not think about profit or loss they just sold them off because for the first time in their lives they were getting so much money. Right now I don't know where these people are. A lot of them sold off their houses because they were addicted to alcohol. Now we are stuck in a family dispute my brother in laws son has taken this house on their name although I paid the rent for this house for so long. They have the papers for this house now. My court case is going on and I don't have any proofs to present in the court that this house was originally allotted to me. We have seen more difficulties than others who were at a better position!

From Sona Devi's account many aspects related to her caste status are revealed. Firstly her father and son in law both work with the sewerage department of the Delhi Jal Board this reflects that they are carrying their caste profession forward by working here. Both Sona Devi's father and grandson were employed with this.

Although there was a sense of empowerment within this family that they have a house in Lajpat Nagar and an earning member from their family has a government, it is reflected through this account how the caste identities and caste professions remained intact.

Sona Devi said that Rameshwari Nehru called her personally for allotment of the house, when she was a labourer after coming to Delhi. Allotment of a house really helped Sona Devi to lead a decent life. Retaining the house was a real problem for her but she managed with great difficulty. This interview also reflects that Sona Devi was one of the few who could benefit from relief and rehabilitation policies.

Similarly it would be appropriate to include the story of Laxmi. Who is a second generation dalit refugee from the valmiki community living in Trilokpuri (another dalit refugee colony). I could not take a long interview of Laxmi as she was a second generation refugee, and only gave me basic information of what her parents told her. Laxmi said her parents Ram Fal and Kela Devi came from a village called Raghunathpur near Lahore. Her parents used to work as labourers on agricultural land in Lahore, as the riots broke out both of them left their village out of fear. They came to Meerut in a train since they originally belonged to a village in U.P. This is similar to the story of Sona Devi because the generation before her had also migrated to Karachi from U.P for employment. In the same way Laxmi's parents were second generation migrants to Lahore. Laxmi told me that her parents came to their village near Meerut with two children, they had no work in the village and no source of income. Her elder brothers who were toddlers at this time died of malnutrition. After this Laxmi's parents moved to Delhi as her father got employed with the NDMC as a sweeper. Laxmi said they did not receive any help from the government, this was probably because they did not come to a refugee camp with all the other refugees. Therefore the question of getting a house allotted for her parents became impossible unlike Sona Devi who travelled to Delhi with all the other refugees.

Laxmi is presently employed as a sanitation worker in Jawahar Lal Nehru university. Her husband is also a sweeper employed with the NDMC. Laxmi and Sona Devi's story can be linked with the larger story of dalit refugees, as their caste profession continued to remain in different forms. In the case of Sona Devi her father and grandson worked with the sewerage department and similarly Laxmi's father and husband were employed as sweepers with NDMC.

Conclusion

The Dalits were not absent from the partition drama, infact they were very much part of the communal violence, threats and migrations. Partition for them also meant changing homes, leaving land behind. All the three refugee communities studied here have different stories and histories connected to them. The aim of the present paper was not to draw genralised conclusions but only to cover the experiences of these dalit refugees. Since no two experiences can be the same and that is what makes each of these individual stories from parition important. The Bhils and the Sansis have similar histories, in the sense that their ancestors migrated to Pakistan in the colonial period because they were branded as criminal tribes

These dalit refugees chose the congress while making their political choices , which is visible from the account of Mangat Ram. He seemed to be a strong supporter of the congress although he had many grievances. In Ranabir Samadar's review of Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Remembered villages' he points out that this hindu refugee that Chakrabarty is talking about is the 'pastoral, revivalist, modern, romantic, upooted hindu refugee'²⁴, in the context of the partition in the East where 'the great partition shows the materiality of politics' people rebuilt their lives and made their political chioeces, in the East the refugees joined the left whereas in Delhi they became the strength of the Jan sangh. But the question here is where do you locate the dalit refugee in this 'materiality of politics' Samadar talks about. The dalits from West Pakistan (as reflected from the interviews) definitely supported the congress in Delhi rather then becoming the core spport of the Jan sangh as we see in the case of upper caste hindu refugees.

Lastly, an attempt here was to bring out the voice of these refugees so that their experiences are also included in the studies related to partition and vioence. While drawing no conclusions between the gendered and dalit experience of partition. The caste and economic status of these refugees does reflect a different partition story. Since each of them have their own histories, social grouping, caste history and experiences to share. Menon, Bhasin, Butalia and Karuna Chanana have done exactly this with the gendered naratives of partiton refugees through personal interviews and so on, each of these writers have gone back into the histories of woman refugees they interviewed. A similar attempt was made here by studying the caste history of each of

these refugees to bring out the change in their lives after migration to Delhi and Punjab in the midst of partition violence.

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Endnotes

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³ Ibid.

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²³ In March 1949 it was decided to entrust the work of the rehabilitation of the dalit refugees to the Harijan Sewak Sangh which was recognized as a Central government agency. The board named 'Displaced Harijans Rehabilitation Board' was set up with Shrimati Rameshwari Nehru as its chairman.

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The Amsterdam Folk-Rebbe: Steadfastness and Faith, Leadership during the German Occupation

by

Yitzhak Cytrin

Abstract

This article examines the life and leadership of Rabbi Dr. Meyer (sometimes spelled Meijer) de Hond, (1882-1943) the Amsterdam folk-rebbe who fought to strengthen Jewish identity and religious observance, especially among the poor and disenfranchised of Amsterdam. He even suggested changes in the liturgy in order to draw the uneducated Jews of the inner city, although this ran counter to Orthodox opinion. During the German occupation, De Hond remained with his chosen community of the Amsterdam slums, and continued to minister to his followers even when already in the Dutch concentration camp of Westerbork. During the Holocaust the use of the term "Kiddush Hachaim" (attributed to the Religious-Zionist leader, Rabbi Isaac Nissebaum of Warsaw), relates to the spontaneous and the premeditated acts of Jewish resistance to the Nazis and their collaborators. The actions of Rabbi Dr. Meir de Hond exemplify this "Jewish resistance", against the Nazi's goal to exterminate the Jews and Judaism.

The conclusions of this paper were that De Hond was a unique, but tragic figure, who did not desert his followers in the face of disaster and crises, even at the cost of his life. By accepting his role as spiritual leader of the poor, and acting in response to the intra-communal injustices of the great discrepancies between rich and poor Jews as well as the Catholic and Protestant inter-communal othering of the Jews, De Hond's life illustrates a steadfastness of faith and leadership.

Keywords: *Meyer de Hond; Rabbi; Amsterdam; Shoah; Leadership.*

Introduction

The origins of the Jewish community in Amsterdam are traced to the immigration of Portuguese and Spanish Jews following the Expulsion of the 15th century. The Ashkenazi Jews of Amsterdam arrived from Eastern Europe in the 17th century following the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648–49 and the Swedish invasion. The Jewish immigration to Amsterdam from central Europe resulted from the thirty-year war (1618-1648). The Jewish community in Holland was characterized by heterogeneity and by its desire to assimilate in the Dutch community. Many were drawn to the liberal and socialist political ideologies, and only a small portion showed an interest in Zionism.¹

During Rabbi Dr. Meyer de Hond's lifetime, the Jewish population of the Netherlands grew from 110,000 to 140,000.² Born in Amsterdam in 1882, he grew up in the shadow of the Dreyfus Affair, the First Zionist Congress and a proletarianization process of the Amsterdam Jewish community.³ He came of age during a time of rising anti-Semitism which culminated in Fascism, WWII and the Shoah, and was murdered in Sobibor in 1943. With him were his wife, his three children, and many of the inner-city poor he had taught and ministered to for decades. The elderly poor, chronically ill, and handicapped of Amsterdam, for whom he had labored to establish a worthy home, had already been murdered earlier that year.⁴

When dealing with those Jews murdered by the Nazis, the victims' pre- Shoah contributions to society, vitality, and circumstance are too often pushed aside in the light of their tragedy. Indeed, as Herzberg wrote,⁵ one Jew was murdered six million times,⁶ a notion which turns the martyred Jews into amorphous victims, somehow. This paper, therefore, rather than focusing only on the way De Hond died has looked

at the way he lived, in order to understand what motivated and shaped him, and how he shaped the world of those who listened to him.

De Hond, good son, intellectual, teacher, preacher, writer, and rabbi, knew exactly where he had come from: G-d⁷ fearing parents in the poor ghetto of Amsterdam. He remained loyal to this neighborhood where the most destitute poor lived, ministering to them, teaching their children, laboring to offer them a carefree old age, entertaining them with his writings, and finally, dying with them in the whirlpool that was the Shoah. He knew where he was going throughout his life, teaching Judaism in the only way he understood it: as a glorious way to experience life to the full.⁸ Moreover, he literally knew where he was going when he was rounded up together with his wife and children, yet did not try to save himself or his family, but chose to share the fate of the poor who lived in a Jewish sub-culture in several Amsterdam neighborhoods, and did not have many options of saving themselves from death.⁹ Looking at De Hond's life, it appears that his actions were never motivated by need for personal gain or greed, while his eyes were open to the needs of others, as will be demonstrated in the final section of this paper. The verse from the Ethics, then, sums up De Hond's way of life.

On the one hand, De Hond remained an outsider because he espoused opinions that ran counter to that of mainstream Jewish power brokers and the accepted Ashkenazi leadership's traditions of Amsterdam. On the other, he also embraced mainstream views, such as the notion that Zionism and socialism were bad ideas, as they negated his religious views,¹⁰ and like most other Jewish leaders at the time, he saw no future for the Jews outside the Diaspora. As a born and bred Amsterdammer, De Hond believed that the Jews could find a respectable place within the ethnic *pillarization*-segmentation of The Netherlands.¹¹ Rejecting socialism and Zionism may seem like a contradiction for an original thinker such as De Hond, but in the framework of his

world, both can be explained. Socialists did not like the royal family, whereas Jews traditionally took pride in their royals, especially the poor – because of a tradition of alignment with the House of Orange since the mid-17th century, when this family was favorable towards the Jews. Socialism and religion were mutually exclusive in his eyes, and while many Jews were no longer strictly observant, they observed tradition.¹² As to Zionism, it was all so new in the early years of the twentieth century, and because of its assimilationist views, De Hond, like most religious leaders did not see its advantages. In one of the question and answer columns of *Libanon*, the magazine founded by him, he even answered a question about this, and explained that there was no special blessing on Jews who went to live in “*Palestina*” as this blessing could only be bestowed when the Holy Land was returned to the Jews by “*a higher power*”, meaning G-d and the Mashiah.¹³ This was the traditional, Jewish standpoint at the time, even though there was a Mizrachi movement in Holland: Rabbi Dünner was actually pro-Zionist. De Hond’s stand on Zionism was in line with the teachings of Samson Raphael Hirsch.¹⁴

This article is a monograph of Rabbi Dr. Meyer de Hond, and asks the following questions:

1. What was the rate of assimilation in the Netherlands during De Hond’s life time, and how did De Hond deal with this problem?
2. How did Catholicism and Protestantism view the Jews, and what was the level of anti-Semitism in the Netherlands?
3. What happened to the Jewish religious leadership during the Shoah?

Jews within the Christian Netherlands

In order to offer a fitting monograph and examine De Hond’s life and actions, such as his choices at various crossroads of his life, his leadership under crisis, and his demeanor and behavior at Westerbork on the eve of his deportation East where he,

his entire family and much of his congregation were murdered, the rabbi's choices cannot be taken out of context and examined anachronistically. Instead they need to be analyzed as part of the bigger picture of the Jews within Dutch society as a whole during the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Therefore, the inter-ethnic conditions, as well as the intra-communal ones must be examined.

When De Hond was born, the emancipation of the Dutch Jews was a legal fact.¹⁵ Theoretically at least, Jews were free to choose their lifestyle and level of observance, field of study and occupation, as well as place to live, as the debate concerning their political rights had ended positively. However, social integration was slow to come. First of all, their small numbers meant, in essence, that outside the capital, most Dutchmen never actually saw a Jew, and besides, in order to avail themselves of the services offered by a Jewish community, such as synagogue, kosher food, and education, they lived in insular, tight-knit communities both in Amsterdam and throughout the provinces.¹⁶ Dutch Jews referred to the capital and the outlying areas as *Mokum* and *Mediene* respectively.¹⁷ *Mokum*, of course, means "place" and it referred to Amsterdam as a small Jerusalem.¹⁸ *Mediene*, another Yiddish/Hebrew derivative, means province/state, and covered any Jewish settlement outside Amsterdam. In 1941 About 60% (more than 80,000) of the 140,000 Dutch Jews lived in *Mokum*, with the rest scattered throughout the *Mediene*. In spite of the widespread poverty of city Jews, there was a feeling that Jews had never had it this good because they had political rights. And so, while the political place of the Jews had been settled officially, in many circles the debate continued concerning the role of the Jews within the fabric of Dutch society, as well as their spiritual merit.¹⁹

In the late 19th century and first half of the 20th, the Netherlands had a strong Protestant population, divided into several denominations, as well as a very large

Catholic minority of perhaps 35% of the population.²⁰ Its social fabric was founded on principles known as *verzuiling*, pillarization, or segmentation. This kind of coexistence denotes a society built on pillars of religion and philosophy. There were four such pillars: Protestant-Christian, Roman Catholic, Social Democratic, and the Liberal or general pillar.²¹ Each had their educational system, newspaper, sport organizations and health care. They also had their own political parties, and because the Jews constituted perhaps 1% of the population, they never had enough political power to establish a party of their own, and traditionally voted with the liberal and leftist parties, and only Amsterdam had a large enough Jewish community to establish a Jewish educational system.

While there was also rivalry between Protestants and Catholics, both groups were more interested in defining themselves vis-à-vis the Jews, and to show that their own way of life was not only preferable, but on a higher spiritual plane. In fact, the bottom line of this discourse was that Jews were a loose group of people, no longer a nation-- as emancipation had ended that separate status-- who had no claim on either this world or the coming one, and had lost their chance for redemption when they refused to accept the teachings of Christianity. While the different factions disagreed on the way Jews could ameliorate this situation, or how they should be treated until they did so, all saw them as outsiders, having no true claim on the coexistence shared by Christian factions, and at times, subjected them to missionary intervention.²² The result was that the *de jure* Jewish equality was not translated into *de facto* acceptance and integration.²³ Perhaps more damaging was the fact that in the religious polemic, Jews were generally seen as a theoretical construct rather than living, breathing creatures who lived in the next street, and this attitude eventually allowed the majority of Dutchmen to disregard the deportation of the Jews during the war.²⁴ In other words, Jews were outsiders, more or less despised in their present

state. With over half of Amsterdam's Jews dependent on financial support,²⁵ most poor Jews remained in abject poverty.

The organization “*Touroh Our*”, The “*Libanon*” Magazine and the Rabbinate

It was in this socio-political climate that Meyer de Hond came of age. He was the child of a poor family and attended Jewish schools. Like other gifted young men from that background, he received funds from the community which allowed him to attend the rabbinical seminary in Amsterdam, a school which existed until the outbreak of WWII.²⁶ As soon as De Hond finished his ‘candidate’ exams, more or less equivalent to a B.A., he was offered a post of *magid* and Hebrew school teacher. Haas van Amerongen reported that his acceptance as a teacher was unusual, considering his age (he was only 23), but apparently, De Hond was already known for his brilliance.²⁷ This fact may have become a problem when he became less of an acceptable figure for the religious, orthodox establishment.

De Hond's first sermon was attended by the Jewish press and reported in the *NIW*, the only Jewish paper with a national readership. The dateline read May 25, 1905, and the headline announced ‘*The Installation of Mr. de Hond*’.²⁸ The event was well attended, and in order to allow De Hond the greatest influence possible as teacher and preacher, the organization *Touroh Our* (The Torah is the light) was established. It gave him a platform to reach many more Jews. This was especially true after he founded the organization's monthly magazine, *Libanon*, three years later.

At his inauguration as teacher and preacher, De Hond was formally asked to serve the congregation, while they promised to be his pupils.²⁹ The establishment had high expectations of him, including Rabbi Dünner, the Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam and the province North Holland, and rector of the Rabbinical Seminary, whose protégé he was. In his first official sermon to *Touroh Our*, De Hond compared himself to the fire

that kindles the light of Judaism among the congregants, and makes them proud to be Jews. The silence in the hall, wrote the journalist, was ‘*proof that De Hond’s words had fallen on fertile soil*’.³⁰ The evening ended with refreshments and De Hond had started his career while still working to finish his studies.

With the establishment, in 1908, of *Libanon*, the written mouthpiece of *Touroh Our*, De Hond now had a much wider audience, because the magazine was distributed free to all its members throughout *Mokum* and *Mediene* as one.³¹ One of his objectives was to show the Jews that things were changing for the better. Already in the first year of its existence, three months after *Libanon* first appeared, in August, 1908, De Hond, who was both the main contributor and the editor of the magazine, published an article written by A.I. Querido, a well-known writer at the time, about the positive differences between the 19th century just ended, and the 20th century. Querido wrote that in the past, Jews gave charity without knowing where the money would go, and bought subscriptions to magazines and membership in organizations whose purpose was unclear. The reason, he wrote, was the high level of religious observance and charitable character of the Jews who left the running of the various institutions to the steering committees.³² The criticism may have been subtle, but there is a certain feeling that Querido did not like this particular way of running the community. De Hond, as the editor, approved the article, and must have stood behind its content. However, more interesting was Querido’s, and by implication De Hond’s, attitude toward women. ‘*In those days*’, he wrote, it was unknown to have a woman, although she too belonged to the organization, enjoy any rights. A man might be kept in the dark concerning the organization he supported, [unless he fulfilled an official function] but the woman was denied any power at all. Slowly, one has come to the understanding that a men-only society has no room in our [modern] coexistence. And yet, even today, there are many who espouse strange ideas concerning [the role

of] women as members of society.... Moreover, the rights of women are discussed throughout society and the world as a whole, and it is too serious a question to postpone finding an equitable solution.³³

This was written in 1908, by an orthodox Jew, supported by a man who was studying to be a rabbi. Querido offered simple guidelines about how to bring women into the center of Jewish affairs, and the article ended with a call to action on the part of the “*ladies and gentleman*” of the *Touroh Our* organization, which, in Querido’s eyes would grow only if both women and men voted with their feet if women were not accepted to play their part in public life. All this was written eleven years before Dutch women were allowed to vote.

It took De Hond only three volumes of his newly established magazine to run afoul of the powers-that-be. In the August edition of *Libanon* he attacked the Amsterdam rich for not observing the spirit of Jewish law in an article entitled ‘*Merry Mourning*’. The occasion was the period of the nine days before the fast of the ninth of Av, the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. During those nine days, observant Jews refrain from eating meat and/or rejoicing. ‘*In Jerusalem*’, De Hond wrote, the memory of the destruction remains fresh in the mind because Jews from all over congregate at the Wailing Wall.³⁴ However, as most Jews live outside that city, care should be taken to observe the mourning suitably.³⁵ In Amsterdam Jews fast, he wrote, and come to shul to say the prescribed lamentations. However, there is no true mourning. Moreover, there is no questioning of the causes that brought about the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the Promised Land.³⁶ De Hond attacked the many ways in which Jews had managed to observe the written precepts, yet had done nothing to try and better themselves, so as to be allowed to rebuild the “*third Temple*”.³⁷ It was De Hond’s conviction that the Jews of Amsterdam were not yet worthy to do any rebuilding, as they had not changed their ways and bickered

among themselves about unimportant topics. He offered clear guidelines how to change the spiritual wellbeing of the Jews. To begin with, he wrote, ‘*give the money wasted on expensive mourning meals (expensive fish, etc.) to charity instead*’, and choose to feel ‘*hunger brought on by mourning*’. Instead of overspending and over indulgence, he admonished the Jews to ‘*focus on justice, modesty, and a sense of worthiness*’.³⁸ De Hond begged his readership to live ‘*in the true faith and swear to think of the City of Peace seriously and every day*’. Then, he promised, ‘*brothers and sisters, you may wear your new white linen and rejoice*’.³⁹

Emphasizing Judaism as the true faith seems like a reactionary statement, and a response to the Christian view of Judaism: as a non-religion or even an abomination of ancient beliefs which had been eclipsed by Christianity,⁴⁰ while the reference to future rejoicing might have come in answer to the Zionist call to return to the Holy Land, which De Hond believed could only happen when the Mashiah came. Finally, his article also struck at the heart of the lack of equality within the Jewish community of Amsterdam, where the rich could eat expensive foods while the poor were starving.

There were over three hundred letters to the editor in response to the above article. De Hond related to them in the September issue of *Libanon*, as letters of both support and criticism, but did not offer any retraction. However, when public pressure mounted against what was seen as his audacity to criticize the rich and powerful, he published a letter of apology in the *NIW*, affirming his allegiance to strict orthodoxy and the 13 articles of faith a few days later. De Hond pledged never to sway from these beliefs till death, and to speak to the people in His spirit.⁴¹

And yet, in the very next issue of *Libanon*, De Hond tackled another controversial issue and once again, sought to support the illiterate poor, and show that the way Judaism was lived was contrary to its ability to bolster the morale of all Jews. This

article, entitled '*Het Gebed (Prayer)*'- opened with a quote from the Psalms concerning G-d's acceptance of all prayer. Fearing a swift decrease in what De Hond called "*interest in burning questions of faith*", he attacked the way Amsterdam, referred to as '*little Jerusalem*' in this article, adorned itself in the external trappings of Judaism, such as large synagogues, while making no attempt to reach to overwhelming majority of Jews who no longer attended services. In his words, the six major synagogues could seat 36.000 yet only six hundred attended services on Shabbath, and even fewer during the morning prayers.⁴² The problem, according to De Hond lay in the fact that prayer in its present manifestation remained inaccessible to most Jews, because of the language barrier. He took care to translate all his own Hebrew terminology into Dutch, so that his readers would understand what he was writing.⁴³ Focusing on the three pillars of Judaism: the study of the Holy Scriptures, the prayer services, and the love of one's neighbor,⁴⁴ he pointed an accusing finger at the middle aspect of what he called "*our great Faith*" (his capital), by calling the format of the prayer service a wormy apple which threatened the other two core cells. Prayer, *avodah*, was the Jew's way of serving G-d, but if there were to be this "*contact between G-d and man*", the soul must play a role, and in De Hond's view, this could not happen since prayer was too bound up in formality. Basing himself on the Scriptures, Psalms and the Talmud, De Hond pointed out that prayer should not be limited by time and ritual, but must also be an event independent of such constraints.⁴⁵

His proposal to make prayer an event outside the appointed times of organized services, to empower Jews to turn to prayer in Dutch whenever they felt a need, and to include prayer in that language also in synagogue would make Judaism more accessible, the service more comprehensible, and finally would prevent the terrible "*mutilation*" of the Hebrew prayer.⁴⁶ De Hond pleaded that children be taught prayer

in Dutch, rather than forcing them to mumble in incomprehensible Hebrew. The article ended with a caveat: Better to have a child understand the connection between G-d, faith and prayer, than to express pride in the way a child could read Hebrew, although he understood nothing.⁴⁷

The Backlash

This time, the establishment responded viciously. The Friday after De Hond's article, *NIW* printed several responses. Dateline, September 5, 1908, under the rubric local news, the following announcement appeared: '*At the Joachimstal Publishers,*⁴⁸ *the following open letter entitled 'open letter to my friend De Hond' by Justus Tal.*⁴⁹ *Price, 5 cent*'. The newspaper explained the occasion of the letter as a response to De Hond's article 'Prayer' in the *Libanon* of September 1. In this letter, Tal accused De Hond of playing into the hands of Reform Judaism.⁵⁰ Moreover, he denigrated De Hond's erudition as '*pseudo learning*'. The newspaper editor applauded Tal's initiative and called it '*written in a friendly tone, by a friend and fellow student*'. This proved, the *NIW* concluded, that some students at the Rabbinical Seminary did have the right spirit, and were still '*truly Jewish... [and] still knew the difference between right and wrong*' (unlike De Hond, apparently).⁵¹ The general mood was clear. De Hond did not find support among the establishment or his colleagues. Perhaps, this was not surprising, as the rabbis and their institutions were greatly dependent on the munificence of the rich industrialists and merchants.⁵² In fact, many rabbinical students enjoyed funding by the rich- De Hond among them.⁵³ Moreover, the editor of *NIW*, Philip Elte, had taken a dislike to De Hond, opposed him at every opportunity and was happy to publish articles and opinions which showed the latter in a negative light.⁵⁴ Elte's involvement may have weighed heavily in turning the tide against De Hond.

There were several instances of further censure by way of letters to the editor of the

NIW, including one by Querido who had just a short while before published an article in *Libanon*.⁵⁵ By the time the furor subsided, Querido and others had publicly withdrawn their support of *Touroh Our*, and the organization was quickly excluded from using the premises of the Main Synagogue. The claim was that De Hond misused his pulpit, and had turned the premises into a battlefield, which would detract from the ‘holiness of G-d’s building’.⁵⁶ On the same page where *Touroh Our*’s banishment was reported, there was a long article about the activities of another, and apparently more palatable, Jewish organization. The article mentioned several prominent Jews, including Justus Tal who addressed the audience.⁵⁷ Tal, of course, was the “friend” who had written De Hond the open letter.

While *Libanon* continued to appear, and *Touroh Our* continued to exist for another eight years, De Hond had fallen from favor, was ignored at the Rabbinical seminary, demoted at work, and generally treated as an outcast, and finally, he was fired and failed his final exams so that he could not be ordained.⁵⁸ There has been much discussion whether his failure was orchestrated by Dünner, but in any case, De Hond’s career was over before it even started. The fact that the *Touroh Our* collected money for him, so he could continue his education abroad, showed the popular support of De Hond.⁵⁹

Haas van Amerongen discussed this episode in great detail, citing the minutes from the meetings of *Touroh Our* and reports issued by its presidents. From these minutes it emerges that De Hond had found a true ally in the members of his organization. In fact, the decision to finish his studies in Germany was initiated by the organization as a kind of protest against the Rabbinical slighting of their teacher.⁶⁰ When De Hond managed to circumvent the German rabbis’ request for a letter of Jewish observance and proper religiosity, the president of *Touroh Our* reported proudly that their “teacher won with flying colors, even without the proper certificate of behavior”,

and was accepted as a rabbinical student at a Berlin Seminary.⁶¹ The above illustrates that to the men and women of the *Touroh Our* organization De Hond was a leader who had the right message, and they wished to see him succeed, perhaps as far as becoming Chief Rabbi. When this option seemed to be closed, they felt threatened as well, and did everything in their power to see De Hond ordained. It is also possible that the dedicated help he received from *Touroh Our* laid the foundations for De Hond's actions during the war, where he stood by the side of the organization's membership.

Kiekjes (Snapshots) and the stories behind the words

De Hond was described as a man who saw Judaism as the true faith, and worked to impart this knowledge to the Jews of Amsterdam and the *Mediene*, as well as a man who championed the poor and saw them as a shining example of that true faith. De Hond's short stories, called *Kiekjes – Snapshots* – about the men, women and children in the poorest hovels of Amsterdam bear out this notion. There are three bundles of these stories available in book form, two published during his lifetime and one anthology which include some of these snapshots of the Jewish neighborhood. In addition, between the years 1908 and 1914, the stories were published in the *Libanon* magazine, and reached children and adults throughout the country.

In *Bloemlezing*, a short anthology of De Hond's *Kiekjes* and other writings collected by Meijer (1951), the story entitled "Klaasie", focused on the power of Judaism and the threat of hunger, as did many other *Kiekjes*.⁶² The situation concerned a poor peddler named Ansel and his wife Sientje. He sold items commonly for sale in the Netherlands around December 5, when Dutchmen celebrate a gift-giving festival called Sinterklaas, and she cleaned house for a wealthy Christian family. Sinterklaas is not a religious holiday, but the trappings involve a figure decked out like a bishop, St. Nicholas, the patron saint of the children, as well as gift giving, traditional sweets,

and seasonal songs. Sientje's employer appealed to her for the services of her husband to dress up like Sinterklaas (in the robes and miter) and offered him more money than he could make in many days of struggling to push his heavy cart over the draw bridges of the city. Sientje, persuasive and insistent, got her husband to promise he would come and put on the robe and miter, even though he felt a Jew should not wear those clothes. Thoroughly ashamed and confused, Ansel presented himself at the household, and went upstairs to dress up. Downstairs, the children waited for the good Saint, as it was already getting dark outside. Finally their father went upstairs to check what was keeping the Jew so long, and found a figure, decked out in Roman Catholic robes, and carrying a staff, who would not say anything aside from "uh, uh", and make movements with his hands that meant "wait, wait". On top of the red robes he wore a prayer shawl: Ansel was saying his evening prayers.

Incomprehensible to the Christians around him, the Jew, poor as he was, managed to cut a royal figure. The irony of the Jew in the robes of a prince of the church praying to the G-d of Israel said more about conviction and lack of attraction of the Christian way of life than any words could have. The Christian celebrants of the Sinterklaas holiday looked on in silence. De Hond took away their speech, arguments, and persuasiveness by putting a simple man with a simple faith to face them. Moreover, the Jewish attributes literally covered up the bishop's robes, thus metaphorically obliterating them.

In another story, entitled Waterlooplein (Waterloo Square), De Hond played with words: the question of Waterloo, the defeat of Napoleon, and the irony that the Jewish funeral home was at the square, so that all Jewish dead 'met their Waterloo' and from there were carried to the cemetery at Muiderberg, just outside the city. And after all, De Hond maintained, the square was indeed a battlefield, alluding to the battle for livelihood among the- mostly Jewish- peddlers, and the battle with poverty

that could not be won. Nevertheless, the carts arrived each day, laden with merchandise, and the Jewish peddlers continued to fight their good fight. Standing outside in all weather, they succumbed slowly to starvation and the cold, but nevertheless, stood their ground. As De Hond would have it, their Judaism sustained them and lifted them above the squalor of their lives, as they could wrap themselves in their prayer shawls and say their daily prayers. In the end, that is how they would be carried to their graves, wrapped in their prayer shawls and held high, on the shoulders of others. The comrades of these heroes of Waterloo stood and saluted, so to speak, even as they shivered in the cold wind, and called out that their dead comrade was the best of Waterlooplein. De Hond's romantic view of the Jews showed how close he felt to these poor men and how he saw them as an integral part of the fabric of the city, and perhaps its best feature.

For eight years De Hond continued to publish these snapshots of the men, women and children of Amsterdam, romanticizing their poverty and disease and doing his best to alleviate some of that. The stories carried an undertone of criticism of a world that would allow people to live in such abject poverty, but in the *Kiekjes* De Hond never said so directly.

Still holding on to the belief that Judaism had the right idea, and that Jews knew all about serving G-d and living a moral and meaningful life, De Hond departed for Germany with money provided by *Touroh Our* and enrolled in university to complete his doctorate and become an ordained rabbi. Haas van Amerongen reported that De Hond had asked for a leave of absence which was denied.⁶³ Meijer, in his preface, ignored the background leading up to De Hond's departure,⁶⁴ while *Pinkas Holland* related only to De Hond's foreign ordination and his exclusion from functioning as a rabbi in the Netherlands based on that.⁶⁵ His loss of livelihood in Amsterdam, his failure at the final Dutch ordination examinations, and the subsequent denial of his

German accreditation by the rabbinical establishment may suggest that De Hond was feared for his oratorical powers and leadership, and had to be kept outside the sphere of influence in order not to threaten any possible candidate for chief rabbi supported by the establishment.

De Hond's departure does fit in with his belief that he should be a rabbi for the sake of leading his adherents into a meaningful relationship with G-d, the commandments, and Judaism. His writings from that period seem to support his view of Judaism as the preferred way of life: In 1912 he published an article in *Libanon* where he compared the Jewish way of life to that of the mundane students at Heidelberg.⁶⁶ Entitled: A Scholar at Heidelberg, De Hond denigrated the Gentile students' hedonism, self-mutilation, and mundane and bohemian lifestyle, and compared them to the rabbinical students who spent their evenings studying Torah. The meaningless dueling scars of the Gentile scholars fell far short of the holy covenant Jews inscribed upon their flesh, the circumcision, and while the former pranced about town in robes, Jews enveloped themselves in the much more meaningful prayer shawls. De Hond made a clear case for the superior lifestyle offered by Orthodox Judaism. However, he also glorified those who were less observant, but who by virtue of their suffering and tradition, still glorified G-d's name, in his viewpoint.⁶⁷

The penultimate piece of evidence concerning De Hond's actions and way of life is his doctoral dissertation. Written in Germany, published in Leiden, and written in Hebrew, Arabic and German, among others, De Hond took a close look at a central Sura of the Koran, where he compared *Al-Khidr*, the green ghost, to the figure of Eliezer, Abraham's servant.⁶⁸ While the dissertation is presented as a close examination of Sura 18, it dealt in greater detail with Jewish sources and exegesis. This writing is the most direct declaration of the De Hond's claim that Judaism is the

true faith, based on the originality of the Jewish revelation and adherence to monotheism. By claiming *Al-Khidr* as a mirror figure of Eliezer from the Books of Moses, De Hond made an undeniable statement concerning the truth of Judaism. Worthy of imitation, it must be worthy to begin with. Not only that, but his claim of imitation also deflates the Koran's claim as a new revelation. The Sura mentions Moses as a companion to the mysterious *Al-Khidr*, but De Hond saw the latter's attributes and characteristics as echoing those of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who set out to find a wife for Isaac. Focused on the mysterious, blurred features of Eliezer, which perhaps were similar to those of Abraham, De Hond showed that the Green Man in Sura 18 was just as mysterious, and also on a similar holy quest for his master. His doctoral dissertation suggests that rather than locking horns with Christianity directly, De Hond used Islam to strengthen his stand concerning Judaism as offering the only true path by weakening the originality of the Koran, and perhaps setting the stage for doing the same concerning the Christian Bible at a later date. Possibly, it was too risky to write against Christianity openly, just as today, his dissertation might not have been published. In an interesting aside, this dissertation was published by the academically renowned Brill press which still publishes comparative religious studies today.

Epilogue

The unique personality of Rabbi Dr. Meyer de Hond is evident during the years in which he led Amsterdam's poor community. His unrelenting activity against anti-Semitism and strengthening the faith of his followers defined his work before the Nazi occupation. When the community stood before extermination, De Hond continued to lead his community and strengthen their spirits and their faith. His actions during these times of crisis, reflects the attempts of many leaders and ordinary citizens to resist the Nazis.⁶⁹

Jewish acts of courage in the face of the Nazis serve as an example of the steadfastness of the human spirit. Two case-studies exemplify the human spirit and the Jewish resistance: Janusz Korczak, the great educator, who refused to obey the murderers' orders and marched heroically alongside his orphans.⁷⁰

The author and journalist Robert Weltsch, the editor of the "Jewish Review" *Jüdische Rundschau*, became famous in April 1933 after the publication of his article, "Tragt ihn mit Stolz, den gelben Fleck" (*Wear it with pride, the Yellow Badge*), calling against the Nazi boycott against Jewish businesses. The article heightened the spirits of the Jewish population.⁷¹

During the Holocaust, dozens of Rabbis, leaders of their communities, showed courage and outstanding leadership in strengthening the spirit and faith of their people, while resisting the Nazis and their collaborators. Their strength of spirit helped their communities to cope from day to day in the ghettos and in the camps, when the future was shrouded by fog.

The leadership of Rabbi Dr. Meyer de Hond is another piece of the *Kiddush Hachaim* manifest and "Jewish bravery" during the Holocaust. The uniqueness of Rabbi de Hond contributes to our understanding of Jewish leadership and courage during this period of darkness.⁷²

The final link between De Hond's beliefs and way of life may be explained, tragically, by his leadership just before his death. Several of his classmates, and contemporaries from the seminary and the rabbinate survived the war, and several played a leading role in the post-Shoah Netherlands. It is possible that the difference between those who survived and those who did not was the divide of poverty. In his article about survival among the Jews of Amsterdam Flim claimed that it was indeed influenced by economic status.⁷³ Bauer also relates to this aspect of who survived and who didn't. According to the latter's research, about '40,000 Jewish workers lived in the

slum sections near the harbor'.⁷⁴ They, for the most part, did not survive the war. De Hond had come from humble beginnings, struggled throughout, and depended on donations for his very education. He did not easily achieve a permanent position as a teacher, and lived in the poor Jewish quarter all his life. His rabbinical title was recognized only when he turned 60, in 1942, and by then everything was just about over.⁷⁵ However, unlike the working poor who had little or no dealings with the world outside the ghetto, and if they did it was with poor Gentiles who may not have had the physical options to offer shelter, De Hond had studied at university, and was a man of great erudition. His studies must have brought him into contact with friends in the Gentile world. One of these might have been willing to assist, the way his classmate and contemporary, Justus Tal, was assisted by Cornelius van Genderen, his professor of Semitic languages at the university of Amsterdam.⁷⁶ From De Hond's actions, however, it is my belief that even if he could have found a way out for himself, he would have chosen to remain at his post as the beloved folk-rebbe, counseling and teaching the poor, and raising their spirits even when all seemed lost. The *Biographisch Woordenboek*⁷⁷ comes closest to saying this as well.

In 1943 De Hond was among the last Jews of Amsterdam, and had been witness to seeing much of his life's work disappear into death and ruin. This alone may have been why he decided to accompany into death those he had supported throughout their lives. As he witnessed the Jewish poor being rounded up, torn from their homes, and sent away, he also had to witness the deportation of the chronically handicapped, sick, and elderly citizens of his brainchild and the crowning achievement to his endeavors, *The Joodse Invalide*, established in 1911. This nursing home was raided by the German and Dutch police on March 1, 1943, just two months before De Hond himself was rounded up together with his family.

De Hond, then, never left his flock. Unable to save them from their horrible death, he stayed with them until the bitter end, dying as he had lived, and thus proving his leadership in the face of crisis, and his steadfast belief in his destiny as a Jew in the hands of G-d. Meijer described him at Westerbork from where trains left for the East every Tuesday. De Hond was seen strolling among the Jews, with a kind word here and there, and at times simply as an uplifting presence as their world was sinking into nothingness, and Hagedoorn reported this as follows:

de Hond and his family succumbed during WWII together with the majority of the poor ghetto Jews of Amsterdam. Till the end, even after he and his family had been taken to the camp at Westerbork, on June 21, 1943, he gave those who shared his fate hope and faith through his spiritual words. Completely in keeping with his belief system and personality, De Hond responded “*HINENT*”- here I am- when his name was called to report for deportation east, on July 20, 1943.⁷⁸

“*Hineni*” is of course Abraham’s response when G-d calls upon him to sacrifice Isaac. De Hond likely knew what was waiting for him, yet he went willingly in order to comfort those weaker than himself. Knowing that those Jews he had dedicated his life to would not survive the war, he too chose to die with them, rather than making an attempt to save himself. In doing so, De Hond gave truth to the precept from the Ethics, to know where he was going, and to know that he would be judged. As Judaism was the only faith he could believe in, and as he had lived it based on the three precepts of Torah, prayer, and the love of others, he let his love of others weigh more heavily than his need for self-preservation. In my view, he did not sacrifice his life as much as sanctify it by offering succor to those who had looked toward him for spiritual encouragement. In their final moments, he did not leave them, and as such proved that in spite of the lack of recognition he enjoyed from the orthodox establishment, he lived and died as the shepherd a rabbi is meant to be.

In his eulogy of a beloved and admired teacher and rabbi, De Hond wrote that as long as we speak of a man he does not die. In this paper I have spoken of De Hond, so his memory will live on, and give it “*a long life*”,⁷⁹ but I have also done so in honor of the late Dr. Abraham de Lange, who wished to keep Rabbi Dr. Meyer de Hond’s legacy alive by writing about him, and brought his life to my attention. And so, by speaking of both, I hope that their memory will live on and remain connected to the chain of life.

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Endnotes:

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2. Y. Bauer, *A history of the holocaust*, rev. ed., New York 2001, p. 262.
3. For an overview of Dutch Jewry in general and Amsterdam Jewry in particular in the period 1870-1940 see D. Michman, 'Netherlands' and 'Amsterdam', *Encyclopedia Judaica*², 1, pp. 900-901; J.C.H. Blom, R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld and I. Schoffer (eds.), *The History of the Jews in The Netherlands*, Oxford 2002; *About the first Zionist and the Dreyfus Affair* see:
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/First_Cong_&_Basel_Program.html
<http://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/1213.nl.html>
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4. De Joodse Invalide, the home for the Jewish poor and handicapped, founded by de Hond in 1911, was emptied by the Germans on March 1, 1943, and all the residents were murdered. See also <http://www.jhm.nl/cultuur-en-geschiedenis/amsterdam/joodse-invalide>
5. Abel Herzberg, Dutch lawyer, writer and chronicler of the Shoah. See http://www.nlpvf.nl/basic/auteur1.php?Author_ID=32
6. *NIW* (The Jewish Weekly), 17.12.1976 (quoted in I. Lipschits, *Tsedaka: een halve eeuw Joods maatschappelijk werk in Nederland*, Zutphen 1997, p. ii).
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8. S. Haas van Amerongen, 'Rabbijn Dr. Meyer de Hond (1882-1943) Reactionair of revolutionair', M.A. thesis, 2005.
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10. J. Hagedoorn, 'Hond, Meyer de (1882-1943)', *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, 2008. Retrieved <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn3/hond>
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14. <http://seforim.traditiononline.org/index.cfm/2008/7/23/Meir-Hildesheimer--Historical-Perspectives-on-Rabbi-Samson-Raphael-Hirsch>.
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17. J.J.F.W. van Beem and H. Fuks, *Mokum en Mediene: de geschiedenis van de joden Nederland*, Amsterdam 1971, p. 1.
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21. Salemnik (ibid), p. 109.
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23. A.H. Huussen, 'De emancipatie van de Joden in Nederland. Een discussiebijdrage naar aanleiding van twee recente studies', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 94, 1 (1979), pp. 76. Retrieved from http://bmgn.knhg.nl/H/Huussen_jr._A._H._-_De_emancipatie_van_de_joden_in_Nederlan.pdf; Michman (supra footnote 13), p.81.
24. Salemnik (supra footnote 18), p.115.
25. A left-over from the time when Jews were kept outside the Guilds, and prevented from plying certain trades.
26. J. Meijer, *Bloemlezing van De Hond*, Amsterdam 1951, preface.
27. See footnote 8, pg. 13.
28. 'De Installatie van meneer De Hond', *NIW*, 25.5.1905, p. 2; 'Maandschrift der Joodsche Vereeniging Touroh Our', *Libanon*, 3, 1 (1910), p. 5.
29. *NIW* (ibid), p.2.
30. Ibid.
31. The advertisements in the magazine show that it reached the outlying areas, while the fact that is what free is stated in the masthead.
32. M. de Hond, 'Vrolijke Rouw (Merry Mourning)', *Libanon*, 1, 3 (1908), p. 24.
33. Ibid, p. 7, footnote 28.
34. Ibid, p. 17, 18.
35. Ibid, p. 18.
36. Ibid, p. 20.
37. Ibid, p. 8, 20.

38. Ibid, p. 20.
39. Ibid, p. 21.
40. G. van Klinken, 'Dutch Jews as perceived by Dutch Protestants, 1860-1960', Ch. Brasz and Y. Kaplan (eds.), *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, Leiden 2001, p.129.
41. *NIW*, 7.8.1908, p. 2.
42. M. De Hond (1908). 'Het Gebed (Prayer)', *Libanon*, 1, 4 (1908), p.25.
43. Even the **NIW** of the period, included much writing in Hebrew, rarely transliterated, and never translated. The assumption must have been that its readership was capable of reading and understanding the Hebrew, and so, this newspaper was aimed at the more financially successful members of the Jewish community.
44. Bavli, Yoma 9B עבודה- וגמילות חסדים
45. De Hond (supra footnote 40), p. 28.
46. see footnote 42, pp. 28-29.
47. Ibid, p. 30.
48. Perhaps the most important publishers of Jewish material at the time.
49. Justus Tal who survived the Shoah was De Hond's classmate, son of a chief rabbi, and eventually chief rabbi of Utecht in the 1930s and 1940s himself in the post-war period. See M de Hond, 'Open letter', *NIW*, 1908, side 1, p. 2.
50. J. Tal, *Open brief aan mijn vriend M. de Hond*, Amsterdam 1908, p. 4.
51. *NIW*, 5.9.1908.
52. K. Hofmeester, *Jewish Workers and the Labour Movement: A comparative study of Amsterdam London and Paris (1870-1914)*, trans. L Mitzman, Burlington 2004, p. 22.
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54. Hagedoorn (supra footnote 8).
55. *NIW*, 1.8.1908, p.1.
56. *NIW* (supra footnote 49), p. 1.
57. *NIW* (ibid), p. 1.
58. see footnote 23, p. 23-26.
59. Hagedoorn (supra footnote 8).
60. Ibid footnote 23 and 54, p. 24-25.
61. Ibid, p. 27.
62. M. de Hond, 'Klaassie', *Kiekjes*, 1, Joodenbreestraat-Waterlooplein 1926, pp. 1-3; M. de Hond, *Ghetto Kiekjes*, Amsterdam 1914, pp. 12-15.
63. Amerongen (supra footnote 25), p. 25.
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70. Ibid, pp. 1085-1086.
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72. א. לוויין, אותיות של אם: עדויות מתקופת השואה בספרות ההלכתית, תל-אביב 2002
- This book compiles hundreds of stories of courage and leadership of Rabbis, a testimony to their faith and strengthening the spirit of their followers during the Holocaust; L. Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry 1932-1942*, II, Tel-Aviv 1987, pp. 726-732.
73. B.J. Flim, 'Bert Jan Flim Opportunities for Dutch Jews to Hide from the Nazis, 1942-1945', Ch. Brasz and Y. Kaplan (eds.), *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others*, Leiden 2001, pp. 289-306.
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Gender and Sexuality and the Images of Women in Early Buddhism

(Study based on three sources: the Vinaya, the Jātakas and the Therīgāthā)

by

Nisha Thakur

Abstract

Issues of sexuality and gender are very crucial in understanding the images of women in Buddhism. Another way of regarding this question is that even though the concept of male-female binary is set at birth, this is only true of a particular birth. The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth asserts that gender can be changed over successive transmigrations. Thus in the philosophical sense there is no male or female, but only a single karmic stream. This is hardly surprising given that the anatta doctrine (temporality and non-permanence) of Buddhism ensures that there is not even a personal identity over the Samsaric stream. This is another reason why Dhamma for most part ignores the sexual identity of persons.

Therefore, in this article I attempt to show that being born a woman is 'not' the result of bad karmas (deeds and actions) in the popular traditions of India when the Buddhist scholars wrote down the Jātakas. The three important texts, i.e. the Therīgāthā, (songs of the women who embraced Buddhism not by force but through their own understanding of the Buddhist path to salvation i.e. nibbana), the Jātakas (folk stories) and the Vinaya Pitaka (the didactic text) attest the fact that women were

an important agent and the authors of these texts were very sympathetic towards them when placed in contradiction with other categories of people mentioned in these texts.

Keywords: Jātakas, Therīgāthā, Vinaya, Buddhist Women, Sexuality, Gender, Paṇḍaka, Hermaphrodites.

Introduction

A lot of scholarly works done on the topic of Buddhism's stand on women in Indian literature shows that on one hand scholars opine that Buddhism gave no importance to the women's role in the religious life¹, on the other hand some scholars think that Buddhism stood as a revolutionary step in bringing women to the equal footing of men in realizing their spiritual quest.² Central to this question of position of women in Buddhism is the issue of sexuality and gender. How Buddhism perceived the role of gender and sexuality is thus the main theme of my study.

It is said that the Buddhists emphasized the importance of the agency of Karma (actions/deeds in previous births) in the case of sex change over successive births. They believed that unwholesome Karmic conditions lead the male to turn into a female, and the wholesome conditions do the opposite.³ Hence there is an underlying assumption on gender inequality.

Buddhism gave a lot of importance to the proper sexual behavior, which can be clearly seen from the three major texts i.e. the Jātakas, the Therīgāthā and the Vinaya Pitaka. While linking sex change to causality (primarily sexual behavior), early Buddhist sources express a certain contradiction regarding gender equality. Although, Buddha on several occasions explicitly expressed gender equality in the way that both monks and nuns can attain full enlightenment or *Arhantship*, (Cullavagga declares that women are capable of attaining Arhantship) the early *Sangha* (Buddhist monastery) soon adhered to a mainstream institutionalized misogyny leaving nuns in second place in the hierarchy of the sentient beings on the Buddhist path towards spiritual transformation. As a result of this, a female always has to be reborn as male before realizing *Arhantship* (The highest goal of Buddhist path of salvation).

While dealing with the question of sexuality in the pursuit of salvation for the Buddhists, scholars often ignore the presence of the third category of people (I termed them as 'others' for the purpose of easy understanding of the early Buddhist perception regarding gender) called by primarily two names in the text, i.e., *Ubhatavyanjanaka*,⁴ the hermaphrodite (those who were both male and female) and the *Pandaka* ⁵ (those who were neither male nor female).⁶ Thus there is a problem in believing that gender had no role to play in the attainment of salvation.

The mentioning of the hermaphrodite and the *pandaka* clearly shows that gender did play a crucial role in deciding whether a person is fit or unfit in the Buddhist world for attaining salvation. According to the *Vinaya* rules, these people were totally excluded from ordination.⁷ The story in the *Vinaya* about the prohibition of the ordination of these section of people is in the response to the example of a Buddhist monk with an

insatiable desire to be sexually penetrated by men, who requested and received this from some animal handlers, who then in turn related the incident to the wider community and humiliation upon the Sangha.⁸ Thus there is a need to place the question of sexuality in a proper context of Buddhist understanding of one's sex which decides whether or not a person is fit for realizing salvation.

Selection of the Sources

The Vinaya Pitaka, the first division of the Tipitaka is the textual framework upon which the monastic community (*Sangha*) is built. It includes not only the rules governing the life of every *Bhikkhu* (monk) and the *Bhikkhuni* (nun). It is also a host of procedures and conventions of etiquette that support harmonious relations, both among the monastics themselves, and between the monastics and their lay supporters, upon whom the Sangha depended for all their material needs.

On the other hand the Jātakas which are considered as the folktales, enormous numbers of old folk tales and fables which were adopted into the canons of the Buddhist schools, tales which were retold as though they were about the many, many previous existences of Buddha. These stories were early oral compositions, composed by common men in the common dialect called Pāli. These tales were a reflection of the social sentiments of the general masses and also a projection of the official Buddhist position on the subject of women. The subject of the narratives incorporated incidents and anecdotes from the contemporary, localized social milieu.⁹ It was because of their mass appeal, and flexible narrative structure, that in due course they came to be incorporated as a part of

Buddhist literature. These tales provide direct or indirect insight into the perceived women as mother, daughter, courtesans etc.

The Therigāthā is the verses or the poems of the Elder Nuns. It is a short but very significant document in the study of early Buddhism as it is the earliest known collection of women's literature. It consists of 73 poems organized into 16 chapters. The text contains passages, which reaffirm the view that women are the equal competitors of men in terms of spiritual attainment.

All the above-mentioned sources belonged to different genres and discuss women and the 'others' in different contexts and capacities. The fundamental differences in the composition of the texts are pointed out by bringing the differences in the three texts crucial to the understanding of the role of gender in Buddhism. While Therigāthā as stated above, a composition about women, composed by the women. It articulates many personal and spiritual experiences of the women. It also talks about the assessment of their past life and so on, while the Vinaya and the *Jātakas* have been composed by male authors and therefore embody an essentially male perspective. On the other hand the *Cullavagga* (Vinaya Pitaka) offered the official, doctrinal position on the subject of women and the others in the Buddhist Sangha. Its textual content was normative and authoritative in character. Thus one can assume that a common dominant undercurrent of mistrust and negativity runs through most of the Buddhist texts with regard to women but women did enter the Sangha and became an important part of Buddhism.¹⁰

This paper is divided into two parts, which are further divided into various sub-sections. The first part is entitled 'Stories of Women and the 'Others' deals with the stories (I treat them as case studies) of **(a)** women's images (thirteen stories), **(b)** stories of the third

sex two stories) and **(c)** stories of women's spirituality (eight stories) in contrast with the 'others'. The second part entitled 'Buddhism: Ideas of Sexuality and the role of Gender' deals with the role and importance of gender and sexuality in the attainment of the highest goals in Buddhist texts and is further divided into sub-sections i.e. **(a)** Concept of Sexuality and the role of Gender and **(b)** Understanding of women of Buddhism and vice-versa followed by the conclusion.

Part One: Stories of Women and the 'Others'

Thus there were four sections of people mentioned in the earliest monastic texts i.e. men, women, the *Ubhatavyanjanaka* and the *Pandaka*. Sexual behavior constituted a major part of Buddhist teachings. The five precepts (*panca-sila*)¹¹ for the Buddhist laity (both men and women) also affirm the point. These precepts included abstinence from harmful living, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. The 'others' here are mentioned only occasionally, but their presence is important. There are many stories and incidences about the image of a particular gender. Therefore I have divided the stories for the proper understanding into different categories. These categories of stories tell us a wide range of images prevalent in the contemporary society. These stories tell us how Buddhism dealt with these images and the different positions given to the women.

(a) The Stories of the Women's Images.

1. The story (Ananusociya Jātaka, story number 328)¹² recounts that there was a holy man passing from the Brahma world and was born again in the form of a young girl in a Brahmin family named *Sammillabhasini*, endowed with all the features of female

beauty. She was 'perfectly pure' (in the Buddhist sense related to sexual desire which was considered to be a hindrance in the way of attaining salvation) as there was no thought of passion existed in her character. She was married to a man against her wishes. Though sharing the same room and the same bed, they did not regard one another as husband and wife (without seeing each other with sinful passion), but dwelt together like 'two holy men or two holy female saints'.

This story is very important as it clearly shows the popular belief in sex change over successive birth (to be discussed in the next part). Also the choices of women received importance by the writers of the texts.

2. The *Suruci Jātaka* (story no. 489), tells us that once a king asked his wife that, 'what is the worst misery for a woman?' She replied, 'to quarrel with her fellow wives.'¹³ The king then decided that to save his only daughter from this misery, he would give her only to that person who would have her as his only wife.

3. In the *Therīgāthā* (songs of the Buddhist women or the women who embraced Buddhism), Kisa Gotami's experience as a woman can be taken as a proof to say that being a woman posed a lot of problem to lead a good life in society. The verses are as follows:

Woeful is women's lot...

Woeful when sharing home with hostile wives,

Woeful when giving birth in bitter pain,

Some seeking death or else they suffer twice.

Piercing the throat; the delicate poison take.

Woe too when mother-murdering embryo

Comes not to birth, and both alike find death.¹⁴

4. The story of *Phusati* (Vessantara Jātaka, story number. 547) tells us instead of asking for being born as a man, women often craved for becoming mother of a son or wife of Buddha. The story goes that Sakka, the king of gods once asked a woman named Phusati to ask for ten boons that he would grant her. She thus asked for the following things:

...Craving that my life in Sivi's realm may be

Black eyes, black pupils like fawn, black eyebrows may I have...,

A son be mine, revered by kings, famed glorious, debonair,

Bounteous, ungrudging, one to lend a ready ear to prayer,

And while the babe is in my womb let not my figure go,

Let it be slim and graceful like a finely fashioned bow...

God bless king Sivi! Come to meat! Be I his queen avowed.¹⁵

5. The *Tesakuna Jātaka* (Story number 521) tells us that once upon a time, there was a king who had no son or daughter. Therefore he adopted a male owl, a female maynah (a bird), and a male parrot. He said to his officials that they should be treated as his children. On all these children, the king bestowed much wealth without making any distinction due to their dissimilar sexes. But as a result of the king's adopting the birds

as his children, the courtiers made fun of him amongst them, saying, 'look at what the king does; he goes about speaking of birds as his son and daughter.'¹⁶ Then the king thought of showing the wisdom of his children in front of those people. He not just tested his sons but he also tried to prove the wisdom of his daughter. He questioned her about the duties of the king. She (the female maynah) thus replied, 'I supposed, sir, you are putting me to test, thinking what will a woman be able to tell you? So I will tell you, putting all your duties as a king into two maxims.'¹⁷ Thus she answered the king about the duties in as many as eleven stanzas. The king was delighted and granted her the post of treasurer. Thenceforth she held the office and acted for the king.

6. The SuruciJataka (story number 489) is a very interesting tale that is about a lay supporter named Vishaka and how she received eight boons from the Buddha. It is said that when she received the eight boons the brethren talked to each other saying that notwithstanding her womanhood, she received eight boons from Buddha. 'Ah, great are her virtues!'¹⁸ Thus proving the value of a woman for the Buddhists.

7. The Sama Jataka, one of the most important stories dealing about the images of women tells us that a king named Piliyakkha, who ruled in Benares, in his great desire for venison had entrusted the kingdom to his mother.¹⁹ The same story also states that women had a lot of space and respect. The instance of a woman named Parika clearly proves that. When her parents insisted her to get married she refused as she had come from the Brahma world and wanted to renounce the world.²⁰

8. The Sambhula Jataka (story no. 519) talks about the distrust and contradiction towards the women. It shows that often women did not remained quite and questioned their husbands who distrusted her. The story tells us that a woman named Sambhula,

whose husband Sothisena was the son of a king named Brahmadata. Sothisena once said to Sambhula, 'Well lady, it may be so. With womankind it is hard to discover the truth'.²¹ Then the queen said that, 'my lord, though you do not believe me, by virtue of the truth, I speak, I will heal you.'²² Then she performed an act of truth, and no sooner was the water sprinkled over Sothisena, the leprosy straightway left him. In this way the truth in the wife proved important in curing the husband. The queen did not remain quite but by performing the ritual, she proved her husband wrong.

9. In the *Vinaya Pitaka*, It was mentioned that an ordained monk went away alone one day and he met his former wife on the way. She spoke to him thus, 'what, have you now gone forth?' He replied, 'yes, I have gone forth.' Then she said to him, 'sexual intercourse is difficult for those who have gone forth. Come and indulge in sexual intercourse.'²³ He thus indulged in it and as a result of that, he went the monastery (*Vihara*) late. This story is a typical example of distrust and popular notion about women who was seen as the biggest threat in maintaining chastity of the Buddhist monks.

10. The *Canda Kinnara Jataka* (story number 485) is about Rahula's (Buddha's son) mother. The story narrates that one day when the Buddha went to visit her, i.e., Rahula's mother in her palace, she welcomed him despite of her grief and sorrows. Then about her, the king (Buddha's father) told Buddha that 'she heard you wore yellow robes, and so she robed herself in yellow... Sits upon the ground. When you entered upon the religious life she became a widow; and refused the gifts that other kings sent her. So faithful is her heart to you.'²⁴ Then Buddha replied, 'it is no marvel, great king! That now in my last existence the lady should be of faithful heart and led by me alone. So, also, even when born as an animal, she was faithful and mine alone'.²⁵

11. The *Vessantara Jātaka* (story number 547), talks about the conversation between woman named Maddi and her father-in-law who was trying to stop her when his son and her husband was renouncing the world to join the Buddhists. Therefore when king tries to convince her but she replied:

As for these things so terrible, which you have tried to show, I willingly accept them all, I am resolved to go...

Knocked down and smothered in the dust, and haled roughly by the hair a man may do them any hurt, all simply stand and stare.

O terrible is widowhood! ...

Men pull about the widow's sons with cruel blows and foul,

O terrible is widowhood...

A widow may have brothers ten, yet is a naked thing.

O terrible...

The wife who shares her husband's lot..... ,

Her fame the very gods do praise, in trouble she sure. ²⁶

12. The *Ananusociya Jātaka* (story number 328) is about a landowner who had lost his wife. On her death, he neither washed himself nor took food, and neglected all his duties. As a result of his anguish he would wander about the cemetery lamenting, while his 'predestination to enter the first path blazed forth like a halo about his head.'²⁷ The Buddha asked him the reasons for his grieve. When he told him the reason, the Buddha

replied, 'Lay brother, that which is breakable is broken, but when this happens, one ought not to grieve. Sages of old, when they lost a wife, knew this truth, and therefore sorrowed not.'²⁸ This story tells us the importance of woman as a wife and her value in the household.

13. In the *Mahavaggasection* of the Vinaya, there is an incidence about a courtesan named Ambapalika (Amrapali) who lived in a city named Vaisali. 'She was beautiful, graceful, pleasant, gifted with the highest beauty of complexion, well versed in dancing, singing, lute playing, and many other arts'. She was much visited by 'desirous people'. Vaisali was a prosperous city and an important center of commercial activities, presently situated in Bihar. It was said that Ambapalika generally charged fifty *Kahapanas*²⁹ for one night, for her customer. Because of Ambapali, Vaisali became more and more flourishing. When a merchant from Rajagriha (another famous city of ancient India) saw the prosperity of Vaisali because of Ambapalika, he also asked the king (of Rajagriha) to install a courtesan in their city.³⁰

In that same text there was at Rajagaha a girl Salavati by name who was appointed by the merchant as courtesan of Rajagaha. And when the courtesan became well versed in arts like dancing, singing etc., and was much visited by desirous people, she became pregnant. She then thought, 'Men do not like a pregnant woman. If anybody would find out regarding me that the courtesan Salavati is pregnant, my whole position will be lost. What if I were to have the people told that I am sick.'³¹ After a few days when the child in her womb had reached maturity, she gave birth to a baby boy. She gave orders to her maidservant to put her child into an old winnowing basket and throw him away.

b. Stories of the 'Others' (*Pandaka/Hermaphrodites*).

Apart from man and woman, the other two categories of people mentioned in the texts occurred very rarely but these stories help one to understand the position of the other sex in early Buddhism. I found three stories important to know the place ascribed to them in the early Buddhist texts.

1. The story of Ruja (*Mahānārada-kassapa Jātaka*, story number. 544) is relevant for all the three sub-sections in this part. She was a princess and practiced Buddhism independently of her father. She once told her father about her previous seven births and the seven future births. She said,

My seventh former birth ... was as the son... I had an evil companion and I committed much evil; we went about counting other's men's wives as if we had been immortal. Those actions remained laid up like fire covered with ashes...! Followed a friend who was devoted to good works ... and he grounded me in what was good ... And that action remained buried like a treasure in water. But the fruit of evil deeds which I had done in Magadha came round to me at last like a noxious poison... After that I was born in the womb of a monkey... I was next born, as an ox ... this was the fatal consequence of my going after other men's wives. When I passed from that birth I was born in family among the Vajji people, but was neither man nor woman, for it is a very hard thing to attain the being born as a man, this was the fatal consequence... Next, o king, I was born... as a nymph ... an attendant in Sakka' s court. While I stayed there I remembered all these births and also the seven future births which I shall experience... The good which I did ... has come

round in its turn, and when I pass from this birth I shall be born only among gods or men. For seven births...I shall be honoured ... but till the sixth is past I shall not be free from my female sex....³²

2. The story of Isidasi was discussed in the *therigāṭha*. She writes about herself, she wrote that she was susceptible to sex attraction, created adulterous conduct. For this she was in purgatory for many centuries, and thereafter for three rebirths was an animal. Thereafter a slave woman as a hermaphrodite brought her up.³³ The following lines tells about her experience

I came to birth, child of a household slave,

Neither of woman nor of man's my sex,

Such was the fruit of my lasciviousness.³⁴

3. Related to the ordination of the sexually non-conformists (the others'), both male and female, there are special section in the Vinaya for the monks and the nuns. The rule of non-allowance of the *paṇḍaka* and the *Ubhataṅgānaka* was in response to these incidences. For example the Mahavagga tells us,

At that time a certain paṇḍaka was ordained among the monks. He approached a number of young monks and said, 'Come, Venerable Ones, defile me.' The monks reproached him: 'Be gone Paṇḍaka, away with you! What have we to do with that?' After that the *paṇḍaka* tried to approach the novices, then he approached the elephant keepers and the grooms respectively. But the elephant became angry and irritated. He

said, 'these recluses, these followers of the Buddha are paṇḍaka and those who are not paṇḍaka defile paṇḍaka. Thus do they all lack discipline.' The monks told this matter to Buddha. The Buddha replied that 'Monks. If a Paṇḍaka is not ordained, let him not be ordained. If he is already ordained let him be expelled.'³⁵

c. The stories related to the spirituality of women.

1. The story of princess Ruja in the Jātakas (Mahānārada-kassapa Jātika, story number. 544; mentioned above) is also interesting. In this story she tries to convince his father about the Buddhist path of righteousness, which leads to salvation. While giving discourse to her father she talks about the sorrows, which she had undergone in her past births.

In the same story Ruja told her father that those who desire to rise persistently from birth to birth, he should avoid another's wife. And thus he will follow his own highest good, be he born as a woman or man.

2. The Guna Jātika (story number. 157), tells us that how the elder Ānanda received a present of robes worth of thousand pieces of money from the queens. It was said that these robes were given in gift to the husband of these royal ladies, whom he gave to many of his wives, but these women did not accept them, rather they gave these robes to Ānanda, who used to give religious discourses to these queens. When the king came to know about this incidence, he rebuked Ānanda and asked him, "do my ladies learn or listen to your preaching?" Ānanda replied, "Yes, they learn what they ought to, and what they ought to hear, they hear."³⁶

3. The Tipallattha Jātaka (story number 16) tells us that when the Buddha was staying at Aggalava temple, female lay-disciples and sisters used to flock thither to hear the truth preached. Thus it can be said that the women actively participated in Buddhism.

4. In the *Therigatha*, the incidence of a woman named Khema says that Mara, in youthful shape tried to tempt her.³⁷ He told Khema,

Thou are fair, and life is young, beautiful Khema!

I am young, even I too-...

Seek we pleasure.

She replied, in a true renouncer's way:

Through this body vile, seat of disease and corruption Loathing I feel,
and oppression. Cravings of lust are uprooted.

Lusts of the body and sense mind cut like daggers and javelins. Speak
not to me of delighting in aught of sensuous pleasure!³⁸

4. Addhakasi's story is cited in the *Therigatha*³⁹ and it was said that one day, in one of her former births, she insulted an *Arahant* elder sister (senior Buddhist nun) by calling her a prostitute, and for this she went to purgatory. In this Buddha dispensation she was reborn in the kingdom of Kasi as the child of a distinguished and prosperous citizen. However, due to the persistent effect of her former evil speech, she turned into a prostitute.⁴⁰ What led her to become a *Bhikkhunis* is not mentioned.

5. Ambapali (Amrapali), in her former births, was walking in a procession with the *Bhikkhunis*, to pay homage at a shrine. At that holy shrine, when an *Arahanttheri* in front of her hastily spat in the court of the shrine, she said in reproof: 'what prostitute has been spitting in this place?'⁴¹ And because of this karma, she became a courtesan, in Vaisali as has been already mentioned above.

6. This story is about the relation between the spirituality of women and their images in the society. The statement given by the lady patron Visakha occurred in the Mahavagga, where she asked for the eight boons from the Buddha proves this. When Buddha asked her the reasons behind asking for each of the boons she told him that because the *Bhikkhunis* were in the habit of taking bath in the river *akiravati* with the courtesans at the same landing place and they are naked, the courtesans took this opportunity to ridicule the *Bhikkhunis*. The courtesans used to tease the Buddhist nuns saying, 'what is the point of maintaining chastity when you are young? Are not the passions the things to be indulged in? When you are old, maintain chastity then; thus will you be obtainers of both ends.'

Thus Visakha complained about this incident to Buddha. She said:

"Then the *Bhikkhunis*, lord, when thus ridiculed by the courtesans, were confused. Impure, lord, is nakedness for a woman, disgusting, and revolting. It was this circumstance, lord, that I had in view in desiring to provide the *Bhikkhuni*'s Sangha with dresses to bathe in for lifelong."⁴²

7. In the *Cullavagga*,⁴³ there is a story of a *Bhikkhuni*. The story tells us that the nun who had followed Buddhism for the last seven years was very forgetful. She lost it as fast

as she received it. She told herself, 'for seven years I have followed the Blessed one, learning the Vinaya; and, being forgetful, I have lost it as soon as I received it. Hard it is for a woman to follow the blessed one her life long.' When the Buddha came to know about this problem he allowed the *Bikkhus* to teach the Vinaya to her.

8. In the Mahavagga (Vinaya Pitaka), there is an incidence of the nuns (Bhikkhunis) who were once travelling on the road from the city named Saketa to Savatthi. On the way robbers broke forth, robbed some of the nuns, and violated others. When lord Buddha came to know about it he said, 'If a person, O Bhikkhus, who has violated a Bhikkhuni (or has had sexual intercourse with a Bhikkhuni), if that person has not received the *Upasampada* ordination, let him not receive it; if he has received it, let him be expelled (from the fraternity).'⁴⁴ This incident clearly shows that Buddha himself respected the women and the place of women in the Buddhist spirituality.

Part Two: Buddhism: Ideas of Sexuality and the role of Gender

In this section, I have tried to explain the above-mentioned stories in the proper historical context. The contradictory nature of the Buddhist approach is depicted right from the early Buddhist texts. The Cullavagga/Kullavagga section of the Vinaya shows that how difficult it was for Ananda to convince Buddha to let the women enter the Buddhist monastic order, i.e., Sangha.⁴⁵ Lord Buddha is said to have grudgingly allowed women as an institutionalized category within monastic Buddhism. On doing so he is believed to have said,

If not Ananda, women would not have received permission to go out from the household life and enter the homeless states, under the

doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgatha, then would the pure religion, Ānanda, have lasted long, the good law would have stood fast for a thousand years. But, since Ānanda women have now received that permission the pure religion Ānanda, will now last so long, the good law will now stand fast for only five hundred years.⁴⁶

This statement of Buddha has substantiated the contention of those who wish to see the Buddhist teachings as misogynists. Those, who claim that early Indian Buddhism should be evaluated as a sect against women, often perceive the texts as projecting the women as temptresses and seducers of men. But in spite of the generally accepted belief that the admittance of women as nuns into the Buddhist monastic order was restricted, there were many women who eventually came to be associated with Buddhism. In fact meeting women was not unwanted; in fact many women visited Buddha very often. In this background this section is sub-divided into two parts, i.e., (a) the concept of sexuality and the role of Gender, and (b) the understanding of women of Buddhism and the vice-versa.

(a) The concept of sexuality and the role of Gender.

Thus in the first section we see different approaches by the writers of the Buddhist texts on the question of comparing women and men and women with 'others' in the Buddhist texts. If we compare Vinaya and Jātakas, we see that on one hand this category of people (called pandaka etc.) were considered as impure and were not ordained. They were not even allowed to give gifts. On other hand, Jātakas tells us that being born a hermaphrodite is a result of one's bad karma in the past births. Therefore, we can infer that Buddhists did have something to do with the question of one's gender in making the

pursuit of the path easy or difficult (as in the case of Ruja and Isidasi). They were differentiated from men and women and were barred from ordination under any circumstances.⁴⁷ We can say that the women and men are seen as normal in contrast to these people. Thus the gender of women had nothing to do with the attainment of the 'nibbana.' At the same time the question of gender becomes very crucial. Gender does have a crucial role in the qualification of salvation. The intention of bringing this issue here is to construct the notion in a better manner, which has variously been perceived as the misogyny of the Buddhist traditions, on the one hand, and the equality among sexes on the other. These people were completely excluded on the ground of their sex. The Therigāthā contains excerpts that do reflect that a female birth is difficult and regrettable, highlighting the travails and tribulations of a woman like 'sharing home with hostile wives' or 'giving birth in bitter pain' but nowhere do these texts delimit or question women's spirituality. In the Vinaya we see that in spite of the Eight Chief Rules (*Garudhamma*) and the Doctrine of Women's Incapability, apparently women were not deterred from entering the ascetic community or the Sangha. But nowhere the others' were given any option to prove their spirituality.

However, there are very few examples where they are mentioned. Isidasi's story (case number 27 above) shows how difficult it was for the third sex to lead a normal social life and it was termed as a consequence of bad karma. In Ruja's case also, she was born as neither man nor woman in one of her previous births as a fatal consequence of her going after other men's wives (when she was born as a man in a previous birth). The hermaphrodites/*Pandakas* were even disqualified from making donations to begging monks.⁴⁸

There is no doubt that things like temptations, sexual desires, and bad karma resulting in sex-change are present in the texts, but it is also true with the men. Women are not exclusive holders of these titles. This shows that hating women is not the fundamental issue. When the brethren's were supporting their mothers, lord Buddha did not rebuke them but he appreciated them (The Gijjha Jātaka, 164; the Sama Jātaka, 540). But when the brethren are in contact with their wives, Buddha rebuked them. In the Vinaya there are rulings promulgated by the Buddha when a Bhikkhu (monk) reportedly changed into a female and a Bhikkhuni (nun) became a male.⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the Vinaya does not give a value judgment for these two cases. Instead, both are simply reported as a matter of fact, without a distinction between the case of a male changing to female or vice-versa. Therefore, in the earlier Buddhist literature there is no indication that for the Bhikkhu to become a female is the result of bad karma, or that for a Bhikkhuni to change into a male is the result of good karma.⁵⁰

The sense pleasures, especially sexuality, were thus considered extremely dangerous and tempting, for both men and women. They are crucial attractions to the householder's existence, which were thought to entrap one into continued rebirth in Samsara (world). Avoiding them and fighting off attraction to sexuality are constant themes in the literature of early Buddhism.

We also see the problems faced by women, which was recorded in the literature and great respect about the woman's commitment towards her spirituality, which was hard. The story in the Therigāthā about Khema (cited above) shows that it is actually not about avoiding women, but it actually meant the complete control of one's mind.

Women and men are often seen equally in the texts as their experiences and problems are more or less the same.

There is a belief that women lived the life of widows when their husbands left the house. These women were also respected. The example of Buddha's own former wife tells that how women who lived a life of a widow without marrying others were respected by the Buddhists. The story of Phusati's daughter in law, i.e. wife of Vessantara (story no.547) also shows the difficulties a woman faces when their husbands renounced the world. This sympathy for the women recorded in the texts is very crucial in understanding her position in Buddhism.

Also both for the Buddha and Ānanda, the encounter with the women was not rare rather they were the foremost among those who frequently came in contact with women. This attainment of the spiritual quest has not received much importance in the books where the Buddhist texts are seen as anti-feminine. The statement of Buddha that gained more importance is as follows.

Ānanda, one of the foremost disciples of Buddha, once asked him (in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*) as how to conduct with regard to womankind? Lord Buddha replied that do not see them. Then Ānanda asked, "but if we should see them?" Buddha instructed not to talk to them in response. Then Ānanda again asked that if they should speak, what is to be done. The Buddha replied, "Keep wide awake."⁵¹

Although this statement is taken very seriously to show that the early Buddhists were anti-female, there is no denying of the fact that women's contact with Buddhists is not rare and as the examples I have given earlier, it becomes even more difficult to

acknowledge that Buddha had said such things. And it was even tougher given the example in the Cullavagga⁵² to believe that a disciple like Ananda had asked such question.⁵³

Ruja's story, mentioned above clearly shows that women were given ample chance to prove their wisdom. Her teachings to her father proves that the Buddhist path to salvation makes no distinction between men and women while the people treated as others were totally excluded and highly disregarded. In the same story, while giving the discourse she says that those who desire to rise persistently from birth to birth, they should avoid another's wife and thus they will follow their own highest good, 'be they born as a woman or a man.'⁵⁴

(b) The Understanding of Women of Buddhism and Vice Versa

In the *Manusmriti*, it is stated that 'one should not sit in a lonely place with one's mother, sister, or daughter, for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.'⁵⁵ 'Through their passion for man, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, the women become disloyal towards their husbands; however, carefully they may be guarded in this world.'⁵⁶ Manu states that women are never to be free under any circumstances. The males in their families must keep her in dependence.⁵⁷ A woman should never be an independent person. In childhood, her father protects her, when married, her husband protects her, and her sons protect her when she is old.⁵⁸

A woman, as prescribed in the Manu, is subject to corporeal punishment. He allows the right to beat a wife. He says that a wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of

the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.⁵⁹ Such strict rules and such strong control on the women's independence are missing in the Jātakas and the Vinaya texts. Women, as imaged in the Buddhist texts, enjoy more liberty and possess more wealth and power. As *Manusmriti* is a prescriptive text, we can see the constant effort of men in controlling the women in every sphere. Such psychological attitude of men towards women is also present in Buddhism. Women are shown as posing threat to men but there are many references where men threaten the women. Therefore, Buddha wanted them to be protected. Men often try to seduce or rape women and the nuns.

The above-mentioned cases (in the first section of this paper) describe the image of woman who is a courtesan and an important patron in comparison to the *Bhikkhunis*. The society's attitudes toward the immoral activities done by the prostitutes are seen disdainfully (even by the Buddhists is evident from these texts). The theory of *Karma* propounded by the Buddha also tells us that the social condition of this section has been much disrespected. But the value of this class in Buddhist texts lies in their capacity to donate.

But there is something else that the Buddhists gave to these women. They also admitted them in the order. This is an unusual thing as their entry in the Sangha could have posed danger, as this class was not seen respectfully in the society, and the nuns on the other hand were respected and their image as a chaste person was respected. Therefore the basic nature of women that is being described by the Buddhists is inseparable unless their sexual desire is challenged. A woman who is seen in the society in relation to her sexuality can become unchaste once she enters the order and then any woman can

become unchaste. Therefore, how one will answer this? This contradiction can also be seen in relation to the authoritative nature of the writer who is not willing to challenge the prevailing images of women but gives concessions to women as they are admitted and proclaims that women are equally capable of attaining salvation.

Thus the considerable interest in the spirituality of these women even belonging to this class, tells us of an important challenge which perceives women not merely as the passive victims of an oppressive ideology but also perhaps primarily as the active agents of their own positive construct. Therefore, women became active agents whose power and independence men constantly tried to reduce. The sixth century saw the Buddhist concept on equality and also observed the increasing subordination of women taking place simultaneously.

An assessment of the rules for the conduct of the *Bikkhus* (monks) and the *Bhikkhunis* (nuns) in the Sangha brings out the essential differences between the two. The rule for the nuns (*Bhikkhuni Patimokkha*) contains three hundred and eleven rules. Of these rules, there were one eighty-one rules similar with that of the monks, but there are extra eighty-five rules exclusively for the nuns. But it must be noted that many of these extra rules were formulated to protect the nuns. As is seen in case number twenty-five, discussed above, in which a nun used to forget the Vinaya frequently and lord Buddha helped her even when she blamed her own sexuality for this.⁶⁰

Buddhism had not entirely distanced itself from the then society and its norms and taboos. The SamaJataka (story number 540) said that Sakka, the god told an (married) ascetic who maintained chastity that, 'Sir, I foresee a danger, which threatens you- you must have a son to take care of you: you must follow the way of the world.'⁶¹ These social

pressures and the ideology also influenced the Buddhists. The general antagonism and mistrust of the female ascetics/ nuns have impacted the Buddhist orders too. But the rules can be seen as to be regulated for governing the interactions of the nuns in the social spheres.

According to the Vinaya Pitaka (Cullavagga section), which is a canonical text, the Buddha allegedly accepted women into his monastic order on one condition: that they adopt the so-called Eight Chief Rules called the *Gurudhamma*. These rules specified that nuns may neither censure nor admonish monks and that nuns must take their ordinations, bimonthly confessions, rainy season retreats, and penances in the presence of monks. Buddha's aunt objected to only one of the eight rules- the one specifying that even a senior nun who has been ordained one hundred years must bow down to a youthful novice who has been ordained but a day- but her objection was overruled by the Buddha himself. While scholars have suggested that the Buddha may never have spoken these baneful rules, their legacy is undeniable.⁶² The cumulative effect of the eight Chief rules was to give monks the pastoral rights to discipline and punish nuns. Despite Buddha's reluctance, women did succeed in entering the order making themselves an exclusive, individual epistemic space of their own, which is clearly reflected in their biographical compositions of the early Buddhist nuns, the Therigāthā. Thus in conclusion it can be said that there are instances in these three texts that the male inadequacies and shortcomings prevalent in the society at that time gave woman a chance to emancipate herself. It is true with the dominant and the dominated group in any society.⁶³ The subordinated class especially the women not always share the views prevailing in the society by the men who held the dominant position in terms of their

authority over the texts in which women are presented in their own parameters. The roles ascribed to both in the Brahmanical texts and women may not always accept the Buddhist texts. These dissent voices are not ignored by the Buddhists and therefore we have examples of women (primarily found in the Therigatha) such as Soma, Punna and Punnika⁶⁴ who strongly came forward to challenge the norms of the society which gave the women an inferior status. I don't think that the records are incomplete in the sense that those women are frequently depicted as contesting the norm where their sexuality was not a barrier as compared to the third sex.

All women, belonging to any section of the society are depicted as having the capacity to achieve the highest goal, without any exception, and many did. Thus the Buddhist doctrinal position is clear. There were no distinctions between the two sexes. Alan Sponberg has described it as 'Soteriological Inclusiveness,'⁶⁵ where being woman or man was not a factor in the ability to attain salvation. The fundamental Buddhist doctrinal position is never questioned in the context of these cases. But the 'other sex' did matter, the point that needs much more investigation.

Therefore in conclusion it can be said that as Buddhism teaches that sensual enjoyments and desire in general, and sexual pleasure in particular, are particular hindrance to enlightenment. The women were not seen as a threat sexually in the popular culture while in the Vinaya they were not prohibited from entering the Sangha and meeting the Buddhist monks and Buddha himself. But it does not mean that the sexuality was not important. While Buddha allowed the ordination of women, he forbade ordination to these 'Other' types of gender. ⁶⁶

The Buddha's proscription against the third gender clearly shows that gender does played an decisive role in the attainment of the *nirvana* in Buddhism. Buddhism does not consider women as being inferior of men. Buddhism, while accepting the biological and physical differences between the four genders, does consider men and women to be equally useful to the society while discarding the others'.

Depending on which source one chooses to cite, a woman's place in Buddhism can either seem rather equal to men's or rather backset. Like most subjective issues, it sort of depends on one's paradigm and the opinion of those one listens to. The Pāli canon, opines Kathryn R Blackstone⁶⁷ is filled with passages and incidents in support of the Buddhist misogyny. However the portrayal of this general misogynist view of Buddhism becomes problematic in all the three sources. Contrary to general opinion that the Jātakas are always negative and distrustful in their portrayal of women, there are both positive and negative references to be found. In the *Therīgāthā* too we find the same contradiction, as women themselves are writing it.

Thus it can be said that Buddhism has come a long way in the equality of women as compare to men. Buddha taught that anyone, regardless of sex or social position, could achieve enlightenment and the freedom from the cycle of reincarnation yet he disallowed the 'other' shows that being born women was not a problem in Buddhism. The discrimination of women in Buddhism have its roots in Vedic society and are symptomatic of the patriarchal structure of human society since that time. However, Gender inequality can find no justification in core Buddhist teaching and is a blatant contradiction of that teaching. Although the Buddha did take some steps to address the issue of gender inequality, these were unavoidably restricted by the extreme cultural

mind-set of his time, which is best demonstrated in the case of the third sex in the Buddhist literature.

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Endnotes:

¹ According to Diana Y. Paul, the traditional view of women in Early Buddhism is that they are inferior. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Traditions*. University of California Press. 1985

² Susan Murchutt points out that, "The nun's Sangha was a radical experiment for its time". *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigāthā*. Parallax Press 1991. P.4

³ Instances of Male turn into female sex change in the early narratives of Buddhism provide corroborative evidence for the agency of casuality, i.e the *Karma*. For example the story of Soreyya. Soreyya was a merchant who falls in love with the elder named Mahakaccāna after having seen him in the bath. Soreyya's wish to marry the elder results in the instant transformation of his sex from male to female. She is then married off (to someone else) and bears children. She was eventually reversed into a male after having asked forgiveness from elder Mahakaccāna. This story is recounted in H. C Norman Ed. *Dhammapada Commentary (Dhammapada-attakathā)*. London: Pali Text Society. 1970. Vol.1.I, pp. 325-32.

⁴ *Ubhatavyanjanaka* are defined as 'having the characteristics of both sexes'. For details see, T W Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), *The Pali-English Dictionary*, The Pali Text Society, Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1975.

⁵ The *paṇḍaka* is a complex category that is variously defined in the early Buddhist texts. In the Vinaya Pitaka which is the earliest text mentioning the name, the word seems to refer to socially stigmatized class of promiscuous, passive, probably transvestite homosexuals.

⁶ The story of the prohibitions of the ordination of these two classes is in the response to the example of a monk with the an insatiable desire to be sexually penetrated by men, who requested and received this from some animal handlers who then in turn related the incident to the wider community and brought disgrace upon the Sangha (Buddhist monastery). see I B Horner tran. *Vinaya* Vol.4, pp. 141-14

⁷ The Mahavagga 1.69, p.223, Vol. 13, Part.1, in T. W Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg (trans.), 'Vinaya Texts' (in 3 Volumes, 13, 17, 20), *The Sacred Books of East* (SBE hereafter). Reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1968.

⁸ *Vinaya* vol.4. pp. 141-142

⁹ Garima Kaushik, *Women and Monastic Buddhism in Early South Asia: Rediscovering the Invisible Believers*. Introduction.

¹⁰ Rhys Davids, *Cullavagga, Sacred Books of the East*. Vol.XX.p.323

¹¹ The five precepts constitute the basic code of ethics taken by the laity (both men and women) of Buddhism. In many *Suttas* regarding lay practices, the Buddha explicitly demands five vows or precepts, which are otherwise dangers and

enemies in the pursuit of salvation. For example, *Book of the Gradual Saying (AnguttaraNikaya)* Vol.3 (Tras).E M Hare.Luzac and Co. Ltd, London, 1934.P. 203.

¹² All references to the Jātakas are from E.B Cowell (ed.) *The Jātakas or the stories of the Buddha's former births* in Six Volumes, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2002.

¹³ Jātakas, Vol. 4. P. 199

¹⁴ Rhys Davids, *Psalm of the Early Buddhists. I-Psalms of the Sisters*.Luzac and Company Limited. London. 1964.

Verse 214-216, pp. 108-109

¹⁵ *Jātakas*, Vol.6. P.249

¹⁶ Ibid. Vol.5. P. 60

¹⁷ Jātakas, Vol.5. p. 62

¹⁸ Ibid.Vol.4 p. 198

¹⁹ Ibid. Vol.6 p.43

²⁰ ibid. p.40

²¹ Ibid. Vol.5 p. 52

²² Ibid.

²³ I B Horner (translator), *Book of the Discipline*, Volume. IV, (*Mahavagga*) 78.1.,Pali Text Society, Lancaster. 1951-52. p. 124.

²⁴ Jātakas Vol. 4. P. 179

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Jātakas*, Vol. 6. P. 263

²⁷ Ibid. Vol. 3. P. 62

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kahapanas is the name of ancient Indian coins. These coins was either made of gold, silver or copper. It was also called as 'Punch Marked Coin'.

³⁰ Mahavagga, VIII, 1.2. in *Vinaya Texts* (Sacred Book of East). Vol. 17. Part.11. Pp. 171-172

³¹ Ibid 172

³² *Jātakas*, Vol.6. p. 120

³³ *Psalm of the Early Buddhists*, (cited above). pp. 156-57

³⁴ Ibid p. 162

³⁵ Mahavagga, 1:61 Part 1, Vol.13 SBEpp. 115-16. Translation adapted from Leonard Zwilling, 'Homosexuality as seen in Indian Buddhist texts' in JoséIganacioCabezón (ed.) *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*. State University of New York. Albany. 1992. Pp. 207-208

³⁶ Jātakas Vol.2. p. 18

³⁷ *Psalm of the Early Buddhists I*, Pp. 84-85

³⁸ Ibid Pp. 82-83

³⁹ Ibid. P. 20

⁴⁰ Ibid Pp. 25-26

⁴¹ Ibid. I 20

⁴² Mahavagga VIII, 15, 10. Part II. Vol. 17. SBE pp. 222-23

⁴³ Cullavagga, X, 8.1. Part 111, Vol.20. SBE p. 334

⁴⁴ Mahavagga, 1.67. Part 1. Vol.13. SBE. p. 221

⁴⁵ Cullavagga, X. 1.6 Vol. 20. Part 111. SBE P.325

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Mahavagga 1.69 Part II, Vol.17 SBE: the Buddha here states, 'if Bikkhus confers the ordination on hermaphrodite were blame as committing sin/*dukkata* offence'. pp.222-223

⁴⁸ I B Horner, *Book of the Disciplines*, Mahavagga, Vol. 4. Op.cit., P. 87.

⁴⁹ Vinaya III 35, 12, 18

⁵⁰ Burkhard, Scherer speaks of a 'basically non-judgmental reaction of the Buddha,' noting, 'this initial pragmatic approach towards gender-crossing is later modified in the authoritative commentary...to the Vinaya' where in the words of Scherer, 'the commentarial stance is evidence for an underlying assumption on gender inequality'. 'Gender Transformed and Meta-Gendered Enlightenment: Reading Buddhist Narratives as Paradigms of Inclusiveness'. *Revista de Estudos da Religiao*, 3 (2006) p. 67, 69

⁵¹ T. W Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Suttas*, SBE, Vol. 11. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass 1968. Chapter 5.

⁵² In the Vinaya it was Ananda who insisted Buddha to let women enter the Sangha. Cullavagga X. p. 354

⁵³ This issue was raised by B R Ambedkar. The rise and fall of the Hindu women (who was responsible for it?) in D C Ahira edited *A Panorama of Indian Buddhism*. Delhi- Sri Satguru Publications Series Number 161. 1995. Pp. 149-172

⁵⁴ *Mahānārāḍakassapa Jātaka*, story number. 544

⁵⁵ G. Buhler (trans. & Ed.) *The Manusmriti: The Laws of Manu*, Sacred Books of East Vol. XXV, Oxford, Clarendon, 1886. II. 215.p. 69

⁵⁶ Ibid IX,15.P.330

⁵⁷ Ibid IX.2.pp. 327-28

⁵⁸ Ibid IX.3.p.328

⁵⁹ Ibid VIII, 299 p. 306

⁶⁰ Cullavagga X 8.1 Part III, Vol. 20. SBE p. 334

⁶¹ Jātakas Vol.6. p. 41

⁶² Ibid. P.354

⁶³ Braj Ranjan Mani, *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*. Delhi: Manohar, 2008, pp. 13-15

⁶⁴ *Psalm of early Buddhists*, pp. 44-45

⁶⁵ A., Sponberg, 'Attitude towards women and the feminine in Early Buddhism', in Jose I. Cabezon (ed.) *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, SUNY Press, 1992, Pp. 3-36.

⁶⁶ Mahavagga, 1: 61, 66, 69

⁶⁷ Kathryn R Blackstone, *Looking Inwards: Attitude towards the Body; Women in the footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for liberation in the Therigāthā*. Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 2000.p.61.

Interrogating Gorkha as Martial Race: Category based on Discrete Identities

by

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Abstract:

Drawing from the review of existing literatures on Gorkhas this paper charts the historical genealogy of the Gorkha identity and its evolution from a martial race category to a social and cultural identity. The paper draws attention to the constructed nature of Gorkha identity as martial race, and highlights how this martial category subsumed many discreet ethnic groups within its fold, while providing minimal space for perpetuation of cultural differences. The paper argues that the collective nature of Gorkha identity was structured in the past through the martial thinking and is still perpetuated in the present context but in a renewed and reinvigorated form.

Keywords: martial race, Gorkha, identity, army, culture, ethnic groups.

‘In my humble opinion they are by far the best soldiers in India, and if they are made participators of our renown in arms, I conceive that their gallant spirit and unadulterated military habits might be relied on for fidelity; and that our good and regular pay, and noble pension establishment, would serve to counterpoise the influence of nationality especially in the Magar and Gurungs.’

Brian Houghton Hodgson

(1833)

‘The Gurkha, from the warlike qualities of his forefathers, and the traditions handed down to him of their military prowess as conquerors of Nepal, is imbued with and cherishes the true military spirit.’

Eden Vansittart (1896)

The study of groups and communities in a post-colonial country like India poses great challenges, as the structures of group identities and boundaries underwent systematic changes within the structures of colonial governmentality. In many ways the colonial strategies to control and discipline the population of India led to the development of different notions of people, and structured identities of many groups and communities.¹ The group’s internal constitution, as well as their conception of the group boundaries was shaped by the way colonialist wrote, envisioned, and represented them, which in turn created essentialized identities.² The myriad aspects of colonial governance initiated a discourse whereby new subjectivities were created through different categorization process like census operations and large-scale ethnological studies. This is the apt case of the Gorkha/Nepali as martial race and their present predicament in India.³

This paper does not dwell into the regimental and military history of the Gorkha, it rather attempts a critical analysis of the early text like the handbooks prepared by the Army officers as they form the source of early details on Gorkhas. The paper will analyze how Gorkhas were represented in the official publications and other anthropological writings which heralded the stereotypes of martial race. ⁴ It will argue that the Gorkha as a martial category subsumed many ethnic groups within its ambit, and in subsequent years assumed a socio-cultural and political form especially in a region like Darjeeling.

The bulk of literature on the Gorkhas belongs to the class of writings by British administrators, scholars, and army officers who served in the British army. The literature can be aptly classified as regimental histories; recruitment handbooks and coffee table books which speak volumes about the manners and customs of the Gorkhas, along with their tales of gallantry. Most of them are didactic in nature, where gallant past accounts are construed which provide legitimacy to the present and future. Most importantly, these accounts create an image of gallant soldiers who are uprooted from their own history and incorporated into the grand narrative of martiality.⁵ The literature is conspicuously silent on the views and opinion of different ethnic groups, and their conception regarding the category of martial Gorkha. Even the literatures produced by the Indian scholars tend to celebrate the category of the Gorkha as a martial race, without paying much attention to understand the ways in which the identity of Gorkha was constituted in the minds of the people.⁶ The Gorkha martial category helps us to explore new avenues of identity claims, and note the dynamics of categorical identity formation in Darjeeling. In order to highlight this aspect this paper looks into the historical process involved in the formation of Gorkha identity, and sets a framework to explore the present through the idiom of the past.

Encountering the Gorkhas:

Many scholars give diverse explanations for the origin of the name Gorkha, however in contemporary times most agree to the fact that the name Gorkha came from a principality located in Nepal. Prithivinarayan Shah who unified Nepal in the late eighteenth century came from this principality. He was known as the Gorkha King and his troops were known as Gorkhali force.⁷ The origin of the Gorkha rulers in Nepal is

shrouded in mystery and historians tracing the genealogy of the Gorkha dynasty⁸ have analyzed the Royal chronicles called *Gorkha-vamsavali* which narrates the migration of the high caste Hindus from Rajasthan to the hills of Nepal following the Muslim invasion.⁹ The historical narrative of the Gorkha dynasty as recorded by Hamilton (1819) recounts the story of two brothers *Khancha* and *Mincha* who inherited lands in the Magar country, *Khancha* in the neighborhood of Birkot and *Mincha* at Nawakot. *Khancha* subsequently extended his realm to include Gulmi and Ghandrung and *Mincha* extended his realm to Kaksi and Lamjung by subduing the Gurung of the region.¹⁰ It was from this latter branch of Lamjung that we first hear of Drabya Shah who was able to seize the little principality of Gorkha.¹¹ It was Pithhvinarayan Shah of this lineage who conceived the idea of extending his realm to the Kathmandu valley. When he came to power in 1743, he started a campaign to conquer the *Baisi* and *Chaubisi* principalities.¹² Though faced with a stiff resistance from the Newars in 1757, yet Gorkhas subsequently ran over Kirtipur in 1766, after which Jayaprakash Malla sought British help to resist the invading Gorkha army. In 1767 the British anxious to maintain a steady trade relation with Nepal and Tibet, send an expedition under Captain Kinloch to assist Newar kings against the Malla. However, the expedition failed and Kathmandu soon fell into the hands of the invading Gorkhas on the day of *Indra Jatra* festival.¹³

After the conquest of Kathmandu, Patan soon fell, followed by Bhadgau a year after. So by 1769 the conquest of Nepal valley was completed and Prithivinarayan shifted his capital to Kathmandu on 21 March 1770.¹⁴ After the conquest of the Kathmandu valley the Gorkhas marched in both the western and eastern direction establishing its proprietary rights over the smaller principalities. On the western front the Gorkhas occupied Kumaon in 1791, Garhwal in 1803 and on the eastern front they

occupied Sikkim and Darjeeling in 1789.¹⁵ From the year 1804 onwards they resumed the campaign of territorial expansion in the region west of Kumaun. However, their plan to expand westward into Kangra region was stalled due to the dispute they entered with the British East India Company. Following such events war was imminent, and it was formally declared on 1 November 1814. The war eventually came to an end with the Treaty of Sugauli (signed on 2 December 1815 and ratified on 4 March 1816), which determined the boundaries between Nepal and British India, and provided for establishment of British Residency in Nepal. The treaty did not mention about the recruitment of the Gorkhas into the British India Army. However, after the conclusion of the war, the commissioner of Kumaon Edward Gardner wrote to the Government urging to recruit Gorkhas into the regular troops of British India army, and this proposal was welcomed by the Governor General.¹⁶

Recruitment of the Gorkhas:

The recruitment of the Gorkhas into the Company's Army started even before the conclusion of the Anglo-Nepal war. British officers like Captain Hearsay recommended the recruitment of the Gorkhas during the advent of Anglo-Nepal war.¹⁷ Similarly, British General Ochterlony played a crucial role in the early recruitment of the Gorkhas, it was during the course of the war that he requested the Company's government to recruit Gorkhas; which was duly accepted by Lord Moira, and an order was issued on 24 April 1815 to raise three Gorkha battalions. The first battalion raised was *Nasiri* or *Nusooree* battalion which was formed to take part in the operation against the Malaun, the second battalion was recruited mainly from the Gorkha prisoners held at Dehru Doon and was named *Sirmoor rifles*. *Kumaun battalion* was raised at the same time

from amongst men who were defeated at Almora.¹⁸ Progressively all these regiments underwent title successive changes in subsequent years.¹⁹

The recruitment of the Gorkhas into the ranks of the Company's army was founded on the martial thinking which was gradually taking shape in the Indian sub-continent. The martial race theory was part of the European doctrine of 'biological determinism' or 'scientific racism', which required more than the discursive construction.²⁰ The martial race theory became more concrete, codified, and took an official shape following the events of 1857. Seemingly after the mutiny of 1857, colonial anthropology was obsessed with the question of caste and its specific characteristics, thus it became the sole determining factor for recruitment in the British Indian army.²¹ Recruitment of groups such as Gorkhas was contingent on their essential difference from people of the Indian plains, and loyalty to the British. McMunn emphasizes this fact when he writes, 'the bulk of Gurkha tribes are in no great sympathy with the races of India, and in the army would far rather associate with the European soldiers than with other Indian troops'²² Martial race was thus designed to recruit relatively backward minorities who would be dependent on the British for their sustenance.²³ Enloe (1980) refers to this process of labeling people from remote rural setting as 'Gurkha syndrome'.²⁴ The deliberate attempt to lure Gorkha recruits through economic benefits is best captured in Napier statement- 'No pay no Goorkha.'²⁵

Martiality was then a product of the economic vulnerability of a group and their geographical isolation. This was most evident in the case of the Gorkhas, where certain districts and regions of Nepal were singled out, which were thought to produce good recruits, and some others were demarcated as regions producing poor recruits. In their

search for the best fighting men from the hills the British ethnographers and military officers downplayed the differences of culture, traditions, and customs of different groups, and only highlighted their similitude as hill dwellers.²⁶ The importance of place was paramount in identifying martial groups. Ethnic groups were perceived to retain their martial quality only in their natural habitat. British officers shared the views on miscegenation and insisted that intermarriage would undeniably contaminate the blood and led to inferior breed.

Two central qualities actively associated with the martial races were that of 'honour' and 'shame.'²⁷ In this way the martial races stood in complete opposition to the 'criminal castes/tribes.' If the natural instinct of the martial race was warfare, in contrast the natural proclivity of criminal castes was crime. It seems that the martial race theory was promulgated to invert the inherent trait of criminality, to check its negative content, to channelize it through disciplinary regimes for productive forces. Therefore, as Omissi (1994) suggests many groups like Mapillas, Mers, and Minas could be categorized as both 'criminal' and 'martial.'²⁸ The British recognized the proclivity of both towards violence, so if unchecked it could pose as a serious threat to the Raj itself. So martiality was a combined manifestation of 'enumerative' plus 'surveillance' modality of the colonial state. In this logic criminality was unrestrained martiality, therefore, to control it criminality was made to stand in stark opposition to martiality.

Though the Gorkhas served in the British India Army since 1815, yet they came to be seen as a corps d' elite only after the mutiny of 1857. The first *Nussuree Gurkha* battalion was raised through the combined effort of Lieutenant Robert Ross, and Lieutenant Frederick Young, who formed corps with men from Gharwal. The disposed

peasants from Kumaon and Gharwal later enlisted heavily into the ranks of Gorkha soldiers. Thus, during and immediately after the Anglo-Gorkha war; regions such as Kumaon, Gharwal, and Sirmoor served as pool for the Gorkha recruits. Early recruits were actually Gharwalis and Kumaonis who were predominantly recruited as irregular levies. These recruits were later molded into Company's image of a gallant Gorkha soldier.²⁹

Gorkha was not a homogeneous group, as men were drawn from a host of peripheral ethnic groups. The variable definition of the Gorkha, needs to be probed given the fact that the first recruits as a Gorkha during the Anglo-Nepal war were men from the Garhwal hills. Though recruited as Gorkhas, these early recruits were depicted as 'strictly speaking not Gorkhas.'³⁰ This form of categorization provides sufficient ground to critically interrogate the category of the Gorkha and trace its connection to the purported martial race category. Structured as a martial race the category of Gorkha was extended to include various groups and communities in subsequent years. Groups such as Limboos and Rais who had resisted the Gorkha expansionist drive in the past were categorized as Gorkhas in the reimagined configuration of martial race.

The first European to report about the martial qualities of the Gorkhas was Hamilton (1819), which became even more prominent in the reports of Hodgson (1833), who then Assistant Resident at Nepali court proposed a direct recruitment of the Gorkhas.³¹ For Hodgson, recruitment of men from Nepal into Company's army was a tacit move to check the ever growing strength of the Gorkha state.³² This view was actively supported by Campbell- the then Assistant Surgeon at the Residency (later on to become the first superintendent of Darjeeling). Though the British resident Edward

Gardiner urged the Government of India to consider the recruitment of the Gorkhas, the Nepali court was suspicious of such an idea. Infact, the Nepali court confiscated the land grant of the soldiers who joined the British India army. In most cases the Nepali government adopted measures to thwart the recruitment, while maintaining cordial relation with the British. In all instances the Nepali court under Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana viewed the recruitment as a strategy adopted by the British to curtail the growing strength of the Gorkhas. Thus, to counter such strategies the Nepali court put a ban on the movement of the families outside Nepal, and the soldiers were prevented from returning home. The court also issued proclamations to punish the agents sent by the British for recruitment.³³ Given these obstacles clandestine recruitment was carried out by the British during this period.³⁴ All this while, the Nepali government under Jan Bahadur followed an obstructionist policy, which was adopted by the subsequent rulers of Nepal like Ranodip Singh. However, under heavy pressure from the British government, Ranodip Singh agreed to circulate notice to the recruits throughout the country, and to collect the recruits himself. During the reign of Bir Shamsheer a proposal to raise five Gorkha battalions was raised and was accented to by the Nepali court.

The recruitment of the Gorkha grew exponentially in 1862; there were five battalions of the Gorkhas which grew steadily to 13 in 1885, to 15 in 1892 and 20 in 1914.³⁵ The first eight *Gurkha Rifles Regiments* recruited mainly from the Magars and Gurung groups, the 9th *Gurkha* exclusively from the Khas and Thakurs, and the 10th *Gurkha* regiment from the Rais and Limbus.³⁶ This policy elevated the status of the Gorkha as elite soldiers within the British India Army. Soon regimental histories were written and regimental homes started in different region. ³⁷ The 1st regiment of Gorkha

Rifles was stationed at Dharmsala, the 2nd at Dehru Dun, the 3rd at Almora, and the 4th at Bakloh. The 5th and 6th were located at Abbottabad, the 1/8 at Shillong, the 2/8 at Lansdowne, the 9th and 2nd at Dehradun, and 10th at Maymyo.³⁸ The overall image of the Gorkha was shy and docile who became ferocious warrior under the British command, as Northey and Morris writes, 'though shy and somewhat reserved at first, he attaches himself closely to those under whom he takes service.'³⁹ As the recruiters wanted to enlist the most martial races, strong emphases was laid on determining recruit's detail, and avoid scrupulous claims of martiality.

Ethnological Accounts and Enumeration of Martial Gorkhas:

As the history of Nepal was crisscrossed by overlapping ethnic ties, where cultural boundaries often overlapped the early accounts on Gorkhas present a very confusing picture of ethnic boundaries. Socio-culturally, historically and regionally the people of Nepal belonged to different ethnic, linguistic and racial groups like a) *Parbatiya* comprised of the Nepali/Khas Kura speaking population, b) The *Newars*- the Newari speaking groups who had their own elaborate system of caste hierarchy, c) The *Bhote* or the Tibeto-Burman language speaking groups and d) The *Kirat* groups of eastern Nepal classified as Rais and Limbus.⁴⁰ Along with these there were also host of ethnic groups like the Magars, Gurungs, Sunwars, Bhujels etc., who had their own cultural autonomy prior to the Gorkha conquest. Given the prevalence of martial race discourse many of these groups were categorized as Gorkha. In the early days recruitment to the Gorkha regiments were confined predominantly to Magar and Gurung tribes, followed by Khas and Thakuri. Formed in such a manner, the category of Gorkha was both inclusive as well as exclusive. It was inclusive as the category of

Gorkha was open to include groups of the eastern Nepal like Rais and Limboos who had resisted the Gorkha conquest for years. However, it was exclusive in the sense that many other groups like Lepchas, Tharus, Agri, Kumhal, Manjhi who predominated in Nepal and the adjoining areas were excluded.⁴¹

In the martial discourse the question was not whether, one is a Gorkha or not, but rather one was *true* Gorkha or not. This was epitomized in questions such as ‘what is a Gorkha’, rather than ‘who are the Gorkhas.’⁴² Gorkhas was not an ethnic label, but an empty signifier, that got signified through the discursive articulation embedded in the martial discourse of bravery and machismo. So, the concern was not just to identify the Gorkhas, but to find what made someone a true Gorkha. This quality of martiality was itself an invention concocted by the British, thus the question ‘what is a Gorkha’ was a reinforcement of the idea of martiality. Within these categories specific attributes were associated to each ethnic group which in turn created stereotypical representations.

The first and the most systematic account on the martial races of Nepal is provided by Hodgson, who includes four major groups mainly the Khas, Magar and Gurungs as authentic Gorkhas. Hodgson classifies the *Khas* as speakers of ‘corrupt dialect’ and regards them as more or less pure Rajputs of other Kshatriyas origin.⁴³ Despite acknowledging the martial status of the Khas; Hodgson does not regard them as best suited for recruitment owing to their caste prejudice, and their devotion to the house of the Gorkhas. He classifies the Khas group into twelve major clans each containing host of sub-clans. The problem of in-determinability of group boundaries in multiethnic and caste society is evident in the classification. In such classifications the Ekthariyas are singled out from the Khas sub-division and a separate list of twenty five

sub-divisions within it is provided. Similar is the case of Thakuris, who are singled out like the Ekthariyas with eleven named sub-divisions within it.

Discussing the other two martial groups namely Magars and Gurungs Hodgson argues that they are Hindus, only 'because it is the fashion.'⁴⁴ He divides the Magar group into three major sub-divisions or clans namely the Ranas, Thapa, Alaya which are further sub-divided into many sub-clans. Interestingly, Hodgson does not discuss sub-divisions within Gurung, and only provides a list of forty two clans within the group, without naming any sub-clan within it. So what passes as sub-division or clans in the case of Gurung are indeed named sub-clans of the major subdivisions. Anomaly of this nature is evident in the data collected by Hodgson; however, more important and illustrious in his classification is the identification of the martial groups from the wide array of ethnic groups in Nepal. These detail provided by Hodgson led to the identification of martial races of Nepal and structured martial race thinking in subsequent years.

The most detailed and comprehensive account on the groups categorized as Gorkhas is presented by the army handbooks compiled by British army officers (self-styled as ethnologists) such as Eden Vansittart and C. J. Morris. These handbooks classifies the tribes best suited for recruitment, and also provide a readymade guide for the recruiters to determine the best clans from within the tribes, so as to avoid scrupulous claims of martiality.⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the spelling of the name Gorkha itself underwent changes in these handbooks so the first volume by Vansittart (1890) spells the name as *Goorkhas*, which is spelt as *Gurkha* in 1906 and subsequently retained in all publications. Defining Gorkhas Vansittart writes, 'the term Gurkha is not

limited to any particular class or clan; it is applied to all those whose ancestors inhabited the country of Gurkha, and who from it subsequently extended their conquest far and wide over the eastern and western hills.’⁴⁶ The handbooks make ample use of the details provided by ethnological studies such as that of Hodgson in determining the best recruits. In some cases officers like Vansittart also compiled cultural details of the groups under question through the recruits themselves. These handbooks also provide anthropometric measurement, especially that of chest and the height of the groups classed as Gorkhas. The most common facet discernible in the accounts presented on the Gorkhas is the grouping of ethnic groups into some loosely defined and structured units. Thus, the first unit is composed of Hinduized Khas language speaking groups such as Thakur and Brahmins, the second groups is composed of Magar, Gurung, Sunwar, and the third is composed of Kahmbus, Limbus and Yakkhas collectively labeled as *Kirati* groups.

Vansittart while discussing the Thakurs regards the *Sahi* clan among them as the best for recruitment followed by *Malla*, *Sing*, *Sen*, *Khan* and *Sumal*. Vansittart names (twenty three clans) of Thakurs, from which two clans *Sahi* and *Mal* are further sub-divided into sub-clans.⁴⁷ This can be contrasted with the details of Morris who provides a total of (twenty one clans) within the Thakurs with *Sen*, *Sig*, *Khan*, *Malla* and *Sahi* clans being further sub-divided into sub-clans.⁴⁸ The confusion stem from the fact that in many regards the accounts prepared by them underwent systematic revisions and with more clan names being identified, these officers seem unsure whether to name a unit within the group as an independent clan or a sub-clan.

For Vansittart the Thakurs share great cultural affinity with the Khas groups which he links to the Rajput lineage. Especially the *Ekthariariah* clan within the Khas is presented as pure descendants of Rajputs and thus superior to all other clans of Khas. Vansittart provides a total of nineteen clans of the Khas group which are further sub-divided into many sub-clans, with Baniya clan with the least of (one) sub-clan and Khattris with most the number of (one hundred and thirty one) sub-clans.⁴⁹ In this form of categorization *Matwala Khas* is depicted as a separate category with eighteen major clans, with three clans namely (*Panre, Rawal and Saon*), which are further sub-divided into many sub-clans.⁵⁰

The colonial self-styled ethnologists took great care to secure the most authentic recruits from the tribes classified as martial, so they specified the real contours of the groups under question. Vansittart classifies Gurungs into two great divisions the *Charjat* and *Solahjat*. He describes the *Charjat* to be of superior standing than the *Solahjat*. Lot of discrepancy is evident in the accounts presented by both Vansittart and Morris, especially relating to the sub-clans structure of Gurungs. Vansittart states that the *Charjat* among the Gurungs are composed of four major clans of i) *Ghale* (with twelve sub-clans), ii) *Ghatani* (with twenty eight sub-clans), iii) *Lama* (with the twenty four sub-clans) and iv) *Lamchane* (with the most number of thirty six sub-clans).⁵¹ The corresponding figure of sub-clans in the account presented by Morris is larger, *Ghale* (with nineteen sub-clans), *Ghotani* (with fifty nine sub-clans), *Lama* (with forty sub-clans), and *Lamchane* (with eighty three sub-clans).⁵² Similar is the case of the *Solahjat Gurungs*, who in both the records are not divided into sub-divisions but categorized into amorphous clans. Vansittart classifies (ninety three) clans within them⁵³, whereas

Morris classifies them into (one hundred and thirty nine) clans.⁵⁴ In both the records the *Ghale* clans is considered the most superior, being of the ruling clan and also difficult to procure. Vansittart speaking about the Magars cautions that, though groups such as *Bohra, Roka, Chohan, Jhankri, Khas Matwala* of Western Nepal claim to be Magars they are indeed not true Magars. For Vansittart the real Magars are divided into six major clans namely, i) *Ale* (with fifty sub-clans), ii) *Burathoki* (with twenty one sub-clans), iii) *Gharti* (with fifty five sub-clans), iv) *Pun* (with forty one sub-clans), v) *Rana* (with seventy sub-clans), vi) *Thapa* (with one ninety nine sub-clans).⁵⁵ Amidst these six clans, the recruits from the *Ale* clan are considered to be the best. The effort on the part of these accounts to structure the contour of groups by eliminating any form of overlapping identities is most evident in the case of *Thapa*; a clan name shared both Magar and Khas

Much more confusion is evident in the treatment of the Kirati groups such as Limbus, Khambus and Yakkhas. Confusion regarding the Kirati group mainly sprung from the titles they were conferred by the Gorkhas. After conquering the Kirati lands of eastern Nepal the Gorkha rulers had conferred titles to these groups, like *Rais* to Khambus, *Subba* to Limbus, and *Diwan* to the Yakkhas. Further, these three tribes followed a custom of adoption and conversion in which an orphaned or an adult could be adopted or converted into other tribe following certain ceremonies. Vansittart divides the Limbus into ten districts (ancestral home or *Kipat*) and accordingly divides the clans *Swang* in terms of their claim to those ancestral homes. Therefore, within the ten ancestral home or Kipats (or *Laji* in Limbu language) he lists a total of (forty four) *Swangs* or clans, which are further sub-divided into four hundred and twenty seven

sub-clans. Along with it he also provides a list of (seventy eight) sub-clans which could not be associated with any of the (forty four) *Swangs* or clans.⁵⁶ The corresponding figure provided by Morris is (fifty six) named clans with (five hundred and fifteen) sub-clans, and (thirty five) sub-clans not associated with any clan.⁵⁷

Correspondingly the Khambus or Kirati Rais are treated as identical to the Limbus, so much so that Vansittart refrains from providing the details of Rai customs and traditions. This applies equally well for *Yakkhas* (Diwan) who are said to be assimilated with Rais to such an extent that the two had become indistinguishable. One of the persistent sources of trouble dealing with the so called Kirata group is evident in noting the exact contours of the group. Standard classificatory models based on language and religion could not account for the heterogeneity of the social units. Especially, the social structure defined through the ever changing clan model acted as the chief source of ambiguity. Vansittart provides an exhaustive list consisting of (forty six) named clans of the Rais which are further sub-divided into more than (six hundred and thirty two) named sub-clans. Further, he also provides a list of (one hundred and sixty) named sub-clans, which could not be classified under any of the clans.⁵⁸ The corresponding figure in Morris is much more higher i.e., (seventy eight) named clans, in which *Yakha* is placed as one of the clans, each of these clans are sub-divided into many sub-clans along with the list of (one hundred and thirty three) sub-clans which could not be placed within any of the named clans.⁵⁹

From the accounts thus presented, it is evident that the effort on the part of the British officers was to club the groups into neat, and order of ranks which could then en-masse be transferred to the category of the Gorkha. The best instance of this drive is

presented in the case of *Sunwars* and *Murmis* (Tamangs). In Vansittart's account Sunwars are presented as being closely associated with the Gurung and Magars. They are divided into two major sub-divisions the *Das Thare* and *Barahthare* clans. The *Das Thare* is further subdivided into (ten) sub-clans, and the *Barahthare* into (four) major clans with (ninety six) sub-clans within them.⁶⁰ Similar is the case with the Murmis or Tamangs, they are described as a group with close affinity to the Bhutia or the Tibetan stock. Murmis are divided into two major subdivisions; namely the *Barathamang* and *Atharajat*, the former considered superior to the latter. Though Vansittart claims that there are no clan organizations among the Murmis, yet he provides a list of (fifty three) clans of *Barathamang* and (three clans) of *Atharajat*.⁶¹ They are considered to be potential recruits even if not classified as the martial race of Nepal.

Representation of Gorkhas and the Creation of a Homogenous Martial Category:

The recruitment of the Gorkhas into the Company's and later the British India army was interwoven with series of narratives which Des Chene (1993) calls as 'Gurkha tales', which associated Gorkhas with amazing feat of bravery and courage. This is epitomized in statements of the recruits such as -"*Kafar hunu bhnada marnu ramro*" meaning, 'it is better to die than to be a coward'.⁶² The associated theme of bravery and loyalty runs throughout the narratives on the Gorkhas, Ensign John Shipp terms the Gorkha soldiers as the 'braves of the brave,' further, he writes, 'run they would not, and of death they seem to have no fear, though their comrades were falling thick around them.'⁶³ Kirkpatrick describes them as 'brave, sufficiently tractable, and capable of sustaining great hardships.'⁶⁴ The essential quality of bravery is seen as biologically and

historically ingrained among the Gorkhas. One of the most enduring images of the Gorkha that is passed on from one generation of officers writing about them to the subsequent generation is the integrity of the Gorkhas and their feat of unsurpassable courage. Volumes after volumes written on the Gorkhas speak about the extraordinary task performed by them; some of which seems closer to myths than actual historical account.⁶⁵ These narratives highlight the courage of the Gorkha; his willingness to fight and even to accept death cheerfully. In other narratives, the physical toughness of the Gorkhas is presented in a manner which exceeds reasoned judgment. They are depicted as being fond of fruits and vegetables, and as good sportsmen, and most accounts abound the legends associated with their adventures in the forests. Allied with the positive image of being brave, loyal, and cheerful, the Gorkhas are also represented as possessor of vices such as, an unhygienic form of life, predisposed to drunkenness and gambling. Along with this Gurkhas are also represented as being superstitious, with their unchallenged faith on wizards, witches, and witchcraft.⁶⁶

In the British records, one of the characteristic associated with the Gorkhas is their childlike quality, and the gross lack of intellect. Gorkhas are treated as cherished pets, who shared with the British the quality of being gentle, as well as brave. In many of the accounts Gorkhas are viewed as nearly equal to the Europeans, especially owing to the essential trait of courage and loyalty.⁶⁷ Gorkhas as a special force were made to think of themselves as belonging to different racial and cultural group from the rest of the Indians and similar with the Europeans. Looking at these features Caplan asserts that the accounts on Gorkhas cannot be classed as orientalist in the same manner as Said (1978) and others associate with such texts and genres; whose sole focus is domination.

In his analysis, the text viewed the Gorkhas as similar to the Europeans and was not exoticized as the 'other.'⁶⁸ This kind of analysis runs into problem as the power to represent still lay at the hands of the colonial masters, and the subject was denied its voice over its very constitution and predicament. The overpowering role and power of these texts can be gauged from the fact that it was able to create both the positive as well as the negative image of the Gorkha. The creation of such binaries can itself be viewed as a strategy in controlling and disciplining groups. So on one hand the Gorkhas are presented as warlike people, yet, at the same time they are also represented as docile and peace loving subjects.

Colonial authorities not only created a category of the martial race but also infused it with cultural elements which structured the identity structure of the Gorkhas. In the colonial imagination regiments were the only space where a where a feeling and sense of camaraderie developed between people who were otherwise divided by their divisive loyalties. This camaraderie in the case of the Gorkhas was developed through the imposition of the Hindu culture over the recruits from different ethnic groups. Thus, after serving overseas, recruits were made to undergo the ceremony of *Panipatiya* and *Bhor Patiya* as per the norms of Hinduism.⁶⁹ The regiments also incorporated some Hindu customs and named it as Gorkha customs to redress any conflict and grievances emanating within the regiments. Despite being aware of the ethnic differences, most accounts paint the picture of the Gorkhas as Hindu groups following strict caste norms. Caplan argues that in most writings-'differences were rendered insignificant by the premise of a common biology, which transmitted the collective martial inheritance.'⁷⁰

Gorkha as a category was thus sustained by narratives of racial uniformity and martial proclivity.

Enlisted and categorical Identities:

Structured as a martial race, the Gorkha can then be regarded as a category, a collective label for the diverse ethnic groups. Formed as a martial category Gorkha subsumed diverse ethnic groups under a collective categorical identity. However, it also provided some room for the perpetuation of exclusive ethnic identities. Firstly, the categorization of groups for the recruitment purposes was done on the basis of their own ethnic identities, thus in order to become an authentic Gorkha, firstly one had to be an authentic Magar or Gurung etc. These identities therefore can be regarded as ‘enlisted identities,’ as the ethnic groups recruited in the regiments were recruited owing to their sense of being an authentic Magar or a Gurung. Infact, many recruits enlisted themselves into the ranks claiming to be a pure Magar or a Gurung, as enlistment was contingent on their claims to authentic ethnic identity. The concept of enlisted identity therefore resonates very well with what Bilgrami calls ‘subjective identities’ i.e., ‘a person is said to have a certain identity owing to some characteristics she has and with which she identifies, then identity is being thought of in its subjective aspects.’⁷¹ It entails the process in which the subject himself/herself endorses the characteristics that is pre-given. The most important part of subjective identity is the un-revise ability of the endorsed values and its projection into the future.⁷² The recruitment process itself created a dual form of identity as enlistment was first and foremost contingent on ethnic group’s exclusivity and purity, which was verified by the recruiting officer. However, the very process of labeling them as a martial race also created a homogeneous ‘categorical

identity' of the Gorkha. This categorical identity relates to what Bilgrami calls as 'objective identity', that is the identity in question does not require behavioral aspects of the subjects to reflect their identity; rather, 'the characteristics and the identity are given by the delivery of some (social, political, economic, or biological) theory regarding these subjects.'⁷³ Gorkha as a categorical identity represents an apt case of objective identity. Though, colonial military discourse may have developed the category of Gorkha, to state that Gorkha was essentially a construct of the regimental culture would be an overstatement. There were other historical processes involved in the transformation of this collective identity into subjective identity.

In the context of Darjeeling, the name Gorkha became readily acceptable owing to the political mobilization which assured an indigenous and national identity to the inhabitants, thus distancing them from citizens of Nepal. In the past many other names such as *Gorkhali*, *Bharpali*, *Bharatiya Nepali*, *Bhargoli* and *Bharatiya Gorkhali* were devised, however, over the course of time the name Gorkha was retained to refer to the collective identity of the Nepalis in India.⁷⁴ The usage of this category by the post-colonial Indian state further added to its popularity. The current definition of Gorkha in official annals adheres to the stereotypical image construed during the colonial period.⁷⁵ Given these developments categories such as the Gorkha have assumed a social significance in the cultural life, and have a large bearing on the post-colonial imagination of the Nepali community in India.

The cultural negotiation of this collective identity was a marked phenomenon during the course of my fieldwork. On the social and cultural parlance people identified strongly with the Gorkha identity, but expressed reservations regarding its applicability

to groups such as Marwaris, Bengalis, and Biharis etc. However, in all unanimity they regard Lepchas and Bhutias as authentic Gorkhas, groups who are otherwise not listed as Gorkhas in the official lists. The construction of clear cut social and cultural boundaries was complicated by the political contingency, thus in the social parlance Gorkha is treated as a historical and political category including communities residing in the region of Darjeeling, and supporting the cause of Gorkhaland. Though Gorkha identity over the years have assumed the status as a collective political identity of Nepali speech community; yet at the social level it is not confined to the Nepali speaking groups alone. This goes contrary to the statist definition of the Gorkha as a blanket term which includes only the Nepali language speaking population.⁷⁶

In the colonial discourse, only an authentic ethnic group of Nepal could be readily enlisted into the ranks to become an authentic Gorkha. In the post-colonial setting the categorical identity of Gorkha took precedence over distinct ethnic identities. In this regard it can be argued that the category of the Gorkha itself was formed, and was crystallized as a social and collective identity within a specific socio-political condition in India. It was informed and invigorated by the social and political importance laid to it, as it was selected to represent the aspiration of the community. In this process the martial quality of the groups was reinvigorated in the imagination of a cultural community and it gets renewed every time these groups assert its place in the nation, or demands rights and recognition from the state.

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Endnotes:

¹ Trautmann, Thomas. R. and Carla M. Sinopoli, In the Beginning Was the Word. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 45, 4 (2002): 494.

² Colonial governmentality initiated large-scale documentation practices like census operation and ethnological studies which attributed certain traits to cultural groups which were considered essential in defining the identity of the groups. These forms of representations were later codified in official documents (see Cohn, Bernard. S, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Imaginary Institutions of India*, in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), *Subaltern Studies Vol: VII* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1992, 1-39); Dirks, Nicholas. B, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

³ Though the name *Nepalis* and *Gorkhas* are used interchangeably in India, however, *Gorkha* is preferred by social and political organizations of Nepalis in India, to distinguish themselves from the citizens of Nepal. The name *Gorkha* is spelt as *Gurkhas* or *Goorkhas* in the Western writings. In this text the name *Gorkha* will be used throughout. Only at places where the historical sources are quoted the word *Gurkha* or *Goorkha* will be reproduced.

⁴ For an exhaustive analysis of the literature on martial race see, Kausik Roy, *Beyond the Martial Race Theory. Calcutta Historical review*, vol. 21-2 combined (1999-2000), 139-54.

⁵ Grand narrative or master narratives is a concept developed by Jean-François Lyotard (1979) to show how abstract ideas and thoughts shape actual human events. Formed within the discourse of knowledge and power these narratives are authoritarian and totalizing in nature, which seek to explain discreet historical events with a single narrative structure. See Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Translation from the French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi). Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979.

⁶ For Indian literature on the Gorkhas see Rai, Bandana, *Gorkhas: The Warrior Race* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2009); Rathaur, Kamal Raj Singh., *The Gurkhas* (New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 1987).

⁷ Landon, P, *Nepal*, (Vol I) (London: Constable, 1928) 28.

⁸ Many accounts have been provided by scholars for the origin of the name Gorkha. Many believe it to be derived from the Sanskrit word *Gau Raksha*, thereby thereby linking it inextricably with the Hindu world, or some other treat it as deriving its name from the *Gorakhnath* sect which had become popular in the Himalayan region.

⁹ There was a slow but a steady process of Rajputanization of the Gorkha dynasty after Darvya Shah seized the principality of Gorkha. A Book compiled under the patronage of Ram Shah *Rajavamsavali* traces the origin of the dynasty to Rawal kings of Mewar of Rajasthan. This narrative was later incorporated into the *Gorkha-vamsavali*. See Pradhan, Kumar, *The Gorkha Conquest* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1991) 23.

¹⁰ Hamilton, F.B, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1819).

¹¹ In their campaigns Gorkha were supported by members of six families, namely, *Pande, Aryal, Panta, Rana, Khanal and Bohra*, who all constituted the *Thar-ghar*. Historical accounts suggest that Dravya Shah subdued the principality of *Liglig* and *Gorkha* taking advantage of tradition among Gurung Ghaes and Magars to select the man who wins the race as their chief. For details see Pradhan, Kumar, *The Gorkha Conquest* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1991) 24.

¹² Baisi and Chaubisi were respectively the twenty two and twenty four principalities on the western and central part of Nepal. There seems to disagreement on the exact account of these principalities as several of the chiefs entered into league with other principalities for mutual defense, or sometimes they were connected through descent thus creating confusion in determining the exact historical genealogies. Hamilton in his account list *Jumal, Jajurkote, Cham, Acham, Roogum, Musikotte, Roalpa, Mullyanta, Bulhang, Dylick, Suliana, Bampi, Jehari, Kalagaon, Ghoorikote*,

Gootum, Gujoor, Darimeea as Baisi principalities and accordingly he lists *Piuuthana, Malebum, Galkot, Isma, Dhurkot, Argha, Khachi, Gulmi, Palpa, Garahang, Poin, Satahung, Birkot, Nayakot, Kski, Dhor, Gajarkot, Rising, Ghiring, Tanahung, Lamjung, Gorkha, Tarki, Musikot* as Chaubisi principalities. Hamilton, F.B, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1819).

¹³ For the eyewitness account of the conquest of Kathmandu by the Gorkhas see Father Giuseppe, *Account of Nepal*, in William. J. Kirkpatrick, *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul* (Printed for William Miller by, W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland-Row. London, 1811) Appendix no. III: 380-385.

¹⁴ After shifting his capital to Kathmandu Prithvinarayan Shah also requested the Mughal emperor to grant him the title of 'Maharaja Samsar Bahadur Jang' and in 1770 it was granted. See Regmi, D.R *Modern Nepal*, Vol I. (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975) 221-24.

¹⁵ Gorkha rule was characterized by political instability and the administration was actually carried out by various members of the royal family like the Queen Mother (1778-85), King's Uncle (1785-94), royal concubine (1800-3), the Chief Queen (1803-4), an ex-King who had abdicated the throne (1804-6), and a member of Gorkha political leadership (1806-37). See Regmi, M.C, *Imperial Gorkha: An Account of Gorkhali Rule in Kumaun (1791-1815)* (Delhi: Adriot Publishes, 1999) 3.

¹⁶The Governor General gave his accent to the proposal advanced by Edward Gardner which read as, 'the Governor General is pleased to authorize you to entertain as provincial troops for service in the hills, a portion of Gorkhas or nipalese, especially such as have families resident in Kumaon and Gharwal'. Source Rathaur, Kamal Raj Singh, *The Gurkhas* (New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 1987) Appendix II. 113.

¹⁷ Farwell Byron, *The Gurkhas* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd, 1984) 32.

¹⁸ Bolt, David, *Gurkhas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) 60.

¹⁹ After the mutiny of 1857, five Gorkha battalions were reorganized on regular basis into Rifle regiments, thus Nusseree Battalion (66th Gurkha Regiment of Bengal light infantry in 1850) was made into 1st Gorkha regiment in 1861, similarly, Sirmoor battalion was made into 2nd Gurkha Regiments, the Kumaon battalion into 3rd Gurkha regiment and an extra Gorkha regiment was raised in 1857 which was made into 4th Gurkha regiment, the Hazara/Gurkha battalion raised in 1858 was made into 5th Gurkha regiment. Each of these regiments was granted its permanent locale, the 1st Gurkha rifle was stationed at Dharamsala, the 2nd at Dehradun, the 3rd at Almora, the 4th at Bakoh and the 5th at Abbottabad. Besides the five regiments a large number of Gorkhas were enlisted in the 42nd, 43th and 44th infantry regiments (Rathaur 1987: 53-54). For Progressive title changes in Gurkha Infantry while in British Service see Farwell (1984) Appendix C (pp. 296-299).

²⁰ Scientific racism developed as a part of colonial strategy to map and document the lives of the people in scientific terms. It justified the idea of racism, racial inferiority and superiority using ostensibly the language and vocabulary of science. Scientific racism led to a deterministic thinking in which every human action was causally viewed and understood as determined by racial traits.

²¹ See Alavi, Seema, *The Sepoy and the Company* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²² MacMunn, George, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Samson, Low and Marston, 1932) 195.

²³ Greenhut, Jeffrey, *Sahib and Sepoy. Military Affairs.* 48, 1 (1984): 15.

²⁴ Enloe, C.H., *Ethnic Soldiers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

²⁵ See Khanduri, Chandra. B, *A Re-discovered History of Gorkhas* (New Delhi: Gyan Sagar Publications, 1997) 225.

²⁶ Caplan, Lionel, *Martial Gurkhas* in Kaushik Roy (ed): *War and Society in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) 229.

²⁷ Omissi, David, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994) 78.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Alavi, Seema, *The Sepoy and the Company* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) 277.

³⁰ Bolt, David, *Gurkhas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) 20.

³¹ Hodgson- was an assistant resident in the court of Nepal from 1829-1831, later to become the Resident after Sir Herbert Maddick in 1833-43. Later in his life i.e., in 1845 he moved to Darjeeling and devoted his stay to study the language and culture of the hill people. He was elected by the Ethnological society as an Honorary Fellow, he wrote extensively on the languages of Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal tribes, he also invented an orthography of languages which did not have alphabets or books. For more on him see, Hunter, William, Wilson, *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson: British Resident at the Court of Nepal* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, Reprint 1996).

³² Hodgson, B H., Origins, and Classification of the Military Tribes of Nepal. *Journal of Asiatic Journal of Bengal*, 17 (1833): 217-224.

³³ Mojumdar, K, Recruitment of the Gurkhas, *United Service Institution Journal*. 102 (1972): 143-57; Mojumdar, K, *Anglo-Nepalese relations* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1973).

³⁴ Banskota, Purushotam, *The Gurkha Connection* (New Delhi: Nirala Publications, 1994) 57.

³⁵ Omissi, David, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994) 11.

³⁶ Bolt, David, *Gurkhas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) 79-80.

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⁵⁶ ibid: 127.

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⁵⁸ Vansittart, Eden, *Gurkhas*, 1991: 135-36.

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⁶²Tuker, Francis, *Gorkha* (London: Constable, 1957) 94.

⁶³ ibid: 90.

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⁶⁶ Northey, W.B and C.J. Morris, *The Gurkhas* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1928) 104.

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⁶⁸ Caplan, Lionel, Bravest of the Brave, *Modern Asian Studies*. 25, 3 (1991): 594.

⁶⁹ Both the ceremonies of *Panipatiya* and *Bhor Ptiya* was designated for the abluion of sins, the former for the overseas travel and the latter for breaking the caste rules like commensality.

⁷⁰ Caplan, Lionel, *Warrior Gentleman: Gurkhas in the Western Imagination* (London: Berghahn Books, 1995) 120.

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⁷² *ibid*: 251.

⁷³ *ibid*: 256.

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⁷⁶ The document under question was collected during the course of fieldwork dated January 12, 2014, from the Sub-Divisional Magistrates' office in Kalimpong. It was a letter from the Anthropological survey of India. Ministry of Cultural Department. Government of India. Titled : *Actual determination of the Gorkha and Sikkimese Communities*. No. 13-229/2000/estt. Dated September 10, 2004, specifying nineteen ethnic groups under the category of the Gorkha. The report states that the 'Gorkhas belonged to both the Hindu and Bhuddhist fold and also the admixture of both the religions'

Clothing and Fashion: Presenting the Indian Female Body in Early 20th Century

by

Anupama Prasad

Abstract

Exploring the clothing practices of Indian women in the first half of the twentieth century, this article analyses the sartorial transformation and gradual introduction of fashion in the context of Indian dressing largely through the fashion columns which appeared in the newspapers and magazines. The article maps how the discourse on clothing in India was framed within the language of nationalism but gradually more individualized notions such as taste, individuality, personality came to be associated with clothing. It shows that Indian women experimented with their clothing as much as men by incorporating styles from the west as well as reforming Indian styles to dress themselves. However, the modernity embedded within the new dressing style and life style of the elite and middle class Indian women was affected by themes such as tradition and modesty.

Keywords

Clothing, Fashion, Sartorial Reform, Dressing

Introduction

Most studies on the history of fashion suggest that it hardly existed in earlier times, and this has led to a debate about its origin and development. Gilles Lipovetsky points out that fashion (as we understand it today) emerged in the west in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹ On the other hand, Elizabeth Wilson traces the emergence of fashion to the fourteenth century which marked the proliferation of more elaborate styles of men and women's clothing.² In order to trace a longer history of fashion and dress in the colonial India, I focus on crucial tipping points in women's clothing from about the nineteenth century. This article makes an attempt to trace the gradual emergence of discourse on fashion in India, largely through analysis of fashion columns addressed to the white, indigenous elite and educated women as they appeared in early 20th century Indian newspapers and magazines.

Fashion can be defined as a system of dressing and presenting oneself, which is determined by a variety of factors such as the fluctuations of the market, the symbolic importance of status, the proliferation of designs, the availability of new materials and technologies, and perhaps most importantly, mass production. Valerie Steele defined it, "most commonly, fashion can be defined as the prevailing style of dress or behavior at any given time, with the strong implication that fashion is characterized by change".³ Are these trajectories traced by fashion in the west similar to those in Indian setting? If not, what were the crucial points of departure?

Without doubt, the most important political influence from the late nineteenth century was the nationalist movement and its attempt to build a new unity of Indian people. Cloth and clothing were central symbols in the Indian struggle to define a national identity and women were important bearers of this identity. In this discourse the emphasis was on *khadi*, austerity, renunciation of expensive and foreign cloth and resistance to western styles.⁴ The search was on in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for an ideal Indian costume. The long experience of colonialism, and the deliberately fostered idea that everything

western was superior was increasingly being challenged by Indian cultural nationalists. Due to the nationalist influence, cloth came to attain symbolic status that it had never had in the past, through its link with movements for political freedom, and the end to British rule in India. Its symbolic presence in the political movements was undeniable⁵ and hand spun/hand - woven cloth created its own caste, gender and class hierarchies.⁶

However, there were also other important changes in Indian society that changed the way in which clothing was seen in this period. With the expansion of the supply of new designs, fabrics and styles, the consumption of clothing in India shared some features of the expanded consumption patterns in the west, though with significant differences, intersecting with concerns about proclaiming nationality, and defending tradition as well.⁷

By the beginning of the twentieth century in India, the Indian newspapers and magazines began to carry regular columns on dress and clothing. For example; *Indian Ladies Magazine* carried columns called “Fashion Suggestions” over the period of forty years,⁸ *Times of India* carried regular columns such as “Home Sewing”⁹ etc. These columns introduced notions of western fashion into the discussion of dress in the Indian setting. French and London fashion was also discussed in great detail. A more regular focus on Indian notions of dress began in the 1920s in some newspapers. One can say that the English newspapers began to address notions of fashion and taste to a more general audience from the beginning of twentieth century. For example, in the case of *Indian Ladies Magazine* (henceforth *ILM*), Emma Tarlo suggests that, “through constant comparisons and suggestions, *ILM* processed the latest ideas from Europe into a new Indian form, providing continual reassurance that the Indian woman could be fashionable without sacrificing her traditional means.”¹⁰ In these columns, “fashion” was always derived from the west, and uncritically disseminated, the vernacular journals in particular made “fashion” coterminous with the “west” as a pernicious influence on national culture, and was severely criticised. At the same time, there was a recognised need for modernising Indian dress styles particularly

for women. The interest of Hindi journals was in the reform of dress styles of women without forsaking traditional notions of modesty in the new forms of clothing. The criticism of western clothing and 'fashion' was harsh in vernacular journals as compared to the English newspapers. One can then say, that in the 1920s, there began a quest for an Indian dress alongside and opposed to the emphasis on European fashion in the English and in some vernacular journals.

This article attempts to trace transformations of sartorial styles of Indian women in the colonial period, both within the private domain of the house and as women began entering public spaces.¹¹ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, women in India sculpted new identities through such different registers as education, social reform movements, caste movements and nationalism.¹² Alongside this, new norms of conjugality, work opportunities, conversion movements and transformed sexualities offered women opportunities for exploring a sense of self and independence. For example, Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar locate the sense of self that was developed by turning to personal experiences of prominent women of twentieth century India.¹³ Their study describes how women like Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Sailabala Das, Anasuya Sarabhai, Shakuntala Pranjpye explored new notions of independence arising from new social and political opportunities, such as access to education, the emergence of new ideals of married life and work opportunities. These changes allowed the entry of some women into the public arena. However, the changes also posed a threat to the existing social order and the presence of women outside the realm of the home met with criticism and disapproval.

An analysis of different reactions towards women's entry into the public sphere reveals that there were sharp critiques of the educated women in particular, which led to the surveillance and scrutiny of how women presented themselves in public.¹⁴ Those who were perceived as fashionable and imitated western culture were singled out for attention and critique.¹⁵ They were often caricatured as irresponsible, destructive of the home and morally suspect. There was an association of the westernized woman with female liberty, unbridled sexuality, and

forms of independence that were unsuitable to family life. However, these caricatures were countered by advocates of western education and by women themselves.

What were the changes that came about in the clothing of educated women? In particular, I would like to see considerations that lay behind the choice of clothing. Several arguments were made for directing societal change and redefining roles of women within the rubric of broader westernization. The westernisation of Indian clothing was severely discouraged by some sections, such as the nationalists and the reformers. Although the changes in clothing were not same for women from all classes, regions and castes, they attracted different kinds of attention and critique. This article focuses largely on elite and middle class educated women. What other kinds of influences and trends have therefore been eclipsed? For instance, what scope was there for the emergence of fashion which implies ideas such as individuality, choice and taste in opposition to collective, ascribed identities and roles? Where clothes and styles of dress, and bearing might have signified caste, community or gendered status and identity, the new styles of clothing freed dress from such strict connotations, and anchored it in new meanings and choices of individual making. These are among the questions that this article will attempt to answer.

Clothing and Mimicry

In the Indian subcontinent, debates around clothing were marked by a rigid resistance to western clothing among those who were either traditionalists or nationalists. However, we need to point that there was a difference between foreign clothing and western fashion.¹⁶ Discarding foreign clothing would mean boycotting cloth manufactured by the British. Western fashion related to fashion trends in Western countries like Britain, France and America which could influence styles of dressing elsewhere. The terms western cultural influence and western fashion are often used interchangeably by the authors of journals and newspapers when they describe dress of the Europeans in their regular columns.

Often articles in magazines and the newspapers blurred the distinction between western cultural influence and western fashion and often used them interchangeably. At the same time, criticism was directed against the adoption of European clothes and against westernization of Indian clothing. According to Tarlo, “the westernisation of Indian garments was a gradual and subtle process, far less controversial than the actual adoption of European garments themselves”.¹⁷

Being dressed in European clothes was not only a matter of self - representation but it was also the means by which one was judged by others. There were undoubtedly privileges in dressing like the proverbial English gentleman or English lady. However, it was resisted on many grounds. The major driving force to reject western fashion was the need to preserve national identity and tradition, and women were perceived to be the bearers of that tradition. It would be necessary to ask was the criticism against men imitating western clothes as virulent as the criticism towards women.

From the nineteenth century, a great deal of cultural criticism has been expended on the imitators. The initial designations for the figure of excess mimicry were *nakal pasands* and imitators. Afsaneh Najmabadi shows that in early 20th century Iran, emulation of Europeans was seen with fear of effeminacy, and it were the men who were criticised.¹⁸ Similar caricatures of men as the *firangi' ma'ab* (European in thought and appearance) were part of the modernist critique. However, in colonial India, both men and women were criticised but the prime figure of modernity's excess was the female. In the early 20th century it was the figure of westernised, educated women who was severely mocked. Most often they were described as women who had observed only European manners, fashion and half-baked education (*Ardhasikshita*). Critical satire and cartoons in journals and popular art form such as Battala prints exaggerated the excesses of men and women through a series of commodities like the European apparel, shoes, walking sticks and umbrella.¹⁹ The critique of women presented them to be neglecting home and family. They were ridiculed for the new habits like reading, listening to songs, travelling in open coaches etc. However, the critique of superficiality and

empty mimicry was very harsh especially for women and occupied space in the conservatives as well as the modernist discourse.²⁰

A section of writers used clothing as means to promote nationalist concerns. One of the reasons cited for denouncing western clothing was the specific climatic condition of India. An essay in *Chand* pointed out that western clothing clearly did not suit Indian climatic condition and therefore Indians should not adopt clothing style that would affect health adversely. 'vastron ka swasthya par prabhav' (Effects of Clothes on Health) pointed out that people in the west kept many clothes for different occasions.²¹ Similarly, Indians also tried to follow them and acquire many clothes. While people living in cold climates needed more clothes, Indians did not since the country was warm, and clothes made from materials like fur or leather was unnecessary. He called Indians lovers of imitation, 'nakal pasand' and criticized them for adopting foreign made items. Later, in the article the author also attacked Indian men and their taste for waist coats, tailored suits etc. He suggested that Indians needed a *dhoti* only (men's waist cloth, worn by draping and tucking), a *bandi* and one *angharkha* (long sleeved long coat worn by men). While it is unlikely that many Indians wore such clothing, the exaggerated criticism was aimed at the elites who had taken to wearing western clothes.

'Bharat ko hi dhekiye yah ek garam desh hai. Yahan par fur, un chamde aadi

dvara bane huye kapdo ki tanik bhi avashyakta nahin hsi fir bhi 'nakal pasand' log kabhi nahi manege. Fashion ki cheese man kar ve videsh se hi

inko mangvakar istemal mein layenge. Hum bharat vasiyo ko keval dhoti,

*bandi, kurta tatha angrakhe ki aavashyakta hai...'*²²

Look at India, as it is a country with hot climate there is no need of clothes made of fur, wool, leather etc but still copy cat people will not mend their ways. Considering these items as fashionable, they will order these from the west and use them. We Indians need only *dhoti*, waistcoat and *kurta*.²³

Similar concerns were also raised by another journal *Chaturvedi* which was noted for its nationalistic and conservative content.²⁴ Once more, western fashion and imitation were criticised:

*'Purushon ne bhi ab sahib banne ki khub nakal ki hai. Sir se pair tak sab bhes European ka ho gaya hai. Kahan toh yeh garam desh aur kahan sheet pradhan desh ki posish. Coat platoon tak toh ganimat thi, par hat ne sara gud gobar kar diya hai, kyunki khal ka rang toh badal lena in bhale admিয়on ke hanth mein hain nahin, jo pakki nakal kar sake, tab log inko desi isai samajh sakte hain...'*²⁵

(Men too are trying to imitate the 'sahibs'. From head to toe, they all are dressed up as Europeans. On one hand, it is a country with hot climate whereas the dress of the cold country. It was fine as long as they were wearing coat and pants but the introduction of the hat has spoiled everything. Since it is not possible for these 'wise men' to change the colour of their skin, and imitate totally so others can identify them as Indian Christians.)

The satirical tone of the statement made the ridicule stronger. The 'hat' became the symbol of mimicry of the European. The criticism of those who adopted western style clothes was also a veiled critique of Indian Christians, whose wholesale shift to suits and hats had been criticised in the popular magazines such as *Chaturvedi*.

We need to take into consideration that not many men wore western dress in their daily life. Some men retained Indian clothing at home and wore western dress at work place.²⁶ Emma Tarlo has called this choice of mixing English and Indian

styles of dress as a 'moral aesthetic approach' adopted by the Indian men.²⁷ This kind of solution was not met by criticism compared to the overall renunciation of traditional clothing by some Indians. Kamta Prasad Guru, one of the writers of the journal *Madhuri* cited government services as reason why a few Indian men wore western clothing. He did not deny the overwhelming influence of western dress in the world but he said that it would be difficult for Indians to leave it immediately. So, he suggested that Indians could at least wear a protective sign of caste: also, since the tie was a religious sign (chinh) of Christians, Indians Hindu should abandon it

' jin Hindustani logo ne is videashi pahnavi ko grahan kar liya hai, unse use chudwana sadhya nahi hai, yadapi itna avashya ho sakta hai ki ve is poshak ke sath apni jatiyata ka koi chinha surakshit rakh sakte hai, nektai angrejo ka niji dharmik chinh hai jise issa masih ke cruse ka bohdh hota hai, ataev, Hindustani hinduon ko use chod de chahiye. Keval use chod dene se unke vetan mein sambhavat koi kami na hogi, aur na ve unche pado se vanchit rakhhe jayenge, sath hi ve samay padne par angrejo aur isayon se jinme nektai ka visesh prachar hai alag samjhe ja sakenge...'

(For Indians who have already adopted this foreign clothing, it is not easy to make them relinquish such clothes. Nonetheless, with this clothing, they still can retain a mark of their caste. Tie symbolises a personal totem for the English i.e. cross and for this particular reason Hindu Indians must abandon it. Just leaving the tie from their attire will not do any harm to their salary and will not deprive them from high posts. At the same time, when the requirement comes they would be able to mark themselves as different from the English and Indian Christians wearing tie.)

According to the writer, this would retain modes of distinction between religions.²⁸ Though Prasad was critical in his writing, he advocated steps which could mark the distinction between European and Indian identity as well as difference in religious identity. He argued for Indian clothing and Indian culture. The focus of his article

was to suggest a way of retaining a critical distance not just from the west, but from Christianity itself, and thereby remain distinct from other groups in India, such as the British or Indian Christians.

In the process of locating and defining dress for Indian men and women, the reformers published articles on the difference between east and west, and Indian fashion and western fashion. In some cases men as well as women who adopted elements of western fashion in their dress were criticised. However, in the case of women the criticism was more scathing. Men were often exempted from sharp mockery due to the purported necessity of wearing western dress at the work place. Women were, however, caricatured as following the whims of western fashion.²⁹

Another section of writers opposed all changes and transformations that threatened to democratize gender relations. Educated women were more strongly criticized than others.³⁰ Education was held responsible for exposing women to fashion and to the corrupting influence of western culture. *Chand* did not support education for women if an addiction to fashion and western culture was the outcome. This was reflected in the text and also some of the images in *Chand*. In these representations of educated western women, the high heeled sandals became the emblematic sign of what was wrong with fashion, a metaphor of the corrupting influence of western fashion. This issue can be linked to the larger debate on reasons that were given as to why Indian women should not be educated. They were caricatured as immoral, uncaring and spendthrift. In a cartoon published in *Chand*, the caption said:

*'Ardh Sikshita Madam', devi ji rat ko Mr. Champat Rai ke saath theatre dekhne gayi thi, is samay shrimati ji couch par shayan kar rahi hain aur bechare pati devta bibi sahibha ki agyaanusar "gulabi Jutiyan" par paolish kar rahen hain aur man hi man kah rahe hain jo meri is halat ko dekh kar hanse parmatma kare who bhi is halat mein fasein...'*³¹

(Half educated madam went to theatre with Mr.Champat Rai last night and is taking rest on the couch. The poor husband is polishing his wife's pink sandals as per her orders and is cursing his destiny).

Caricatures of educated women as irresponsible and neglectful of home and family were prevalent in nineteenth century Bengal. Ania Loomba points out that the image of the woman who overstepped her bounds or misused her education was taken from memsahibs or Englishwoman who neglected her home and husband.³²

A similar opinion was reflected in one editorial in *Chand* which commented that, women who were born in the cradle of fashion, western civilisation and luxury, were obstructions in the progress of women's *samaj* (community).³³ According to the writer, these were responsible for blocking the campaign for woman's education. It further pointed that girls who came out of schools learned only two things, fashion and English culture. Indian dressing was being moulded according to western concepts, and according to the journal, fashion was akin to adultery (*vyabhichar*). The pernicious western influence made parents hesitate before sending their daughters to schools. Even the *Madras Mail*, an English daily newspaper from Madras, and a serious advocate of fashion commented: "Indian women on the whole are more conservative than their western sisters but it is the more enlightened and educated women who impetuously imitate and ape foreign custom..."³⁴

We see how educated women became the objects of mockery and suspicion. The new habits adopted by the educated, such as watching movies, shopping, and reading, travelling for work or pleasure, came in for criticism. It was felt by some sections that these activities made women neglect their family and household. Freedom in every sphere of life was seen as good as long as it did not adhere to western assumptions. All Indian educated women became objects of criticism. C.P. Kalyani Amma reacted to such criticism and said that: "Mr. Menon is of the opinion that all our ills stem from English education. If all the books were burnt, if all the *ravukkas* (blouses) and jackets were dumped in the canal, if the older

ornaments found favour with us again and *Kalyani Kalavani* served once more as our major past time, Mr. Menon's anger towards us may subside a bit..."³⁵

Women writings in the early twentieth century showed emergence of sense of self and individuality. Voices emerged to argue for women's education and independence. However, it can be said that the limited women's activism that operated in this period raised questions of education, health and independence but at the same time did not challenge the patriarchal set up. Kalyani Amma responded against Mr. Menon, a writer who accused women of imitating the western woman, spending too much and not respecting the husband.³⁶ In the context of adoption of clothes, she says that they have been adopted in accordance with the changing times.³⁷

The critique of the educated women needs to be located in the general fear of the decline of a moral order. The public space was considered to be unsafe for women's chastity. In this discourse, while the stress was on protection of women, one can say that it raised questions about woman's independence and mobility and thus, attempted to forbid women from tasting outside freedoms. Another argument made in this context was that Indian women adorned themselves for public spaces such as fairs and railways, and dressing had become a way of showing off wealth. Such worries were reflected in regular columns on fashion such as the suggestions of Sister Susie in *ILM*.³⁸

When however, we, Indian women, begin to study the fashions of the western world and try to imitate them in detail, then I think it will be time for us to hang our heads in shame. Why should we imitate what is western? When Western fashions do not sometimes suit Western people, how can they suit us? May I be allowed to enumerate some of the fashions that we do not want? These are only suggestions...³⁹

Sister Susie pointed to a different reason for not wearing western clothes. She focused on the idea of suitability and said that western clothes sometimes did not even suit western people. As a solution, she criticised both short and sweeping skirts, as she found them to be unhygienic and uncomfortable.⁴⁰ The second suggestion was that there was no need for the saris to be too tightly twisted or folded around the body. According to her, this way of wearing sari was 'Un-Indian and exotic'. Instead, she preferred an elegant and simple way of draping the sari, to produce a beautiful effect.

Sister Susie's suggestions can also be understood as a fear of westernised modernity. They reflected a certain kind of standard patriarchal and nationalist anxiety which was against the use of cosmetics and western fashion. This kind of emphasis on retaining modesty in clothing was linked to the dress reform of the early twentieth century. The women's movement in India emerged in the 1920's. It was responsible for consolidating changes that had been initiated by social reforms, and challenging the range and variety of roles women could play in the society.⁴¹ All India Women's Conference (AIWC) played a crucial role in development of women's movement since the time it was founded in 1927.⁴² The members of AIWC focussed on issues like women's education, child marriage, age of consent, purdah and right to vote. Their efforts facilitated women's development to some extent. The demands of AIWC also gained support from popular nationalists like Gandhi and Nehru. These movements ushered in new consciousness around looking at women's issues. By the mid - 1920s imparting education to women had become an important concern. As we have seen, this was also the time when political women and ordinary women began participating in the national movement. All these changes lead to the redefinition of the roles of women. This change was reflected in women's writings and journals.

In the 1930s, there were two kinds of notions that prevailed about modern Indian women. One of the views that emerged in *ILM* was that she had forgotten her duties in the process of fighting for her rights. Another view which emerged was that those modern women who were educated and still fulfilled their duties should be given credit.⁴³ These views were markedly different from the writings of the

1920s when educated women were blamed for being blind followers of fashion. This change can be traced over a period of time in the essays written by women journalists. Welcoming the changed scenario, Manjari Krishanan commented:

The Indian woman is no more the shy housewife that she used to be, nor she has become a thoroughly westernised one blindly and indiscriminately imitating all that comes out of the west by way of fashion or recreation. The most outstanding feature of the modern development of women's movement in India is that with gradual infiltration and absorption of the foreign education into their lives, they have begun to think and work towards the betterment of their position and the breaking up of a system that has kept them bound in unjustifiable limitations.⁴⁴

The editor of the magazine also appreciated the modern woman and her qualities.⁴⁵ According to her, modern woman was not shy and her dressing could not be blamed for being immodest as her dressing sense was sensible. Modern woman was credited with qualities that would make life more tender and refined. K. Sathianandhan praised modern woman for having a beautiful mind, clear expression, sympathetic nature, gentle wit and described her as having 'a lily in her soul, a rose in her heart and the song of the thrush'.⁴⁶

This kind of argument countered the approach which saw educated women as a threat to societal order. The appreciation of the modern woman was based on a belief in her commitment towards her work, balanced behaviour, sensible dressing and several other qualities. The women's movement was responsible for bringing this change, and as the author explained, facilitated the breakup of old systems and unjust traditions. A woman was seen as possessed of a rational intellect which enabled her to make the right choices. The woman was thus praised for qualities which she acquired due to education. She could combine efficient home making and a career at the same time. Suruchi Thapar argues that a modern woman was expected to bridge the existing gulf between the educated man and his uneducated counterpart, without challenging the gender specific roles.⁴⁷

Western civilisation and fashion were therefore, not always criticised. By the mid twentieth century, newspapers and journals increasingly gave suggestions about improving one's clothing style by incorporating elements of western fashion. How then were elements of fashion combined with apparently contradictory ideals like tradition, nationality and modesty?

Women and the Contradictory Influences of Fashion

Fashion by definition emphasizes individuality, choice, and taste as opposed to clothes satisfying the dictates of community, status or tradition. If we look at the discourse on fashion in the nineteenth century we see a familiar negotiation, an effort to answer a set of question. How to be modern without being western? How could one change tastes and styles without renouncing Indian, without rupturing the relationship to tradition? What did being Indian mean? Did it mean that western fashion had to be abjured? We have different people giving different answers to such questions. Furthermore, what scope existed for the emergence of fashion in opposition to collective identities like nation and region? How were modesty and nationality produced through sartorial choices?

Clothing could thus not be entirely delinked from its former role of signifying community status, hierarchy etc., but had to incorporate the new demands exerted by the need for mobility, convenience, and new notions of modesty in the public sphere as well. Ania Loomba has suggested that the body of the gentlewoman was implicated in the construction of an ideal woman.⁴⁸ In this the notions of refinement and modesty are culled from both western and Indian discourses. She notes Indian woman was moulded in explicit opposition to the spectre of western virago and the ideal woman was imagined in Indian clothing. According to her, such clothing became a site for various debates about modernisation, tradition and class identities. Western woman was seen as the erotic woman, they were seen to embody sensuousness in the way they walked, talked, dressed, and interacted with males. Thapar points out that the Bengali and Hindi tracts presented the image of *kulastree* (calm, covers up body, dresses simply) and distinguished from the *baishya* (seeks male company, parts of body, dresses simply) which was often used

for the European women.⁴⁹ It was argued (journal *Maharathi*, 1927) that Indian woman can look modern and attractive without projecting themselves as sex objects as Western women do. This suggests that the notion of modesty in the Indian context was seen as a presentation of self as de-eroticised body. Modesty was implicated in the notions of *lajja*, (Shame) modest behaviour, concealing skin and shyness.

To begin with, it was pointed out in *Madras Mail* that Indian women had some inbuilt advantages over her western counterparts:

Indian women are now seen in public: may they be an example to all our Indian women, so that our land may soon be able to boast of her charmingly dressed daughters. A simple artistic effect is all that is needed, for we need not, like our western sisters, trouble about the cut of our dress or about changing fashion.⁵⁰

The garment that was draped rather than cut, namely the sari, permitted the Indian woman to be timeless and beyond fashion, rather than a slave to it. Women's entry into the public sphere was made possible and celebrated because Indian fashion was constant, and less of a preoccupation.

Not many women wore western clothing, so these comments were aimed at elite and middle class educated women who were influenced by western fashion. The newspapers and journals in which fashion discussions appeared were generally in English. So, we may presume that the readers of these journals were Europeans, Indian elites and the educated middle class. The *Madras Mail* which had largely British readership did not talk of nationalist themes and modesty so much as other contemporary journals and magazines. On the contrary, the Indian journals such as *ILM* and *Times of India* emphasised notions of modesty, set up ideals of beauty that were subordinated to duty, whether to nation, community or family.

There is a need to analyse different print cultures, and the spaces they provided for different classes of people; in English, educating people to new tastes and

habits, and in Indian/vernacular press, educating people to perform their duties to the nation. In what ways could fashion be defined in the Indian context? We have seen that a constant comparison was made between western and Indian discourses on fashion, with the latter always defined in opposition to the former. However, the discussion on fashion was linked to the question of creating demand and taste for new kinds of clothing via the market as opposed to the fashioning new ideals of womanhood subservient to the nation.

Loyalty to one's ascribed culture was to be maintained in styles of dress, though the burden of such loyalty fell largely on women. The necessity of preserving/creating a national spirit derived from tradition was emphasized in Indian clothing,⁵¹ but Indian women were above all expected to remain formally traditional in their clothing choices. The differences between western and eastern cultures were also cited as reasons for condemning fashion. Yet these distinctions were mapped on to the notion of suitability, in other words within the discourse of fashion itself, though what was upheld was a conservative ideal of cultural modesty. For example, sleeveless blouses were rejected on the ground that it was not appropriate for Indian women, especially those who had brown skin.⁵² Sleeveless clothes were seen as an imitation of modern western customs. Another reason for disapproving sleeveless fashion was given by the writer for the *Madras Mail* is captured as; "to go without sleeves is an imitation of the modern western custom of appearance as much in nature's garments as it is permissible to do. Why imitate a custom which is so much against our traditions?"⁵³ Thus, western custom was rejected on the grounds of tradition. The specific concern expressed was about what parts of the female body were to be revealed and what concealed. How furthermore was culture to be expressed through covering, rather than uncovering the limbs?

An article in *Madras Mail* purportedly by an Indian woman said that the much talked about preservation of national spirit seemed to be more in theory than practice and that there was a tendency towards Anglicization in almost everything.⁵⁴ She pointed further, that there were many currents of thought and that it was difficult to choose one to follow. She offered a solution for it and said

that if one was Indian at heart then one would eventually be an Indian in manner.⁵⁵

The presentation of a clear nationality in dress had to be learned through a refashioning of the self. This was in turn linked to the individuality of a person. In *ILM*, individuality was determined by two factors. One was the method of wearing clothes⁵⁶, and the second was deportment and carriage⁵⁷ which would set off the garment. In *Madras Mail*, women were said to be responsible for maintaining individuality while being true to nationality.⁵⁸ At one level this is a contradiction: since one is a reflection of a community identity while the other is a notion of self-delinked from other, primordial identities. These ideas were expressed in different ways:

Therefore, the only thing we can do is to be true to our individuality basing it on our nationality. Here it is that the women of India can score; for they have been living in the backwaters of life and with their more plastic and emotional natures, they have been storing up the impressions of the outside world as men never can, in a vast and unchanging treasure house of experiences and idealities. It is from them therefore that we must call the traditions for our maxima and precepts of life, on which to base the onward march, for we must not forget that mere conservatism will not do, leading as it generally leads to stagnation.⁵⁹

According to the writer, conservatism alone led to stagnation, but an obligation to reflect national identity was the woman's, since she absorbed, without being absorbed herself, the tides of fashion and change. The responsibility of Indian women towards national identity was through a new notion of individuality. Another argument considered Indian women's nature to be conservative and so traditional clothing was suggested for them.⁶⁰

In a different article, *Madras Mail* presented Indian women as conservative in nature and suggested that Indian women keep to their saris as European clothes were unbecoming, it discussed in the context of new style of hair bobbing, shingling, cropping and so on.⁶¹

The focal point of the discussion in the fashion columns in *Madras Mail* about French and London fashion was the importance of dressing according to individual attributes. So it is crucial to compare the categories to see if they were similar or different in India and elsewhere. French and London fashion discussions focussed more on themes related to style, elegance, current fashion, cut of the dress, and design. Discussions of Indian fashion were buttressed by ideas of modesty, shame, nationality and tradition. In some cases European fashion was discussed in terms of nationality and modesty but the burden of retaining these did not fall so much on European women as it did on Indian women.

Ideals of modesty, shame and culture were emphasized by the vernacular journals. Discussions around fashion also questioned male attitudes. Thapar pointed out that in the Hindi journals, it was argued that the youth, under the influence of modern ideals were depriving the women of her natural talents and making them objects of display.⁶² Women were presented as adorning themselves for the men. Writer of *Chaturvedi* magazine commented:

Isme koi sandeh nahin aj kal ke balak , balikaon ko fashionwali banne ka anurodh karte hain, ve apni striyon ko apne mitron se milne julne aur apni mandli ke sadasyon ke sath hans karne ityadi hi ko sabhyata samajhte hain parantu lajja mein hi hamari sabhyata hai jisse humko kisi dasa mein hath se na jane dena chahiye..⁶³

(There is no doubt that men are persuading their women folk to be fashionable, they think that only by meeting their friends and cracking jokes with them will make them progressive. But modest behaviour is the mark of our tradition and we should not abandon it under any circumstances.)

In this article by Shrimati Poorna Devi titled 'hamari kuprathayein' (our evil systems), it is suggested that men should be held responsible and not women. However, the burden of saving tradition fell upon women's shoulders. New norms of conjugality were not supported by some sections. Men who went abroad to study were often seen as influencing their wives and modelling their married lives on Victorian examples. The Victorian model of marriage emphasised companionship. However, this kind of change in the institution of marriage and place of women within the home met with considerable criticism. Appearance of women in public and their mixing freely with men other than family members were considered to be influenced by European lifestyle and tradition. The writer appealed for women to retain modesty and shame, against insistence from men of their family. Thus, again the burden of upholding morals of tradition fell upon women. Similarly, images of fashionable woman were used as examples of those who had been corrupted by influences from the west.



Figure 1: Woman and influence of the West (“Colourful balloon of new civilization brought by winds of the west”)

Source: Kamla (1932)

Figure 1 shows an Indian woman falling off from the high pedestal of Indian tradition/culture in attempt to catch fashion. The caption below the image 'Paschim ki hava mein nayi sabhyata ka rangin gubbara' (colourful balloon of new civilization brought by the winds of west) caricatures the follower of fashion. The woman is represented as someone who is unaware of the consequences of her action, since she does not pay attention to the fact that she is falling. Instead, she is happily trying to catch the balloon which is a symbol of fashion. Although she is represented as chasing fashion, she is not entirely western in appearance. However, use of shoes and lack of veil indicates the influence of the west.

Western fashion was also seen as incongruous for Indian women. *Madras Mail* cautioned Indian women against attempting any kind of standardization of fashion since dressing was based on individual taste. So, the resolution of combining elements of Indian and western in dressing was rejected by the author, "Therefore, I hope, I may be pardoned, when I say, how incongruous is the style with the fashion of the sari. It is bad enough to see cropped head over topping English frocks, irrespective of whether they adorn old or young. How much worse it is it is to see them with the graceful Indian drapery?"⁶⁴

Many writers thus discouraged western dress and hair. To make their appeal stronger the writers emphasized that fashion of short/bob hair did not even suit European women. Thus, such hairstyles were not suited to Indian saris. These discussions invoked ideals like taste and presented it as essential element in dressing. However, taste is not only generated through dressing but it's an acquired skill which is determined by a variety of factors, such as education, socialisation, market forces etc.

Columns in the *Madras Mail* commented sharply on the weak points of Indian dressing and suggested ways to improve it. These were alternatives to westernized dress forms which brought out the uniqueness of the Indian sari, which was presented as the most graceful dress if some things were kept in mind. In the

process of suggesting ways of dressing, *Madras Mail* also defined new codes against show of wealth and westernization:

They do not seem to realize that the object of dressing is not to show people that they are rich and can afford to buy expensive clothes but to dress in such a way that they may produce a pleasing effect, and give an impression of taste and beauty to all those who may chance to look at them. We do not wish to become westernized in our habits; it will do us no harm to dress more prettily at night than we do during the day.⁶⁵

The above excerpt taken from *Madras Mail* indicates that dress was a means for the presentation of a person's taste and not wealth. It also pointed out that Indian women were not aware of the potential of dress as a means of creating a pleasing appearance and that it could be a medium for displaying one's beauty and taste rather than just an indication of westernization.

Indeed, the display of wealth in dress could result in a lack of artistic effect in overall appearance which the majority of Indian women did not produce in their clothing.⁶⁶ Though they bought expensive saris and wore jewels studded with sparkling gems and they were unable to create an overall impression on the critical eye.

Fashion columns pointed out that Indian women's clothes were an inappropriate combination of colours for the sari, blouse and footwear.⁶⁷ However, the author reminded the readers that the skill of overall appearance was not because of lack of artistic taste but carelessness about producing a general effect. In the end, the sari was represented as the most graceful dress if worn properly.⁶⁸

Harmony had to be observed in overall dressing to achieve the desired effect. Therefore, the lack of harmony between blouse and sari was discussed, along with suggestions about what kinds of blouses Indian women should wear. For instance, it was suggested that "the blouse need not be of the same colour, but the colour

scheme can be made to match and if the wearer does not possess a coloured blouse which will not match a particular sari, a simple white blouse will look extremely pretty.”⁶⁹ More suggestions were given for Indian women to follow: for instance, it was brought out in the article that a simple Magyar blouse with loose comfortable sleeves cut a little above the elbow and a V neck which is not too low but at the same time not too high, gives a cool charming effect.⁷⁰ New styles were allowed when it confirmed the ideal traditional image of woman.

Though the columns of the *Madras Mail* offered some criticism of European fashion, and questioned its appropriateness, it suggested and even encouraged westernization of Indian clothing to a limited extent, in the style of blouse design, or in hair style and footwear. The fashion columns in *Madras Mail* on French and London fashion discussed different types of dresses like evening long gowns and dresses for day wear; these were new concepts adapted to the Indian context.

Even the *Indian Ladies Magazine* suggested ways of improving clothing, though it was more conservative than *Madras Mail*. It reiterated cultural nationalist sentiments by looking deeper into the Indian traditions. It is important to place *ILM* on a different register, as its writers were mostly female. Some of the prominent women associated with this journal were Kamla Saththiyandhan (editor), Cornelia Sorabji, Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant.⁷¹ It was highly praised and acclaimed as it was written by Indian women, and thus, promoted education of women. The magazine was probably read by a large number of educated, European and South Indian women. Until the 1920's, this magazine glorified the ancient Indian ideals of womanhood. The writers encouraged women to be of a sweet gentle nature, with a commitment towards home and family, chastity etc.⁷² But from the 1920s, the new roles of women in the home, and in social, political and national life were stressed in the articles.⁷³

In the context of fashion, writers were against blind imitation of western fashion. Most of the fashion suggestions were written by Sister Susie. According to her, fashion was the blind imitation of the people who were supposed to be leaders of the society and knew what was 'in' for clothes. She noted further that for people it

did not matter if a particular style suited the person or if it was producing a disharmonious effect but what mattered was whether they were in fashion.⁷⁴ Sister Susie's statement attacked some people for simply opting for one type of fashion.

For Sister Susie, beauty was not a simple matter but made up of different factors like perfect dressing, fine figure and features, attractive manners and liveliness of expression. She stressed that the greatest thing was to know oneself.⁷⁵ Importance of thoughts and actions in the creation of self was highlighted. Sister Susie believed that the real personality could be hidden under prejudiced thoughts, ignorance, moral cowardice and sentimentalism. Her columns gave equal importance to the personality of the person along with dressing. It was reflected in the way hairstyle⁷⁶, makeup, footwear⁷⁷, and ways of walking, manners and attitude was discussed. In an article Elizabeth Craig (writer of magazine *Dress and Beauty*) women were supposed to pay attention in matters of hair, the shape of the head, balance of features, and the formation of figures. Suggestions were given in this direction. However, the idea was to prepare oneself for the gaze of the man. She quotes an impresario who gave his views of what makes woman really attractive:

Perfection of form and feature, and faultlessness in style and technique are not enough for him, he says, when he chooses the chorus girls for his revues. He needs something more, viz. some individuality of charm or genius, 'which can so irradiate women, that even plain and ugly actresses can, within a few minutes of their entrance, persuade us that they are among the most beautiful women in the world. The first thing he looks for natural poise and balance of manner. This means a fine deportment and quite an easy walk when in movement and a beautiful repose when in rest; one of the most important points of the latter being a graceful handling of the hands and feet. The figure also can always be made shapely in approximate proportion to the size, so long as there are no foolish ideas to special requirements, which may not be suitable...⁷⁸

These qualities were searched in women for the purpose of a performance on the stage by the impresario. But as it appears in the column of 'Fashion Suggestions' in this journals it seems this kind of discussion was aimed at Indian women. The idea of grace is celebrated here. Here the strict control of gestures signifies distinction from the rest of woman. It becomes a marker of authority. *A Cultural History of Gestures: From Antiquity to the Present Day* by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg helps us to understand the cultural politics of presentation of self beyond the notions of dress and fashion.⁷⁹ Gesture has been defined as a significant movement of limb or body or use of such movements as expression of feelings or rhetorical device.⁸⁰ The book analyses how the body served as a location of self - Identification and demonstration of authority. Gestures were transmitters of political and religious power in medieval society. They were markers of social distinction. Gestures can convey different messages, emotions, reactions and expression of a person. In this volume, gestures are seen as a product of the needs of society to maintain separation, impose domination etc.

Thus this magazine contributed to setting trends to be followed by women and produced new norms for the fashion conscious. Bodily practice itself was altered to suit the dictates of elegance and fashion. It specified the right way of walking, the careful position of the hands while sitting and talking and a certain notion of the body shape.⁸¹ In an attempt to redefine women's behaviour, it restricted her manners by setting strict trends in woman's personal area. *The Times of India* also carried columns on western fashion especially from Paris and London on ways of improving Indian dress styles. *The Times of India* was the most outspoken newspaper which emphasised ideals like tradition and nationality, presenting Indian culture and civilisation to be superior than west. One of the crucial themes that were foregrounded in this newspaper was the superiority and gracefulness of the Indian sari.

The sari was glorified for different reasons and writers constantly debated its popularity in the 1930s. It was even debated whether the sari could be worn by

European women, with one columnist Safi, suggesting that European women could wear it as an evening dress.⁸² Writers for *The Times of India* differed from the other newspapers/journals discussed so far, since they emphasised an exchange of ideas about fashion from both sides. One columnist, Mina, even expressed the hope that the “evening dress of Europe would resemble the sari in the years to come and frocks will become a thing of past.”⁸³ She also pointed out that most Indian women clung to the traditional sari in spite of outside influences. She was in favour of abandoning the nine yard sari for the more manageable six yard one. But, there were other authors who opened options for women by confining women to strict regulations. Joan Williams commented:

Fashions in India do not undergo the same changes as in England, America or France; here women of the east are much more staple and conservative in their ideas of dress. Almost every caste and creed has its own orthodox ideas on the dress problem, and the method of wearing dress and jewellery marks the social rank and the caste of the wearer. So long as a woman keeps within the recognized regulations of the dress customs of her class, she may indulge in the matter of colour, design, or material all of which offers an extensive range of variety.⁸⁴

On the one hand, these authors attempted to posit the superiority of east over west. On the other they advised women to leave conservatism behind but retain traditional dress. Joan William’s argument was aimed at addressing problems associated in different caste (as it has been mentioned in the article that every caste and creed has its own dress problems).

The sari was praised for other reasons too. It was represented as a costume which reflected continuity with ancient dress. In this context Sally commented, “sari as a costume has stood the test of ages. It has survived the whims and fancies of Indian womanhood through several centuries and still retains its original form and

simplicity.”⁸⁵ This article also pointed out that in spite of uniformity of sari it was worn in different manners in different regions of India.⁸⁶ The Punjabis, the Bengalis, the Marathis, the Tamils, the Coorgs, and the Parsis all wore the sari in distinct ways. R. Hurry considered the dress of Marwari women to be most attractive if it was judged by western standards.⁸⁷ According to the author, the tight fitting bodice, gaudy and multi coloured skirt and a flimsy cloth thrown over their shoulder gave them appeal which was unmatched by any other Indian costume.

However, there were dissenting voices in this discourse which focussed on the disadvantages of the sari. Despite presenting the sari to be the best dress, a few authors did not consider it fit for the working woman or sports woman. According to Mina, it hindered growth and so it was uncomfortable for business women and professional women like nurses.⁸⁸ The author of ‘The Conquering Sari’ stressed that the sari was unfit for tramping the hills, climbing fences in cross country walks, playing tennis, running on the sands, climbing two steps of a bus with an overcoat over one arm, a bag and an umbrella in the other etc.⁸⁹ Sari was also considered to be dangerous in the domestic sphere, when it came in the way of cooking.⁹⁰ Similar argument for not wearing sari was given by Hemanta Kumari Chaudhuri (1868 - 1953).⁹¹ The choice of western dress was made over sari as gown was considered convenient. She describes in 1900 in her book *Antahpur* that why few Bengali women opted for western gowns.⁹² She notes:

As a result of the advent of the English race to this country and through intermingling with them, it is not only the case that our husbands, sons and brothers learnt to wear coats and trousers. We too began to use various kinds of chemises, petticoats, bodices and jackets. Prior to this we had no national dress for women, the wearing of which would preserve one’s self - respect. Perhaps because of this, many Indian women wore the clothes of the English ladies. Many abandon the sari to wear the gown for the sake of convenience in moving out of doors...’⁹³

The personal account shows the consideration behind donning such items which were seen to be the result of western influence. The lack of a national dress and comfort in clothing is cited as the reason by Chaudhuri. It suggests that the process of emulation was started by men and was followed by women. The sari was also seen to be hampering mobility. If some columnists in the *Times of India* wrote that the sari was the most graceful dress and presented as the ideal costume for Indian women, there were others who preferred clothes that gave women freedom of movement.

Almost all fashion columns in these English newspaper and journals discussed clothing in the public realm or in the context of activities home. The discourse of clothing took place in context of what should be worn to a meeting, a party, sports events, at college, to fairs, etc. The distinction between private clothing and public clothing did not appear at all. It seemed as if new types of clothes and western clothes were adopted by women only in the public space. There was no discussion about what should be worn within the household except when the dangers of cooking were discussed. One can also say that with the entry of women into public space, it was seemed crucial to improve her appearance in public and that's why the dress reform was aimed at spaces outside her home.

The readership of vernacular journals was no doubt larger than English journals as they were circulated over many regions in North India and Bengal. There were more men and women who could read Hindi during this period.

We have already discussed that *Chand* presented nationalist and patriarchal worries prevalent during that time. Though it aimed to educate women and make them aware of national and international news, it also redefined codes of conduct for women. *Mahila* welcomed the changes in women's dressing.⁹⁴ According to its authors, the new fashion of wearing jacket or blouses without sleeves was much better in covering body than the old custom of wearing sari without blouse or inner clothing.⁹⁵ They believed that one should not be concerned about issues of modesty as any new form of cloth did not defy norm of modesty if compared to the custom

of women bathing in scanty sari.⁹⁶ One of the female writers did not mock women who followed western fashion.⁹⁷ Instead, she criticised men for their preference for educated and fashionable women. According to the writer, it was such attitude of men which compelled women to adopt fashion. This theme was also pointed by other writers in the magazine *Kamla*.⁹⁸ *Kamla* acknowledged the spread of fashion and also justified the new form of clothing due to new needs. Savitri Devi Shukla suggested new ways of dressing as necessary for women who worked.⁹⁹ However, she emphasized ideals like 'shistachar' (etiquette) in the new kind of dressing. Articles that were published in journals like *Mathur Vaishya Hitaishi*, *Manorama*, *Stri Darpan*, *Kamlini* reflected anxiety about women following western fashion and culture advertised in English papers and journals. While *Sudha* carried articles promoting fashion, most of the articles focussed on upholding traditions. Indian women were asked to retain modesty and a sense of shame in their behaviour.

Conclusion

Nationalism was a dominant influence on the clothing choices of Indian men and women in the early 20th century. Gender differences were significant in this process since men were more easily corrupted, and women became the bearers of nationalist virtue and tradition via the refashioned sari. The discourse on nationalism focused on a criticism of west. It also emphasized ideals like simplicity, austerity, modesty and nationality.

However, this article explored the shift in Indian sartorial styles to themes like individuality that was asserted through one's dress. What were the chances of fashion as it was promoted in English columns succeeding in finding an audience? The presentation and definition of the Indian body was crucial in this movement. In this context, everything related to woman was a focus of attention, from items of clothing, behaviour, footwear, hairstyle and mannerisms. Newspapers and journals during this period emerged as significant sites for popularising or criticising dress reform and fashion, and the adoption of these styles by women.

The discourse on clothing was also marked by a constant search for 'an ideal Indian costume'. The iconic costume for Indian women was supposed to fulfil all the requirements in the dress. It was supposed to represent nationality, tradition, modesty. Along with these ideals, it was also expected that such costumes should reflect a person's taste and aesthetic skills. The sari emerged as the most popular choice for the Indian women which fulfilled all these criteria. It's crucial to note that in almost all the journals it was the 'Indian woman' who was the centre of discussions. This article also located the discussions on dress in the context of the fear, anxiety and apprehension towards women's entry into the public sphere. The debates reflected predictable worries of the nationalist, reformers, orthodox sections about the loss of control over women. However, such criticisms were countered by advocates of women's independence and education. The voices favouring women's independence could not be considered as feminist as this freedom was to be exercised within some limitations. The freedom which women enjoyed in increased mobility and in experiments with clothing were over determined by nationalist ideology and insistence on women as the bearers of the reformed Indian identity. The market drew some converts too, though largely from the upper echelons of society. Through the 1920s and 1930s there were signs that women themselves were joining the debate, vociferously demanding adherence to reformed codes in some instances while others approved of choices made by women themselves. A new aesthetic which combined mobility with elegance and at the same time a particular Indian tradition was brought into being, which enabled women to participate in public life, without being threatened.

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¹¹ Malavika Karlekar, *Revisioning the Past: Early Photography in Bengal-1875-1915*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² Satyadev Vidyalankar, 'Mahilaon ki jagriti – parda kaise choda' in *Parda*, (Calcutta: Adarsh Hindi Pustakalaya, 1936), pp. 141-205.

¹³ Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar, *In So Many Words: Women's Life Experiences from Western and Eastern India*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2008). This work adds to my understanding of how women negotiated with everyday self in wake of new developments. There are other works available which show about Indian women's subjectivities. Here, I have cited the example of this work as it narrates the experiences of women who were involved in politics and contributed to then going movements. Most importantly, their ideas were influential in shaping dressing of women too. For example; Sarala Devi Chaudhurani.

¹⁴ Pundit Chandradeep Narayan Tripathi, *Strisikshasar*, (Summery of Women's Education) (Calcutta: Hindi Book Agency, 1934), p.232, Chaturvedi Dwaraka Prasad Sharma, *Mahilahitaishini*, (Well - Wisher of Women) (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1924).

¹⁵ Shrimati Poorna Deviji, translated by Leeladhar Chaturvedi, 'hamari kuprathayein', *Mahilaank, Chaturvedi*, volume 16, No 1,2, April May 1930, p.31

¹⁶ I argue that there is a difference between foreign clothing and western fashion. Fashion as the term occurs in wake of mass production and markets where as foreign clothing was present even before the industrial revolution. These columns however, often blurred the boundaries between foreign clothing and western fashion. They were often used synonymously to criticize or describe the dress of the west.

¹⁷ Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, pp. 47-48, She pointed out further, that for Indian men it was a means of looking respectable without having to desert one's Indian identity. She also says that the British admired this type of Indian professional dress since it was smart and decent without being too close to their own dress. Women also used European fabrics, colours and designs but retained Indian sari and thus, incorporated latest trends from Europe by giving them a new Indian form.

¹⁸ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards*, (England: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁹ *Chand* carried cartoons which criticized the westernized, half educated women and they were represented as neglecting housework, child care and husband. The images also depicted women to be going for movies, busy in their academic work and ignoring the ill child. In such caricatures the image of man was the passive recipient of the women's wishes and often shown to be taking care of child or doing house work. These cartoons denoted the threat of reversal of gender roles.

²⁰ Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, Volume 2, No 8, March 1929, p. 434, C. A. Bayly: *The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society*, in edited by Arjun Appadurai *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²¹ Dr. Ravi Pratap Srinate, 'wasrto ka swasthya par prabhav', *Chand*, December 1933, p. 291.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ All the translation in this paper has been done by the author herself as per the style sheet.

²⁴ *Chaturvedi* was Hindi journal published from Agra, Kanpur and Lucknow. Some of the editors were Radha Krishna Chaturvedi and Visveswar Dayal Mishra. It was a community journal in which most of the writers

came from *Chaturvedi* caste probably high caste. Even women writers in this magazine were from the same community and most of the times relatives of some male writer. This journal can be marked for its nationalist and orthodox tones.

²⁵ Shri Baijnath Chaturvedi, 'vayasano ki bharmar', *Chaturvedi*, November 1924, pp. 32.

²⁶ Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 53.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 9. It was also used when a significant proportion of the Indian population were buying English made clothes. According to the writer, the moral aesthetic approach was therefore linked to the more general idea that Indian textiles and crafts were under 'threat' and required 'revival'.

²⁸ Kamta Prasad Guru, 'vesh bhusha mein shistachar', *Madhuri*, volume 3, No 3, November 1924, pp. 502-506.

²⁹ 'The Fascination of Fashion', *ILM*, April, 1903, no. 10, pp. 314.

³⁰ Mrs. C. Besley, 'Social Intercourse Between English And Indian Women', *ILM*, April 1903, no. 10. P. 302. The author mentions that as an influence of Western education some Indian women have blindly rushed to model their life, manners and dress on western lines and in the process have lost their individuality.

³¹ 'ardhasikshita madam', *Chand*, July, 1926.

³² Aniya Loomba, 'The Long and Saggy Sari', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8:3,1997, pp. 278 - 292.

³³ Editorial, 'sampadakiyavichar', *Chand*, 1926, p. 336.

³⁴ Indian women, 'An Informal Talk', *Madras Mail*, 1 September 1931, p. 11.

³⁵ C.P. Kalyani Amma, 'The Craze for Imitation', in J.Devika's *Her Self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*, (Kolkata: Stree, 2005), pp. 37 - 40.

³⁶ Ibid. Puttezhattu Raman Menon was a prominent intellectual and public figure in early twentieth century Cochin(Kochi). In this article he launched a vitriolic attack on modern minded young women as the chief perpetrators of a shallow and superficial modernity. He perceived the major resources of this modernity to derive from blind imitation of western dress, habits, manners, language, attitudes and tastes. Response to this criticism came from Kalayani Amma in the next issue of journal *Lakshmi bhayi*.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁸ Sister Susie is probably Cornelia Sorabji. Her younger sister's name was Susie Sorabji who was actively involved in school work. Probably, Cornelia used her sister's name as Susie. However, there is no direct information on her identity as in all articles the name 'Sister Susie' had been used. I have made this link on the basis of internet searches. I got this information by typing sister Susie and got to know that she was actively involved in social work and a school was named after her in Poona. Cornelia Sorabji's family was also known for their contribution in social work. The primary sources also mentioned Cornelia Sorabji's name as one of the writers in *ILM*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornelia_Sorabji, Accessed on 10th April, 2009.

³⁹ Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, pp. 434-435.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Shahida lateef, *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities 1890-1980s*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990).

⁴² Aparna Basu and Bharti Ray, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-2002*, (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 1990).

⁴³ Manjari R Krishnan, 'The Womanhood of India', *ILM*, volume 5, No 9, May June, 1932, p. 400.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ K. Saththiandhan, 'Who is the Ideal woman?', *ILM*, volume 1, No11, June 1928, pp. 367 - 369.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 229.

⁴⁸ Loomba, 'The Saggy Sari', p. 283. She pointed out that the debates revolved around the way sari was draped to look like a dress or in a way blouses were pleated and in adoption of accessories like pins and brooches which would make the sari more efficient or give it a different aesthetic an through shoes.

⁴⁹ Thapar, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, p. 240.

⁵⁰ L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4, May 1929, p.23.

⁵¹ Indian Women, 'The Foreign Spirit among Indians', *Madras Mail*, 9 April 1928, p. 9.

⁵² L.P.S, 'Fashion notes for Indian women- Sleeveless styles condemned,' *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.

⁵³ 'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, volume 5, No 12, November, December 1932, p. 575.

⁵⁷ 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 3, May June 1935, p. 93.

⁵⁸ 'Foreign Spirit Among Indians', p. 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

- ⁶⁰ An Observer, 'Indian Women - An Informal Talk', *Madars Mail*, September 1931, p.14.
- ⁶¹ 'Foreign Spirits Among Indians- Coiffure', p. 9.
- ⁶² Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 253.
- ⁶³ Shrimati Poorna Deviji , translated by Leeladhar Chaturvedi , 'hamari kuprathayein', *Mahilaank, Chaturvedi*, volume 16, No 1,2, April May 1930, p.31.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 15 June 1929, p.28.
- ⁶⁶ L.P.S, 'Fashion Notes for Indian Women', *Madras Mail*, 4 May 1929, p. 23.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ The Satthiyanadhan families were exceptionally distinguished in terms of their contribution to the growth of Anglican Church in South India and to the development of education in India especially for women to the policy making of Indian National Congress and the first government after Independence, <http://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/electronic-books/articles/jackson--caste-culture-conversion.pdf>, Accessed on 10th April, 2009.
- ⁷² By An Indian Lady, 'Social Intercourse between European and Indian Ladies', *ILM*, September 1901, no. 3. P.58, Sri Krishna Sarma, 'The Hindu Ideal of Womanhood', *ILM*, September 1901, no.3 p.65, By the Editor, 'Mrs. Besant on Indian Womanhood', *ILM*, , January 1902, no. 7 , p.195. By an Indian Lady, 'The Indian Woman ', *ILM*, November 1910, no.5. p.129.
- ⁷³ K. Satthianadhan, ' Who is the Ideal Woman', *ILM*, June 1928, no.11, p.367, R.K. Mittr , 'My Ideal woman', *ILM*, February 1929, no.7, p. 345, H. Kaveri Bai , 'Thoughts of Ideal Womanhood, *ILM*, May and June 1932, no. 8 , p.421.
- ⁷⁴ Sister Susie, 'Fashion Notes', *ILM*, volume 2, No 8, March 1929, p. 434.
- ⁷⁵ Sister Susie, 'Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 7, No 4, July and August 1935, pp. 135-137.
- ⁷⁶ Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, February, 1932, p. 330.
- ⁷⁷ Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions - Our Footwear Suggestions', *ILM*, January 1929, pp. 320-321.
- ⁷⁸ 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 8, No 3, May June 1935, pp.93-94.
- ⁷⁹ Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1991).
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., p.1.
- ⁸¹ Sister Susie, 'Our Fashion Suggestions', *ILM*, volume 1, No 6, November- December 1934, pp. 247-248.
- ⁸² Safi, 'Dress Reform in India: Could European Women Wear the Sari?' *Times of India*, 13 April 1937, p. 14.
- ⁸³ Mina, 'The Beauty of the Sari: Already Affecting Western Design', *Times of India*, 7 May 1936, p.15.
- ⁸⁴ Joan Williams, 'The Fascination of the Eastern Sari: Simplicity and Symmetry of Line of Classic Styles of Ancient Greece' *Times of India*, 12 September 1932, p.13.
- ⁸⁵ Sally, 'Beauty of the Sari: Has Stood the Test of Time', *The Times of India*, 22 October 1935, p.13.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ R. Hurry, 'Ancient Origins of Modern Fashion: Dress of Indian Women', *The Times of India*, 25 October 1932, p. 11.
- ⁸⁸ Mina, 'The Beauty of the Sari: Already Affecting Western Design' *The Times of India*, 7 May 1936, p. 15.
- ⁸⁹ 'The Conquering Sari - Most Graceful Dress in the World', *The Times of India*, 30 January 1936, p.13.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Hemant Kumari Chaudhuri, 'Women's Dress', Malini Bhattacharaya and Abhijitsen's edited *Talking of Power: Early Writings of Bengali Women from the Mid Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, (Kolkata: Stree, 2003), pp. 88 - 93.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Ibid., p.91.
- ⁹⁴ *Mahila* was a monthly magazine in Hindi which was published in Calcutta. Its editor was Sita Devi.
- ⁹⁵ Shri Mohan Lal Nehru, 'fashionable', *Kamla*, July 1940, pp. 9-11.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Shrimati Kiranmayi, 'mahilaon ko fashion kis ne sikhaya', *Kamla*, May 1941, pp. 6-8.
- ⁹⁸ *Kamla* was published in Benaras. Some of the editors were Shri Jagganath Prasad (Founder), Shri Babu Rao Vishnu Paradkar and Shri Shanti Priya Dwivedi from 1939 to 1941.
- ⁹⁹ Savitari Devi Shukla, 'naya aur purana pehanava ', *Kamla*, April 1939, pp. 44-45.

Women and Healthcare in Colonial Times: A Focused Study of the CDA

by

Mridul Megha

The paper is a minor exploration in the area of formulation of policies around venereal diseases and their control. The objective here has been to study venereal diseases and their control in the light of public health. The time period under consideration is that of the working of the Cantonment Act of 1864 and the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, in particular. The paper attempts to highlight colonial concern as a hegemonic one far beyond the concern of the public health of the “natives”, in particular, that of the prostitutes. Health and medicalization of the body hence, as a site for the construction of the British empire’s authority and control.

Unlike other epidemic diseases like cholera which had a high mortality rate, venereal diseases were actually on a decline from about the 1860s when they captured public and medical attention.¹ There were other epidemic diseases which had a higher death toll and required immediate public health measures to be taken. So what was it that triggered this kind of attention towards venereal diseases?

It was not mortality from venereal diseases but its incapacitating effects which worried the British officials. The mortality levels with respect to venereal diseases were much lower than that of cholera, malaria and typhoid; however the regulatory actions of the British officials continued to be justified. The high rate of venereal disease in the British army led to increasing alarm. It was a major cause of invaliding and therefore anxiety about inefficiency. According to Kenneth Ballhatchet, one-third of the European troops lay in hospitals due to venereal diseases. The high levels of mortality, sickness and invaliding of British troops always meant invalidating the British Raj. Fevers (including venereal diseases), cholera, diarrhoea and liver diseases were the major causes of deaths among the troops. Hence, the rising mortality in the British army was not due to war but rather due to diseases and epidemics.² Maintaining the sanitary condition in the barracks became the need of the hour. A Sanitary Commission was set up in 1857 and again in 1859 to look into the sanitary state of the army.³ The control of sanitary conditions in the segregated areas of residence was done through public health legislations.⁴ Laws/legal sanctions were hence used to enforce these. The Cantonment Act XXII of 1864 was one such legislation.

This also brings us to what Arnold terms as -“the environmentalist” paradigm of medicine, where disease was attributed to the Indian climate, sanitary habits (the Indian prostitute was seen as part of such a disease-ridden environment).⁵ According to the British officials, the disease in tropical regions acquired a particular virulence which made the contagion even worse. Judy Whitehead opines that the Victorian sanitarians as well as the officials in the

British Medical Service viewed diseases as results of environmental decomposition. The miasmatic theory for diseases continued to be prevalent in India till about the 1890s. The miasmatic theory spoke of how toxic concentrations of vaporous products of decay caused diseases. With the miasmatic theory being dominant, the British officials adopted the policy of a) sanitation and b) segregation. Sumit Guha has shown the important place sanitation and hygiene came to acquire in the British army in roughly the same period. Ann L. Stoler uses the term “cultural hygiene” of colonialism.⁶ Sanitary rules were laid down for the use of the European troops for the year 1858. Guha points out that in order to regulate the spread of STDs cantonment magistrates were given the power to regulate prostitution, as well as to maintain the sanitary state of the area under their charge. The Indian Cantonment Act of 1864 allowed the local magistracy “to make special rules for the maintenance in a state of cleanliness of all houses occupied by registered prostitutes within the limits of the cantonment, and for the provision therein of a sufficient supply of water and of proper means of ablution”.⁷ The stress was on maintaining individual hygiene and to inculcate such knowledge (as opposed to ignorance and carelessness) into the soldiers that it did not matter much if their surroundings were germ free or not. Soap was supplied to soldiers who were encouraged to use it. In many stations, the endeavour was also to teach the soldiers how to guard themselves against enteric fever, malaria and venereal diseases.⁸ The condom, though available, was mentioned far less. It was a more expensive preventive measure; also, it was linked to contraception and hence, came under moral scrutiny. Medical officers also acknowledged a gap between possession of the packets and

their use.⁹ Military education on venereal diseases hence, became a major part of sanitary education. Ballhatchet makes mention of Surgeon-General Taylor (Principal M.O. to the forces in India) asking for “the provision of lotions and towels for the men in barracks”.¹⁰

In the control of venereal diseases the second tool adopted was that of segregation and control. David Arnold wrote, “Western medicine is also sometimes seen as one of the most powerful and penetrative parts of the entire colonizing process”.¹¹ In the military sphere especially, medicine was a very effective “tool of the empire”. This brings us to the use of medicine and public health measures as an instrument of “social control”. As Harrison points out, such instruments of social control provided means of knowing the indigenous population, and also served as rationales for social segregation. Fear of infection at times justified segregated residential patterns and also the right to isolate the infected ones.¹² Public health measures became powerful tools for the domination over “natives”. Public health measures were often selective and degrading, through detention and isolation they controlled population movement to a great extent. The public health garb however portrayed as a sign of colonial benevolence helped reduce resistance to imperial rule. What the officials observed was that firstly, venereal disease endangered the “vitality of the race.” Secondly, that it was the “dangerous neighbour” who had to be controlled.¹³ Indigenous women were being projected as a terror for military men; their sexuality was seen as having a de-masculinising effect on the soldier. Official attempts were made to control sexual relations between the ruling race and

Indian women. The cantonments had regimental bazaars (*lal bazaars*) where the soldiers could satisfy themselves.¹⁴ The idea was to control the movement of soldiers beyond the controlled environment of the cantonment which made them more susceptible to contracting diseases. Lock Hospitals were opened where suspected women were examined and infected women were admitted by force, if necessary, for treatment. The medical examinations, as it involved the genital area, were embarrassing and came to be resented. There was also the fear of both chaste as well as unchaste women being treated as prostitutes on the basis of mere suspicion. The objective here was not the health of the woman; the purpose was to provide safe pleasure for the soldiers.¹⁵ The Acts had no provision of penalties for soldiers; the only “criminal” here was the prostitute. As a report of the Royal Commission observed “... we may at once dispose of any recommendation founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain: with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse”.¹⁶ In British official documents the Indian prostitutes have been portrayed as luring British soldiers into contagious surroundings and restraining them till their wages had been spent. Clearly, the rules were “for inspecting and controlling houses of ill-fame and for preventing the spread of venereal disease.”¹⁷ J.B. Hamilton (Surgeon-Major, A.M.D., In medical charge of the Cawnpore lock hospital) on the 9th of January 1878 justified the existence of lock hospitals.

It is not to be supposed that venereal disease, as a disease of the native population, is affected to any appreciable extent by the working of the lock hospital, but there is no doubt that if the police do their duty properly, and cause all women who prostitute themselves with soldiers to be registered, and if severe punishment is inflicted on unregistered women found prostituting themselves with the troops, the disease can be kept in check to a very large extent.

Not more than 10 per cent of the Europeans contracted disease from the registered women, and with stricter supervision on the part of the regimental bazaar authorities and police, even this small number might be much reduced.

There is a most important factor in the extent of venereal among Europeans for the past few years that has been quite lost sight of, viz., the army being now composed of much younger men, with a smaller proportion of married men, and very few old soldiers, is rapidly becoming a mere “venereal” army, so to speak, i.e., composed of men in whom the passions are stronger, and among whom a greater extent of disease is to be looked for than among the men of a few years back.

I will conclude by showing the work of the lock-hospital for the past four years (the strength of the garrison remained nearly the same all along):-

Year	No. of admissions from Europeans
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1874	407
1875	283
1876	144
1877	175

These figures speak for themselves, and taking the fact into consideration that only 82 cases were contracted from the registered women during 1877, I think the lock hospital may fairly claim to have done good service to the state.¹⁸

We here cannot overlook the excessive attention paid to controlling the sexuality of the “native” woman. We could conjecture that it was the association of the venereal diseases with immorality, control over women, and the need to maintain inter-racial divides (particularly after the rebellion of 1857 in the Indian context) that lead to greater attention towards venereal diseases. The ideas of racism and eugenics obviously then were working behind the regulation of “native” women, the prostitute in particular, in the garb of public health and preventive measures. The nineteenth century was a period where the act of having sex became a police matter. Sexual control was desirable for a variety of reasons. This was a period marked by talks of eugenics, racism, production of a healthy race, a healthy progeny and an ideal family. It is interesting to note how eventually juridical and medical control became the most effective means to execute surveillance over sex and sexuality. There was a certain idealization of the family. Indulging in sexual activities other than for reproductive purposes became a taboo. Law-taboo-

censorship in tandem became mechanisms of control to examine the sexuality of individuals outside family control. The law of prohibition and the threat of punishment became tools of sexual control. The Contagious Diseases Act enacted in 1868 was one such law. The most obvious targets were women. The law along with limiting its scope to the health of the troops alone, also came to regulate “native” women’s sexuality. The body literally became a site for the construction of the empire’s own authority, control and legitimacy.

An entire process of hysterization of women’s bodies took place. The feminine body came to be analysed, qualified, and disqualified as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality. The feminine body was integrated into the sphere of medical practices. This medicalization of feminine sexuality meant her being kept under close watch. The nurturing mother versus the negative image of the “nervous/mad” woman (which can be read as the fallen or the more sexually explicit woman) became the most visible form of this hysterization. In the Indian context, the Indian prostitute too came to be controlled. According to Judy Whitehead, the sanitary legislations implemented as public health measures, the Contagious Diseases Act, in particular, were means of introducing disciplinary forms of Victorian respectability to Indian jurisprudence by means of the colonial state¹⁹ – “the ideal Victorian woman was one whose upbringing had enabled her to completely sublimate sexual and aggressive impulses... .. unlike middle class Victorian ideology however, women in North India were not thought to be passive, repressed beings, either creatively or sexually”.²⁰ She became the contradictory site of desire and disease, of sexual danger and pleasure. She

emerges in the nineteenth century as the counter-point of the docile, familial, virtuous woman of the home. This is not to say however, that such interventions and the desire to control indigenous women went unchecked by the “native” population. Indian Nationalists’ rhetoric of colonial officials attempt to infiltrate the “private” or the domestic lives of the Indian “natives” shows the contestation over women’s bodies and women’s sexuality between the colonizer and the colonized. The social reformers of the nineteenth century too came to identify her as “the victim, the fallen”. In contrast to the *bhadramahila* (upper class woman) she stood as the “sexually perverse woman”.

These decades also saw an intensification of legislation on prostitution.²¹ While the making of the laws were a response to the fear of contracting the disease, the governing practices of police constables and inspectors, military medical examiners, British officials were purely administrative with very limited health concerns. These laws did not end the practices of prostitution, or soldiers buying sex, rather they only rearranged the relative power of the two parties involved. The very goals of preserving public health and public order led to the criminalisation of the common prostitute who did not work in the state sanctioned forms of the trade. The prostitutes were committing the crime and so it was them (the sources of venereal contagion) who were supposed to be punished and fined. It was particularly because of these laws - which penalised prostitutes in the nineteenth century that scholars like Judy Whitehead have read these laws as an export of Victorian sexual prudery from the metropole to the colony. Unlike in Britain the laws in the colonies were much

more biased against the prostitutes. They had to be regulated for they were propagators of a disease which was a major threat to the military strength of the empire. The scope of public health then was an idea confined to the soldiers. The laws were much more committed to preventing ill-health among the client white population than among the prostitutes. Public health in India, hence, to begin with was largely confined to the colonial enclaves and to the health of the soldiers. The colonial authorities simply had neither the political wherewithal nor public pressure to provide public health to the country at large. Instead, the excuse cited was a lack of funds. Radhika Ramasubban points to the general lack of interest in health needs beyond the army and the white community and labels it as “the colonial mode of public health”.²² Financial constraints considering the vast Indian public health needs were often cited as the reason behind lack of commitment on the part of the state.²³

The system of lock hospital in India was borrowed from Britain of the eighteenth century. The rising incidence of venereal disease among the European soldiers in India at the turn of the eighteenth century saw the introduction of the system in the colony too. The efforts to check venereal disease began in India in 1816, when through a series of rules issued from the Governor-general of India, the medical surveillance of public women in regimental bazaars was ordered.²⁴ Keeping in view the demands for such hospitals, the Governor-general in council authorised the building of “hospitals for the reception of diseased women” at Behrampore, Kanpur, Dinapur and Fatehgarh.²⁵ Lock Hospitals were established at sixteen of the principal stations of the army. Regular inspection and

compulsory treatment of women found to be diseased were to take place. Women found diseased were to be kept in confinement within the Lock Hospitals till declared cured of venereal diseases. The staff of a lock hospital comprised of a matron and peons for taking up diseased women to the hospitals.²⁶ Their purpose was to check the spread of venereal disease among British soldiers. However what is interesting to note is that the term “Lock Hospital” was not used, even when, in practice, patients were forbidden to leave until they had been certified as cured. Statistics and reports on lock hospitals in the North-Western Province and Oudh and Central Provinces illustrate the working of civil and military lock hospital system. The reports describe conditions, staffing and expenditure of lock hospitals. Prostitute statistics show registration, attendance and punishment. These reports have tables which list instances of venereal disease (syphilis, gonorrhoea) in women and troops. They also include comments by military staff appraising the working of the lock hospital system. The reports were extracts from proceedings of the Cantonment Committee which assembled annually to examine the medical officer’s reports. The Cantonment sub-committee was composed of the officers commanding the British corps, the cantonment magistrate, the senior medical officer of the British forces and the officer in medical charge of the lock-hospital. This committee met on the last Monday of every month and submitted their report. While going through the reports one notices – The Committee considered the medical officer’s reports very satisfactory, as showing a great diminution of venereal disease during the past years, an improvement attributable chiefly to the city having been placed out of bounds, and partly also to greater vigilance on the part of the cantonment police.

The history of venereal disease in Cawnpore for instance pointed to one fact most prominently, that is, the focus and chief factor was to be found in the city. These reports mention various measures for control of prostitutes apart from keeping the city out of bounds. It was compulsory that all women practicing prostitution were registered and regularly examined, either in the city or the cantonments. No registration fee was to be levied. The reports suggest the registration of women in the cantonments had been quite successful and was extended to a circle of five mile radius. The women reported for absence were fined an amount of Rs. 135-140 which were levied and recovered. There were also arrangements in place for examining and treating the women. The city women were to be examined in the city by the civil surgeon, and all diseased women were sent in to the cantonment lock hospital. The examinations in the cantonments were conducted by the officer in medical charge of the lock hospital, and the women were assembled an hour before his arrival, and seated in a row under the supervision of police, to prevent their cleaning themselves immediately before examination. The speculum was used regularly. All cases of disease or suspected disease, according to the reports, were at once admitted and treated till cured. The women were dieted according to scale, and were supplied with cots and bedding if they were unprovided with the latter. Condemned bedding and clothing were obtained from the commissariat for the latter purpose. A “dhai” or “mahuldarni” was employed in the regimental bazaar. She also supervised the royal artillery bazaar.

The reports clearly suggest that the vast majority of the cases were contracted by city prostitutes, no doubt from intercourse with natives. Therefore,

immense importance attached to the order placing the city out of bounds never to be revoked, for if it was, there was no doubt that it would at once be followed by an outbreak of venereal among the troops. Women found to be “disordered” on “the customary days of inspection” were to be sent at once to the hospital.²⁷ At this stage, the establishment of Lock Hospitals was regiment specific, only those regiments which complained of a rising incidence of venereal diseases were granted Lock Hospitals. The military officials exercised control over the Lock Hospitals, and thereby only over the regimental prostitutes. These measures reveal the caution with which the authorities sought to tackle the problem of venereal disease.

Missionaries immediately reacted to such measures.²⁸ They argued that while the measures in England sought to reclaim the prostitutes and rehabilitate them, in India the concern for the health of the prostitute was only to sustain the immorality of the soldiers. As one missionary wrote:

Lock Hospitals in Great Britain and Ireland are institutions having their origin, I believe principally, if not entirely, in private bounty, regulated by public law, having as their design not merely the treatment of diseased women, but chiefly the reclamation of them from evil to industrious habits, and the communication to them of religious instructions, with a view to their moral and spiritual reform; and having their end and fruit in the restoration of some fallen and unfortunate females to places of trust and credits and often in the reconciliation of others to their families. No institution of the kind in the British isles without these provisions is legal,

and therefore none exists; institutions with such ends, rules and practices create the desire that they were more numerous than they are...

In India no broken hopes linger about the system. The woman is an object of concern, simply that she may not injure others; the care taken of her, the money expended, her cure if diseased, are all simply meant effect this that they may be a soldiery who may morally offend, but who must be physically uninjured. It follows then that men offend with official facility, and official sanction, and that the woman is the protégé of the state, that she may enter on and conduct her nefarious work with what advantage she may to herself, and without injury to her licensed customers.²⁹

Though the criminalisation of prostitutes in colonial India has been studied as an expression of Victorian sexual restrictiveness, we cannot overlook how the laws in the metropole and the colony functioned differently.³⁰ Strategic/administrative needs and not rehabilitation and cure of the Indian prostitute were the agenda. The colonial assumption that prostitution was recognized in Hindu law books also led them to assume that there would be no resistance to medical inspections-

for the confirmed prostitute no further degeneration is possible. And even if they were any deteriorating moral influences they were more than counterbalanced by good moral and physical results.³¹

The officials often looked at the problem of venereal disease as a “matter of police than of medicine”, to most of the authorities it appeared as an established

fact that “the remedy lay in lessening the opportunities of intercourse with women likely to be diseased than in the cure of those that are so”.³² This attitude appears particularly important given the state of curative medicine at that time. The public dispensaries at this stage or the Lock Hospitals at a later stage, thereby, were increasingly seen as places where the diseased women could be confined, separated from the soldiers, so that the possibilities of intercourse with these women could be reduced. This policing attitude also explains the basis of coercive measures like the prohibitions on prostitutes leaving the hospitals until they were declared free of disease.

The emphasis on the maintenance of a special police to identify and bring the sick prostitutes to the hospitals seemed a general requirement during this period. This was so because the authorities often looked at “vagrant women” – those who lived outside the limits of the cantonment and did not profess prostitution as their prime calling as the real propagators of venereal disease among the troops. Officials often categorized the prostitutes as “clean” or “foul” commodities, thus making obvious that the focus of the official concern was limited to the idea of providing safe pleasure for the soldiers. Officials also looked at prostitutes as forming “ordinarily, a separate well-organized class or profession, recruited according to certain fixed customs, and they have often their rules of caste like other people”.³³ This kind of perception appeared as strategically easier for the officials whose concern for the prostitutes were defined through the soldiers’ sexual needs. Also, these ideas excluded the possibility of concerns like health and rehabilitation of prostitutes as the colonial state’s

responsibility. An important and rather positive attribute of this classificatory scheme was that it helped the authorities in distinguishing the females of respectable households from those of professional prostitutes.

The cantonment committees of every cantonment were required to instruct the cantonment authorities to register these prostitutes and provide them with printed tickets in a prescribed form on which the results of their examination would be recorded. On detection of venereal disease, the prostitute was to be detained in the lock hospital until certified as cured. Registered prostitutes had to present themselves every seven days for medical examination. If found diseased, the diseased woman would be detained in a certified hospital until medical officers considered her fit to be discharged. The Contagious Diseases Act also gave massive powers to the police. They had the authority to demand that the prostitutes produce their registration tickets on demand, and penalize them on failure to do so. The Act both in England as well as in the colonies (particularly in India) sparked a political battle. The objections were that the compulsory examination system increased the power and the interference of the State, that it gave powers to arrest to a “moral police” who inspected only prostitutes and not their clients. “Compulsory and painful examination by vaginal speculum was held to constitute “instrumental rape by a steel penis”, and the campaign harped upon “medical lust in handling and dominating degrading women”.³⁴ The most abhorred element of the Contagious Diseases Act was the element of compulsory periodical medical inspection. The Act, by this element of supervision, was considered demeaning and violating the basic liberties of women. The Contagious

Diseases Act was also discriminatory in the sense that it did not affect the entire population as a whole; the language of the Act very clearly blamed women's bodies and not men. The Indian Contagious Diseases Act could penalize women for a variety of "crimes." Not possessing registration was grounds for imprisonment up to one month and/or a fine of up to one hundred rupees. If a woman refused to show her registration, she could be punished with a fine up to rupees fifty and imprisonment up to fourteen days. Contrary to this, there were only official suggestions to stop the soldier's pay while they laboured under disease in the hospital.³⁵

The "crimes" for which the prostitutes were apprehended show the extent of control in their daily activities. The fact that they were imprisoned and fined speaks volumes about the Lock Hospitals. They were not centres of cure and rehabilitation, rather they acted as prisons with the Act functioning as barriers to control sexual relations between these women and the soldiers. We hardly find mention of soldiers being reprimanded, imprisoned or being fined.

The unpopularity as well as the failure of the Act can be gauged from the means employed by women to escape medical inspections. The theme of diseased women removing themselves from government scrutiny was a familiar grievance throughout the empire. In India, it was the new technology of transport which helped undermine the regulatory system by hopping on a train. To counter this, in the late 1880s, the Bombay Surgeon General called for the extension of the Indian Contagious Diseases Act beyond Bombay's limits to the suburb of Bandra. "Cheap railway fares exist between these two places, and... women on finding

themselves diseased, resort to this suburb to evade the police, coming into Bombay at night by the trains”.³⁶ This trick was much used and there is evidence of a similar complaint, almost twenty years earlier from India’s north-west region, where women avoided registration in Cawnpore, “when... to avoid interference (they) retired temporarily to other places, for which they have every facility by the East Indian and Oudh railways”.³⁷ The laws ultimately came to be read as a failure. Targeted women often resorted to strategies to escape medical checks and confinements. There were innumerable cases of prostitutes flouting the regulations.

Through the Contagious Diseases Act, the prostitute came to be “criminalized,” she came to be seen as the unrespectable Indian female and it was the Act which helped shape the responses against this newly defined unrespectable Indian femininity. This also influenced other debates involving social reforms concerning women, such as education for girls and their age at marriage and the vexed issue of widow remarriage. The figure of the prostitute created by the colonial state, then, stood for a wide range of issues such as moral degeneracy, male power, declining public health, female deviousness – these came to affect not just the prostitutes but the policies too. The laws which began with prostitutes, regulating their sexual relations and medically monitoring them came to engage military officials, missionaries as well as nationalist social reformers in India. Racism, eugenics and women’s sexuality, hence dominated the discourses of colonialists and the nationalists as well. Reproductive regulation became a concern for the British as well as the Indian patriarchy. The

women's body in Bengal during the colonial regime became a site for debates, however the question of women's health never came up. Despite, the emerging middle-class anxiety to impose its own norms of morality for its national well-being, maternal health became a topic of real concern only in the late 20th century. The Dufferin fund, an initiative to improve medical conditions for women had been in operation in the late 19th century. The fund aimed to supply female doctors and mid-wives to work in *zenana* (female) hospitals in India. Surprisingly, when it came to venereal diseases the British government in its endeavours to control venereal diseases had clearly laid out specific outlines to manage the Lock Hospitals. Nowhere in the Sanitary Commissioner Reports was there mention of maternal or reproductive health. The wives of the Indian soldiers were hardly mentioned in the sanitary reports. The one state medical measure before the 1880s which did have a direct bearing on women was the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, but this was clearly designed to address the problem of venereal disease among British soldiers rather than the health of the prostitutes (or the soldiers' wives). There appears to have been no serious discussion of venereal diseases as they affected women in India before the 1920s. The primary arenas of state medicine in the first half of the nineteenth century – the army, the jails, even the hospitals – were primarily male domains in which women played little part. The diseases that preoccupied colonial medicine in the nineteenth century were epidemic diseases, the communicable diseases of the cantonment, civil lines and plantations, the diseases that threatened European lives, military manpower and male productive labour. It is indeed surprising that despite looking into venereal diseases, examining women, keeping them under

supervision for treatment, the health of the woman was completely side-lined. Despite talks of eugenics and the need to produce healthy progeny, reproductive health was completely omitted. Such neglect of women's health can be traced to contemporary times too.

The Sanitary Commissioner Report of 1868 is considered to be one of the most important documents, particularly for the study of venereal diseases as the Contagious Diseases Act came into force in 1868. This was also a period of the rise of utilitarianism. Paucity of funds had affected the sanitary measures too which were taken quite seriously by the colonial government. Colonialism's political, cultural and hegemonic concerns were over and beyond the concern of the public health of the "natives". The control of venereal diseases which already had a limited scope, sidelined the health of the "criminal" prostitute even further. The Sanitary Commissioner Report of 1868 put forth its inability to prevent venereal diseases amongst the masses quite clearly. The excerpt below from the Sanitary Commissioner Report of 1868 speaks for itself regarding the public health measures taken for the prevention of venereal diseases in colonial India. The Sanitary Commissioner in this report talks about his limitations. It will be useful to point out that it was in 1868 when the measures for the prevention of venereal diseases were at its peak, and when the Contagious Diseases Act was introduced here in India.

With regard to paragraph 9 of the Resolution of the Government of India, I should wish to have all available information regarding Lock Hospitals now in operation in the Lower Provinces. I do not quite know where to obtain

such information; and perhaps it is not the wish of the Government that I should myself call for it.

If this be the case, I hope the Lieutenant Governor may see fit to issue such orders as may be necessary under the circumstances... .. It should be here observed that Indian Lock Hospitals are, as a rule, within the limits of military cantonments, regulated by a Cantonment Board of Health, and supported from cantonment funds... ..

If on the other hand, it is desired by the Government, that the lock hospital system should be extended generally beyond the limits of military cantonments, the greatest difficulty in the way of success will be the question of available public funds. The expense of effective establishments, organized for the protection of the general community must be considerable.

It seems, nevertheless, necessary to point to the fact that an absolute want of local funds may, in many cases, explain, why prophylactic measures, against contagious disease, are not effectually organized and carried through.

This one difficulty of “want of local funds” is for ever in the way of the Indian sanitarian, and it is but right that the fact should be fairly acknowledged... .. It is important to note that the funds at present allotted in India for the general protection of public health are altogether insufficient for the great object in view.

Perhaps His Honour the Lieutenant Governor may be pleased to call for information as to the amount of available funds in the districts of the lower provinces for such a purpose as the prevention of venereal disease amongst the masses... .. need to bring about enactments and especially to allot such imperial resources as to render it practicable for public hygiene to be worked in a manner which, under existing circumstances is quite beyond the scope of possible fulfilment (GOI 1868: 23).³⁸

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Communalism and the Writing of Medieval Indian History: A Reappraisal

by

Harbans Mukhia*

Until very recently the writing of medieval Indian history primarily turned on an eloquent enumeration of the glorious achievements of great emperors; equally eloquent was the description of their failures. One way or the other, the emperor stood at the centre of all that was considered worthy of the historian's concern.

One way or the other, the emperor stood at the centre of all that was considered worthy of the historian's concern. To a considerable extent this concern was inherited from the large number of Indian historians who wrote their books during the medieval centuries themselves, contemporaneously or near contemporaneously with the events they had narrated, the contemporary historians as we call them. These contemporary historians were invariably members of the imperial or the provincial court and were often partisans of one or the other faction of the intrigue-ridden polity. Not seldom did they actually participate in the events they had described; equally frequently they or their friends or relations were eye-witnesses to such events. Inevitably, arising from each historian's predilections, his version of events was at considerable variance with those of the others even as they described the same events.¹

Yet, there was much that they shared with one another. As members of the court, their attention was confined to their surroundings. The events they narrated were events in which the court's involvement was immediate and direct: accession of a ruler, rebellions against him, his conquests, administrative measures, punishments meted out by him as also rewards given, conspiracies hatched for or against him, his deposition or

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death, etc.² Even as the historians' sympathies varied, they were all concerned about the stability of the polity as a whole, though individually each might have liked it to lean in his direction, if only just a little.

Clearly the emperor was the pivot around which this whole polity revolved; he ruled on behalf of the entire ruling class, keeping all the factions together, dealing firmly with overambitious individuals or groups who tried to disrupt the overall unity and being benign to those who kept within the legitimate bounds. Understandably the emperors' actions drew a major share of contemporary historians' attention, both critical and appreciative, in medieval India.

Historians in medieval India also understood historical causation in terms of human volition or, at best, human nature or disposition. This understanding too had, in a manner, been conditioned by the historians' own daily experience. By virtue of their position in the court they were often participants in, or witnesses to, some of the events that formed part of their narrative; their experience was that rebellions occurred when so-and-so had, of his will, decided to rebel; that a king was deposed when a group of nobles decided among themselves to terminate his reign; that an emperor engaged himself in extensive conquests owing to his virile nature; that another emperor followed a policy of treating all his subjects alike, irrespective of the distinctions of creed, for so enlightened was his disposition. Willful decision, conditioned by the nature of each human being involved in the events with which the historians - were concerned, formed the basic cause of the occurrence of those events, as our historians saw it. Zia ud din Barani, author of two of the most outstanding works of history around the middle of the fourteenth century,³ raised this understanding to the level of fine theory. Every man's nature, according to Barani, comprised contradictory qualities and the events in which a man was involved were a manifestation of those qualities. A balanced mixture of those contradictory qualities resulted in success, whereas an unbalanced mixture led inevitably to failure in life.⁴

Understandably, if the historians' own experience taught them lessons in historical causation in their context, it was easy for them to explain similar events in the distant or near past in the same terms.

The explanation of historical causation in terms of human volition also implied the treatment of each historical event as a single, individual, independent event unrelated to the other events described in their works.⁵ For in the absence of a structural analysis, the only other framework of historical explanation, within which all events together constitute an integrated pattern and thereby lost their individual identities, was the one in which divine will intervened to cause the occurrence of events. Medieval European historians' framework was indeed the prototype of such an explanation. Clerics as those historians were, their whole outlook on life and letters was influenced by the theological doctrine in which all that happened in the past and the present and was to happen in the future was predetermined by god's will; which in turn implied that the events of the past, the present and the future formed a rightly knit whole as the manifestation of god's wisdom, for surely no event could occur at random unless it had been assigned its due place in god's all-embracing plan.⁶ But such was not the understanding of medieval India's courtier-historians, even when some of them happened to be theologians along with being courtiers and historians.⁷

If medieval Indian historians focused their attention on events pertaining directly or indirectly to the court and if they explained the occurrence of these events in terms of human will or nature, the ruler's will or nature would clearly occupy a critical element in the explanation in view of his pivotal position. Indeed personal qualities of the ruler inevitably became the all-too-important factor in the whole framework of explanation. Indeed, the events that occurred during a reign were seen as the manifestation of the personality of the ruler.⁸

Communal and Imperialist Historiography

There was, too, an implicit communal undertone in this framework. If the ruler's disposition, his personal qualities, mattered all that much in the making of history,

surely the fact that he was a Muslim ruling over a vast mass of Hindus would be a material factor in the whole assessment of history. And, of course, medieval centuries were not the time when the influence of religion had been eliminated from the thinking of humankind in any part of the world. It was easy therefore for some historians of medieval India to visualise contemporary history as the history of Muslim rule in India.⁹

Yet the framework of historical explanation in terms of human will/nature in its essentials contained a strong element of ambivalence that accommodated, for medieval centuries, a quite astonishingly secular historical thinking such as Abul Fazl's along with a fairly dogmatic Muslim statement such as Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni's. Indeed, the whole range of historical works written in medieval India swings in degrees from one to the other thinking, yet never overflowing the human will/nature syndrome.

This then was the ambivalent framework that British colonial historians had inherited from medieval India. It was, however, the singular mark of colonial historiography that it sought to eliminate the element of ambivalence from this framework, boldly explicate its latent communal undertone, and make a linear communal study of India's past the dominant, almost the exclusive trend. Such was the end result of James Mill's periodisation of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods¹⁰ which was to become the universally accepted periodisation for the study of Indian history for the next century and a half and continues to be nearly universally accepted in Indian universities today though with a new nomenclature: ancient, medieval and modern periods. An even bolder and more deliberate attempt was made by Elliot and Dowson's eight-volume *A History of India as told by its Own Historians*¹¹ which was a translation of excerpts from Persian-language historical works of medieval India. The selection of excerpts left little to the reader's imagination: invariably the translated passages aroused communal passions. Apparently, Elliot knew what he was doing, for the professed purpose of all his intellectual labour was "to teach the bombastic babus of India the virtues of good government they were enjoying" under the British rule compared to the misery of their fate when the Muslims governed them. If Elliot succeeded eminently in achieving his objective of inflaming passions, it was

largely because he had adopted a long familiar, durable framework but had drastically changed its emphasis.

The framework, however, still endured. Early in the twentieth century, especially during its second quarter, some historians vehemently contested the version of medieval Indian history that spoke only of Muslim rulers' oppression of the Hindus and of heroic Hindu resistance to it—the version given by British as well the Indian communal historians reflecting the communal wing of the Indian national movement. Communal historiography had a degree of variation in its outlook: Hindu communalism visualised the medieval centuries as a long period of alien Muslim dominance over the Hindus (the vast masses of the country's native people), the repeated attempts by the Muslim rulers to convert the Hindus to Islam or else to eliminate them and the heroic stubbornness of the Hindus in defence of their religion and the country's honour. Other stereotypes were also created: if the Hindus lost their battles to the Muslims, this was because of mutual dissensions;¹² if medieval Indian history was a story of unrelenting conflict between the two major communities, this was owing to the Muslims' determination to retain and assert their separate identity unlike their predecessors, the Greeks, the Sakas, the Huns etc, who also had immigrated from distant alien lands, but having once settled in this country had lost their independent identity in the mainstream of Indian (i e Hindu) life; Indian (i e Hindu) civilisation has always been known for its liberalism in embracing any element that comes to it with outstretched, friendly arms: it is the Muslims who refused to merge their separate identity in the mainstream of Indian (i c Hindu) life; indeed they sought to forcibly change the course Of this stream. This was the origin of communalism in India, etc. etc.¹³ Muslim communalists, on the other hand, considered those regions which overly asserted their Islamic identity as the peaks of Islamic glory. However, the basic assumption of both Hindu and Muslim communal historiography (as also the British) constituted the unity of their thought: they all visualised the Hindus and the Muslims in medieval India perpetually in conflict, deriving their evidence from the arena of political, indeed dynastic, history.

It was this notion of perpetual communal conflict in medieval India that the nationalist historians were contesting. They questioned the genuineness of the religious

motivation of Muslim rulers of medieval India; they brought forth evidence to suggest communal harmony in medieval India; they emphasized the considerable extent of mutual interaction between the two large communities, in the realm of ideas, in the realm of culture, in the realm of life-styles in the centuries past. It was from this emphasis that the concept of "composite culture" was evolved.¹⁴

The contribution made by nationalist historians in secularizing the study of medieval Indian History was by any standard extremely significant. However, they were contesting communal historiography really on -the latter's terms. If communal historiography brought forth evidence to suggest Muslim oppression of Hindu subjects, nationalist historians cited cases of tolerance shown by Muslim rulers; if communal historiography highlighted instances of conflict between communities, nationalist historiography brought into relief other instances of cooperation between them. Both groups of historians studied mainly politico-administrative history and drew their evidence by and large from court chronicles. If communal historians over emphasised one part of evidence and covered up another, nationalist historians did much the same, though with a contrary, and admittedly more laudable, objective.

Clearly, this was rather a weak offensive against communal (and imperialist) historiography, for once the study of medieval Indian history in terms of the ruler's religious policy was conceded, the evidence overwhelmingly inclined towards the communal viewpoint. On this premise, nationalist; historians, while lauding Akbar's achievements, handed over the other six-and-a-half centuries of "Muslim" rule to communal historiography. It is interesting that when it comes to Akbar, the language of the nationalist and the communal historians becomes utterly interchangeable. This is essentially a communal vision, for by lauding Akbar's religious achievements, the validity of that historical methodology is established which seeks to evaluate all of medieval Indian rulers in terms of their religious attitudes. Akbar clearly becomes an exception, which merely proved the rule.

Fundamentally, therefore, even in nationalist historiography, the categories of historical analysis remained communal. So long as the categories of one's analysis

remained Hindu and Muslim, whether one argued on behalf of communal conflict or communal harmony, one's thinking still remained limited to the confines of those communal categories. The logic of both the communal as well as the nationalist historians emanated from a common assumption of the existence of separate communal identities; so long as thinking was based on communal categories, this assumption was inescapable.

If there was no escape from this assumption, it was because this was in fact the assumption of the national movement itself and was common to both its nationalist and communalist wings. Both the chief antagonists during the national movement, the Congress and the Muslim League, proceeded with their politics based on the recognition of the existence of separate communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. The politics of one stressed rapprochement between them and that of the other their irreconcilability. The common basic assumption often permitted an easy transition from one to the other; a slight shift into each other's direction would often bring them to a common meeting ground; it also permitted easy shifts in individual loyalties. Starting from the basic assumption, from the very categories of social analysis and political agitation which were communal, the "nationalist" politics as represented by the Congress carried far more than a "tinge" of communalism;¹⁵ communalism was integral to the politics, through its silent, non-violent manifestation. The Muslim League, starting from the same categories of analysis, charted off to its not-so-silent manifestation. Conceptually, nationalism and communalism in India had much in common with each other even if historically they were each other's negation.

It was this dichotomy, conceptually questionable but historically significant, that was reflected in the dichotomy of communal and nationalist historiography of medieval India.

The New Shift in Focus

The circle was broken from the 1960's onwards. This was the period when research was initiated on new themes altogether in which communal categories did not enter at all. These were themes like rural class structure, forms and magnitude of

exploitation of medieval Indian peasantry, the significance of *zamindars* as a class, production technology, trade and commercial organization, etc. An important role in this shift of focus was played by research on what came felicitously to be called "early medieval India" in Professor R S Sharma's terminology. This research made two significant contributions: one, it implicitly questioned the earlier, clearly communal, periodisation which divided medieval from ancient India at 1206 A D, with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, for it, again implicitly, opened up the possibility of seeing an extensive continuum of social and economic history from around the seventh or eighth to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, even as important changes occurred within the range of this continuum; two, it decisively shifted the emphasis from politico-administrative to socio-economic history, where communal categories in any case lost much of their significance.

As more research is done in newer areas, the very communal problematic— the relations between the Muslim dynasties and Hindu subjects or the extent of theocratic nature of the state in Medieval India, etc.— is being marginalised. There has been of late a movement of the study of history of medieval India towards society's lower end, indeed towards its lowest end: a study of the actual labour processes in the field and the workshop, at the hands of the peasant and the artisan. This involves a complex interaction of areas of study: to begin with, the ecology of a region, the nature and the fertility of its soil, the availability of water for irrigation, the duration of the sunshine etc; it involves also the given technology, the shape and size of the plough, the use of other implements and of course the knowledge and practice of agricultural techniques such as crop rotation or preparing of manures or the treatment of plant diseases; above all, it calls for a study of social organization of labour utilisation: whether labour is servile or free, whether the system allows the actual producer freedom from extraneous control over his process of production or not, whether the system permits mobility to the peasant or not. The attempt is to study the production system in all its multi-faceted totality. Similarly, the labour of the artisan is being examined. The very complexity of this study allows religion merely the share that is its due in social life, along with the share of elements, instead of giving it the overarching importance it had attained in the history writing of medieval India for so long. It is in this sense that history writing is becoming profoundly secular.

(The paper was presented at the seminar on “Problems of the Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes”, New Delhi, August 6-7, 1983, and it seeks to reappraise the earlier essay, “the Medieval Indian History and the Communal Approach”, in Communalism and the Writing of Indian History, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969)

¹ The outstanding examples of the writings of Abul Fazl and Abdul Qadir Badauni, both courtiers of Akbar, represent an extreme case of variation in their versions of the same events; others would constitute somewhat milder examples.

² There is at best a vertical growth in the contents of these works: from a mere narration of the stories of accession of rulers and their battles etc., such as in Minhaj-us-Siraj’s *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, increasing information on allied themes such as administrative system, imperial policies, composition of nobility, etc., begins to get incorporated in their works, the two most outstanding examples of which are Zia-ud-din Barani’s *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi* for the Delhi Sultanate and Abul Fazl’s *Akbar Nama* for Akbar’s reign. There is, however, little horizontal growth in the contents of these works which would extend to matters of no immediate concern to the ruling class.

³ *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, English translation by M Habib and Mrs Afsar Khan under the title *Political Theory of the Delhi Sultanate*, Allahabad, and *Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*, Saiyad Ahmad Khan (ed.), Calcutta, 1862. The whole of the *Tarikh* is yet to be translated from Persian into any other language though portions of it have been rendered into English by Elliot and Dowson and into Hindi by S A A Rizvi.

⁴ Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* (tr), pp 85-89.

⁵ Corroboration for this statement is found in the very style of writing of all medieval Indian historians. They break their narrative of history into regnal units and the reign of the contemporary ruler is mostly further broken into an annual chronicle. Within the regnal the annalistic form, the narration of each event begins with the statement, “...and another event that took place during this reign (or in this year) was...” or “another occurrence of this year was...”. One event having been described, they move on to the narration of the next event prefacing it with the same preamble.

⁶ See Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, 1946, p. 55.

⁷ Peter Hardy, (*Historians of Medieval India*, London 1960) has suggested that medieval Indian historians treated history as a branch of theology and that historical causation in their conception lay in divine will. Hardy appears to have overlooked the very substantial difference in the social, intellectual and political contexts as well as the social position of medieval Indian and medieval European historians in seeking to establish uniformity of historical approach between them.

⁸ For details of the argument advanced so far, as also for its empirical basis, see Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1976.

⁹ Thus for example Badauni reconstructs the history of India from the day Islam had made its political appearance here. Significantly, he does not begin his book with the Muslim conquest of Sind, for “Islam could not be stabilised in this region” after Muhammad bin Qasim’s death; on the other hand, since it was “*Nasir-ud-din Subuktgin* whose son was Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, who led annual expeditions to India with the intention of waging holy wars, and Lahore became the capital during the reign of his descendants, and moreover (since) Islam was never (therefore) eliminated from this land” Badauni considers it proper to begin his history with Subuktgin. See his *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh*, Vol. I, p. 8.

¹⁰ James Mill, *History of British India*.

¹¹ Trubner and Company, London, 1867 – 1877.

¹² The only available evidence for this all-encompassing theory is the alleged refusal of Jai Chand of Kannauj to come to the aid of Prithvi Raj Chauhan at the second battle of Tarain against Muhammad Ghori. Quite apart from the fact that one piece of evidence, even if true, does not substantiate a theory of such dimensions, this theory ignores the fact that Prithvi Raj did not get help from other rulers. Secondly, the assumption underlying this theory is that individually the Indian rulers were quite weak vis-à-vis their alien adversaries, but collectively they would have been invincible. This assumption is made contrary to all available evidence which invariably points to many times more numerous Indian soldiers in the field of battle than the Turks. Clearly, addition of more soldiers could hardly have improved the prospects of victory. The causes of defeat lay elsewhere than in inferior manpower; they lay in the obsolete methods of utilising this manpower.

¹³ This appears a reasonable enough statement on the face of it. However, under it lies a methodological flaw and communal logic. The flaw rests on making a comparison between two incomparable phenomena. While the Greeks, Huns, etc., have been identified on the secular basis of the country of their origin or of their race, Muslims have been given their identity in terms of their religion. Clearly, the two bases of identification are far from identical, and the comparison therefore is questionable. If, however, identical bases of identification for all of them were adopted, the problem would be posed as follows: the Greeks, the Huns, the Sakas, the Scythians etc came to India and over time lost their identity in the mainstream of Indian life; what about the Mamluks, the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs and even the Mughals? Have they retained their separate identity to this day, or has it been merged in the mainstream of Indian life? Evidently, the answer is quite unambiguous, for there is hardly anyone around to claim descent from all those dynasties that had migrated to India in the medieval age and had ruled here for so many centuries. Where have the descendants of all those dynasties and their nobles gone? Surely they have merged their identity, like their predecessor-immigrants, in the mainstream of Indian life and enriched it in the process. But then the whole argument in this unequal comparison is communal; not only does it identify Muslims on the basis of their religion, it also quietly identifies Indian mainstream with Hindu mainstream. The argument is thus posed in veiled communal categories.

¹⁴ The concept of composite culture was the especial contribution of the Allahabad school of historians: Professor Tara Chand, R P Tripathi and B P Saxena, in particular. Though Professor Muhammad Habib was situated at the Aligarh Muslim University, historiographically he too belonged to the same school.

¹⁵ Bipan Chandra, "Hindu Tinge in the National Movement" (mimeograph)

Interview/ Dwijendra Narayan Jha

Q. Let me begin by suggesting that the historian's craft is under increased scrutiny today, due to the necessity of their role as public intellectuals as well as towards whom their positions can be seen as being aligned. Do you agree?

The historian's craft is under scrutiny by those who don't know history or those whose understanding of the past is based on faith. It is under increased scrutiny now because the RSS backed political party is in power which is afraid of scientific history.

Q. A recent statement has appeared, signed by 46 historians in reply to the previous statement signed by you, Professor Irfan Habib, Professor Romila Thapar and others. It states that the Leftist school in Indian history had produced a "legislated history which has presented an alienating and debilitating self-image to generations of Indian students and promoted contempt for their civilizational history". In the same statement they have asserted that they are against attempts to portray India's past as a glorious and perfect age. Amongst the signees one of them is Dr. Dilip K. Chakrabarti. What do you make of this statement?

The assertions made in the statement are baseless. In fact, its signatories have indulged in shadow boxing...there was no legislated history written by any serious historian. What they mean—and this is their routine allegation---that history writing in India has been dominated by Leftists and liberals. But this is hardly true. Very few among Indian historians can be labeled as Marxists. Even those who are Marxists seldom agree on historical interpretations. In other words, there may be isolated Marxists or Leftists but there is no Marxist school of historiography in India. Any one who disagrees with the Hindu Right is dubbed a Leftist. Most of the historians are either unmarxists or antimarxists.

I may add that several scholars among the 46 signatories of the statement you are referring to are the beneficiaries of the so called Leftist dispensation. They are hypocrites.

Q. In your book the *Myth of the Holy Cow* you had questioned the Hindutva vision of a glorious Hindu vegetarian cow worshipping culture. You were writing against

the grain, against what was till then believed to be the hegemonic, rhetorical sense of public memory. What were your main contentions and what sort of a backlash did you have to face for the same?

India has never been a wholly vegetarian country and so the vision of a glorious Hindu vegetarian worshipping a cow is ridiculous. There is ample textual evidence to show that animal food has been quite common among the people including the Brahmins. The Vedic texts testify to killing of animals including the cow for food and sacrifice by the Brahmins and so do the Smriti texts. Vegetarianism in India has to be seen against the background of religious developments and ecology. As for the Brahmins, as you know, they are not vegetarians throughout the country. While most Brahmins in south India are vegetarians, there are very few vegetarian brahmins in eastern India (Bihar, Bengal etc).

I have had to face a backlash when I published my book not because I contested the imagined vegetarianism of the Brahmins but because the Hindutva brigade is in the habit of creating problems if one speaks or writes against its foolish ideas.

Q. Just when we were decrying the incidents in Bangladesh leading to the deaths of Avijit Roy, Washikur Rahman, came the horrific murders of Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi. Does this dishearten you?

The murder of rationalists is condemnable; it is an assault on reason. Intellectuals have come forward to oppose this, which is an indication of their resolve to fight against obscurantism.

Q. While the academia had always fought on methodological issues, interpretations, etc., and never really seen eye to eye on political issues, today there is an increased effort to bring together academics, artists, and performers to a particular camp. Is that a sense you get or does it appear this way because of the right wings' failure to attract intellectuals over the years, thereby the desperation when it control's the state's resources?

The intellectuals have differed and will differ on various issues but one should not expect them to remain silent when there is persistent attack on reason. That is why intellectuals and academics have come together to fight against the atmosphere of intolerance. This coming together has not been consciously organised, it is spontaneous. The right wing had never any following among the serious intellectuals; they cannot see

beyond Savarkar and Golwalkar. Tell me who is their Amartya Sen, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra? None, I'm sure.

Q. In the mainstream media there is often this argument of counterbalancing 2002 against 1984 and a suggestion that those crying foul today have forgotten the atrocities of the past. A contemporary historian also has to stand in as witness to the bygone. You have also seen both 1984 and 2002. What do you make of the binary arguments?

I have seen both 1984 and 2002. As far as I know the intellectuals opposed the horrible killings of both 1984 and 2002. What about the RSS? It was silent as pointed out rightly by Navalakha in his interview.

Q. For many years now historians have analyzed many myths and debunked them after thorough scholarly analyses. Right from your work on beef-eating, which we spoke about, to Uma Chakravarty's work on the Vedic Dasi positing it against the pride of place held by a Maitreyi or a Gargi. Let us for the moment look at the colonial era myth of the Brahmanical religion having propagated peace in early India. You have argued against this. With the Indian civilization being pushed back further and further, do you fear that the Aryan discourse, of which you had also partaken, would be brought to the fore once again?

The Aryan problem is more or less settled for professional historians according to whom the Aryans came from the northwest. They have discarded the Aryan_invasion_theory and have been arguing in favour of the migration theory. But the question remains very much part of the Right Wing discourse. The Hindu Right groups (they have no credible professional historians) are never tired of repeating that the Aryans were indigenous people and that they were the authors of the Harappa civilization. They are suffering from an incurable antiquity frenzy and their favourite pastime is to claim greater and greater antiquity for the Aryan civilization and Hinduism.

Q. There was earlier a suggestion from India's External Affairs Minister for making Gita a national scripture while recently in the debate on Constitution Day there was the revival of an age old suggestion of how 'secularism' was a western import and imposition which Ambedkar was not in favour of. Raising the bogeyman once again you think?

The Gita has meant different things to different people in different ages which is why it has a large number of commentaries—recently a scholar has counted as many as 227.

Not surprisingly the first translator of the text, Charles Wilkins, asserted that this small text has more comments than Revelations. But two basic facts remain uncontested: the Gita is a book of war and it provides justification for caste—these are facts that fit into the RSS scheme of things. They are at war with religious minorities and are upholders of the upper caste ideology. This is the reason why the RSS and its affiliates have enlisted it for the propagation of the Sanatana Dharma. When Sushma Swaraj made the ridiculous suggestion that the Gita should be declared the national scripture or Narendra Modi presented its copy to the Japanese prime minister, or when the Haryana Chief Minister made it a prescribed reading in schools they assigned a hegemonic status to the Gita and the Sanatana Dharma in a country like ours with enormous religious diversity. This to my mind is a communal act.

As regards Ambedkar not being in favour of secularism, perhaps I am not the right person to comment on the constituent assembly debates. But I can say that the issue of caste weighed heavily on him and not communalism.

Q. You have also written and spoken about the historicity of caste. Mohan Bhagwat's statement on caste requiring re-evaluation was said to have led to BJP's defeat in the recent Vidhan Sabha elections in Bihar. Your comments on the same.

Mohan Bhagwat's statement demanding a revaluation of the reservation policy seems to have had an impact on Bihar elections. In principle, there is nothing wrong in reviewing govt policies from time to time and criticize the govt for certain policies. But it all depends on the context.

Q. While the philosophy of history of history has always accommodated a multiplicity of meanings, there is however, a problem with this because the argument can then be extended to suggest that every narrative of the past is valid, the hindutva version included. Do you believe the same? Should history be accommodative of all forms of reading the past? I am reminded specifically here of your – “How history was unmade at Nalanda”, in reply to Arun Shourie.

Only that history is valid which is based on a rigorous examination of the sources. The Hindutva version of history is not based on critical analysis of the sources. It is mythification of history. This is clear from the manner in which ancient texts like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are taken at their face value.

In my view students of ancient Indian history will be well advised to consult these texts but interpret them in conjunction with other sources. Taking ancient texts at their face value would lead to grossly misleading statements about the past and to the denial of scientific knowledge.

Interviewed on behalf of JSHC by Rohit Dutta Roy.

Interviewee Bio:

Dwijendra Narayan Jha has been a Professor of History at the University of Delhi and a member of the Indian Council of Historical Research. He is regarded as an authority on Early India. Some of his published works include *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Traditions* (New Delhi: Matrix Books, 2001), *Myth of the Holy Cow* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2009) & *Economy and Society in Early India: Issues and Paradigms* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1993)

Interview/ Sugata Bose

Q. In 2003, speaking on Kashmir as part of the Glenn Miller Lecture Series, you had highlighted how the social fabric of the region was not just a product of seamless religious syncretism as later day political proponents of Kashmiriyat have claimed but more of a creative accommodation of differences. You were hinting at the autonomy the region enjoyed even under Akbar's claim of sovereignty, leaving space for local authorities as well as the preservation of a regional identity. In the melee of a nationalist discourse, how do you see the complexities today? You did recently reiterate what you had said earlier on the issue, that the centre should not treat Kashmir as a real estate dispute. Also, has the creative accommodation of differences lost out somewhere in the urgent need to oppose the state?

One has to respect differences in order to transcend them. Kashmiris knew how to do so ever since the days of Lal Ded and Sheikh Nooruddin. The exigencies of the current political protest may have temporarily undermined the long tradition of creative accommodation of differences. It can be rekindled if the state takes the initiative to have a people-centred rather than a territory-centred approach to the Kashmir problem. The first necessity is to discard colonial definitions of sovereignty and borders and instead rely on rich resources in pre-colonial and anti-colonial Indian political thought on layered and shared sovereignty. We can also learn from political experiments in other parts of the world. The British and the Irish redefined sovereignty in order to reach the Good Friday agreement on Northern Ireland in 1998. A conceptual shift often needs to precede a breakthrough in a political logjam.

Q. During the course of the same lecture you said that 'the state system has to bend if not to break'? People in this country have always had a problem with a unitary nation-state propped up on a quasi federal structure and insist on maintaining the idea enshrined in our constitution that India is a union of states. It is evident today with protests in Una, food preferences being challenged by majoritarian principle. Have the prioritization of the national agenda adversely affected our federalism? What are your thoughts?

Since independence we have had a state structure that is federal in form but by and large unitary in substance. This is because we inherited the unitary centre of the British raj in 1947. During the last seven decades a certain tension has emerged between a slow-changing state structure and fast-moving democratic processes that have tended towards a more federal polity. Federalism is not just about the autonomy of states. It is also about an equitable sharing of power at the centre. That is why federalism needs to be a key principle on our national agenda. The resort to religious majoritarianism will foment further division and alienation. A free and flexible federal union will in the long run prove to be a stronger Indian union.

Q. After the murders of Pansare, Kalburgi and Dabholkar, there were widespread protests among artists, scholars, professors, and intellectuals from all walks of society. Awards were returned, public meetings organized, etc. Then there were the Muzaffarnagar riots and Akhlaq's lynching. What do you think is the role of a public intellectual in these troubled times?

The role of a public intellectual is to speak out without fear. The return of state honours is an age-old method of recording dissent. The meaning of *Akhlaq* is ethics. Artists, professor and scholars should contribute to the public debate about the ethics of good governance.

Q. In your speech in Parliament on the issue of intolerance you highlighted the need for constitutional morality espoused by Dr. Ambedkar, because some members of the Government according to you were "spreading a virulent form of prejudice and bigotry". You also said that "tolerance is not good enough". What is this notion of constitutional morality? Also, is the idea of tolerance itself hinged on differential parameters of majority and minority?

Dr. Ambedkar invoked the concept of constitutional morality described by Grote, the historian of Greece, as "a paramount reverence for the forms of the Constitution enforcing obedience to authority acting under and within these forms...yet combined with the habit of open speech...and unrestrained censure of those very authorities as to all their public acts." "Constitutional morality," Dr. Ambedkar had contended, "is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realize that our people have yet to learn it." In the course of the constituent assembly debates Zairul-Hassan Lari pointed out that constitutional morality was a value that not just citizens but also the government must learn. The spirit underlying the constitution and not just the words must guide and restrain the government. We must go well beyond tolerance and foster cultural intimacy among India's diverse communities.

Q. The minorities and marginalized people are increasingly being threatened with murder or being raped on the mere suspicion of carrying beef. 'Majoritarian triumphalism' as you termed it in Parliament is an increasing threat in our times. Do our lawmakers and the executive have to answer for this? Additionally, is there something seriously wrong with our pedagogy that youngsters nowadays are not aware of the history of meat eating or dietary preferences across cultures?

The beef issue is one symptom of majoritarian triumphalism. While it is important for our young generation to be taught to respect dietary preferences of others, it is even more important for them to learn the true meaning of majority and minority in a democracy. Dr. Ambedkar had said, "The minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority...They have loyally accepted the rule of the majority which is basically a communal majority and not a political majority. It is for the majority to realize its duty not to discriminate against minorities." I would go a step further and question why we should privilege the religious distinction in defining majority and minority. In a true democracy a majority should be earned and not handed out on a pre-fabricated religious platter.

Q. “Nationalism” you mentioned in Parliament on the debate over Rohith Vemula’s death, “can be a truly Janus faced phenomenon”. But this debate over nationalism or national interests running roughshod over individual aspirations or divergent views is not new. In Independent India we have examples of the emergency, the Babri Masjid Demolition, etc. Even in pre-colonial times there were voices like Tagore’s, who spoke out against excesses committed in the name of the Swadeshi movement. Are we yet to be comfortable as a democracy to be more accommodative of different ideas and definitions of nationalism?

This is not a problem specific to Indian democracy. We are living through an historical moment similar to that of one hundred years ago when narrow nationalism bedevilled the working of formal democracies. For example, the rhetoric of Donald Trump is today making a mockery of democracy in America. In India we have fortunately always had sage voices warning against the hubris of the more selfish and arrogant forms of nationalism even in the days of our freedom struggle. We need to rescue nationalism from the clutches of chauvinists and religion from the stranglehold of religious bigots. We should nurture the more generous forms of nationalism that instil a spirit of service and inspire creative faculties among our people.

Q. You have authored notable monographs on agrarian studies in Bengal. In *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1970*, “In 1970” you write, “... the agrarian scene in Bengal was marked by scarcity of people and vast stretches of uncultivable fertile land. Two centuries later, land in the two Bengals has some of the highest densities of population and some of the lowest yields of production in the world”. The Singur verdict was passed on 31st of August, 2016, in which the land acquisition was quashed. Justice Arun Mishra faulting it on irregularities and failure to follow due processes while Justice V. Gopala Gowda faulted the acquisition altogether, suggesting that land acquired for private industrial setups, no matter the employment generation involved, cannot be seen as falling under public purpose. In a sense excluding the land acquisition from the purview of the 1894 Land Acquisition Act. We know that it might not be possible for you to separate the political, in this case the organizational from the academic perspective but as a scholar of agrarian history how do you see the Singur verdict?

In *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital* I had written about the demographic transition since the great famine of 1770 and offered an interpretation of agrarian change over the next two centuries. In addition to demography, I had noted the significance of market forces and the agrarian class structure as explanatory variables. On the Singur verdict, as an agrarian historian I agree with Justice V. Gopala Gowda’s line of reasoning. I am glad that at last our highest court has taken the question of public purpose seriously in reaching a judgment.

Q. As is widely known and you have also mentioned in the book that unbridled demographic growth or population pressure can create a burden on the land and sustenance for its tillers leading to malnutrition and hunger. This was also one of the

arguments used by the Left when it pushed for speedy industrialization, which among other areas included Singur. There is also the contrarian view that this population pressure could lead to innovations in agriculture. While the jury is still out on it, how do you look at industrialization in the context of fertile landscapes like West Bengal? Is it possible to have a different industrial model, which the Left perhaps failed to see, even when there is high competition among states in India?

In my academic work I had accepted the theory that demographic pressure could and did lead to innovations in agriculture. At the same time, I noted that by the late twentieth century there was a desperate need for employment-generating industries. However, we need a change of mind-set in terms how we go about seeking investment for new industries. Instead of offering special privileges to particular business houses and selling out the legitimate rights of peasant smallholders, we should create an attractive, transparent and competitive environment with particular attention to physical and social infrastructure as well as a level playing field for potential investors.

Q. Vivekananda has been thoroughly appropriated today by the right. How was it possible for the right to appropriate him without any murmur or protest as such? Not only did the BJP use Vivekananda as their main icon, even candidates from the BJP's student wing fighting for union elections in universities like JNU carry pamphlets with Vivekananda's image on them, as if this grants their campaign sanctity. Do you believe this is a correct appraisal of his work or his lifelong positions? One is of course reminded of the *Organizer* selectively quoting Vivekananda even during 1992 – 1993.

It was so easy to appropriate a figure like Swami Vivekananda because the self-avowed secularists had ceded the domain of religion to the religious bigots. Religious faith cannot be reduced to communalism in the pejorative sense of that word. Vivekananda had a remarkable breadth of outlook on religion and caste. Young people should read his speeches and writings that go completely against the grain of what the cow vigilantes and their patrons stand for today.

Q. With the release of new documents of Netaji there have been attempts to appropriate Netaji's legacy by almost all political outfits. What is the relevance of Subhas Chandra Bose today?

Subhas Chandra Bose remains relevant today as a unique example of generous leadership that successfully united all religious communities and linguistic groups. He won the absolute trust of the minorities because of his fair-mindedness. His egalitarian vision encapsulated in the concept of "samyavada" is also salient in an era of increasing inequalities.

Q. Without getting into the controversy surrounding his death and ways to latch on to it, is this attempt of the right wing guided by what they perceived as Subhas Chandra Bose's yearning for authoritarian rule the first few years post Independence.

Is this reception then pitted against what they see as Nehru's feeble democracy, which ceded space to everyone whether opponents within his party or outside?

The younger generation should learn from Netaji's book of life. Even though Subhas Chandra Bose spoke of a strong state authority in three or four lectures/essays to carry through radical social and economic reforms in the early years after independence, the entire corpus of his works reveal a deep and abiding commitment to the principles of federalism and democracy, including inner-party democracy. If there is to be a legitimate critique of the Nehruvian era after independence, it should be directed at his ill-conceived authoritarianism in Kashmir and the Northeast. The febleness of his post-colonial democracy was revealed not in attempts at consensus-building but in the abject failures to deliver in the fields of primary education and healthcare.

Q. JSHC's present issue is on the differing notions of secularism. Students of Indian History are aware of both Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru's contribution to the ideological processes that shaped a secular India. Bose was religious while Nehru was agnostic, if not an atheist. One celebrated religio-cultural differences and an environment which fostered their mutual interdependence while the other wanted a neutral state espousing a culture built on rationality, science and allowing the right to question religion itself. What were the basic tenets of their secular ideals which helped evolve an idea of India? Did their thoughts converge on the secular credentials of a nation?

Subhas Chandra Bose was less impatient with the expression of religious and cultural differences than Jawaharlal Nehru. In this respect, he was closer to Gandhi and Tagore in believing that only by respecting differences can you rise above them. Yet Bose was different from Gandhi who until the 1920s was not in favour of inter-dining or inter-marriage. The value of cultural intimacy among our diverse communities was the foundation of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's political philosophy. "Democracy," he told the Maharashtra provincial conference over which he presided in 1928, "is by no means a Western institution; it is a human institution." India, he believed, should become "an independent Federal Republic". He warned Indian nationalists not to become "a queer mixture of political democrats and social conservatives" in matters to do with class, community, caste and gender. While not being opposed to "any patch-up work" needed for "healing communal sores", he sought a "deeper remedy" through "cultural rapprochement". He regretted that the different communities inhabiting India were "too exclusive". "Fanaticism is the greatest thorn in the path of cultural intimacy," he told his audience, "and there is no better remedy for fanaticism than secular and scientific education." This was the first occasion on which Netaji used the term secular. For him secularism was not hostile to religiously informed cultural identities, but could help foster "cultural intimacy" among India's diverse religious communities. So there were elements of convergence and divergence in Nehru and Bose's thoughts on the secular credentials of a nation. Nehru tended towards a secular uniformity that was uncomfortable with the notion of difference. Bose's secularism, by contrast, embraced difference to forge unity. It was this accomplishment of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose that Mahatma Gandhi came to admire in the last years of his life.

Interviewed on behalf of JSHC by Rohit Dutta Roy.

Interviewee Bio:

Professor Sugata Bose is Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs and a Member of Parliament in India. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. His books include *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) and *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.). He was a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1997.

Book Review / Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta.

White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550, Second Edition.

Winthrop D. Jordan. With new forewords by Christopher Leslie Brown and Peter H. Wood. The University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina, 2012. Pp. 696 : ISBN: 978-0-8078-7141-6. USD 35.

Winthrop D. Jordan published his seminal work *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* in 1968. This was an exhaustive study focusing on the evolution of the racial attitudes and perception of white Americans and the English towards the blacks. This evolution was studied from the context of differential parameters incorporated to justify slavery based on race and how the ideas of justice and liberty were reserved for the whites only. In this book Jordan tries to answer certain pertinent questions about the origin and development of racism and discrimination against the blacks. Divided into five distinct sections the book tries to explain the early attitude of the English settlers towards the Africans and the evolution of the beliefs that subsequently led to chattel slavery in Africa. This book came at a very worthy moment when America was witnessing one of the most tumultuous social upheavals in history, the racial attitudes of the white Americans were under question and the racial approach of an entire nation was under scrutiny. This lengthy text charts the alteration of black and Anglo-American relations from the initial kindly ambivalence to the imposition of laws to ensure a permanent state of inferiority for the black in the American society. The paradox of such laws lay in the rejection of moral ambitions for which both the whites and blacks had fought shoulder to shoulder in the Revolutionary War. To quote Jordan, it was during the “Revolutionary era [that] Americans ... realized for the first time that they had a racial problem on their hands [and] that the institution which their ideology condemned was founded on perceptions of physiological differences which they could do little or nothing about” (p.xi).

The influential book ran into its second edition in 2012 and had its foreword written by historians Peter H. Wood and Christopher Leslie Brown. Jordan's work is still the most authoritative works one can refer to while studying the history of racial discrimination and slavery in colonial America.

During the 1960s the question of race and race relations deeply consumed the American society. Jordan embarks on a journey comprising close analysis and careful interpretation of the first impressions that the 'black' or the 'negro' had on the English imperialist settlers. The comprehensive use of the primary sources reveals attitudes that were based on/influenced by the markers of skin colour, physique and religion. Numerous travel journals written by 16th century voyagers to West Africa reveal how the Englishman was utterly startled with the "differentness" of the African's skin colour. In addition to the "black" skin colour, the apparel and the religious practices of the natives also were elements of added research and discussion. Jordan sensitively unravels the various ideas and beliefs held by the European settlers about the evolution of the skin colour, facial features and the curious curly hair of the Africans.

One of the most popular beliefs was that the blackness of the Africans' skin had its roots in the biblical story where Ham is cursed for seeing his father Noah naked. Ham's son Canaan was cursed to be "a servant of servants unto his brothers." Rightly pointed out by Jordan this story was relevant in supporting the future prospects of slavery; however it states nothing about the skin colour. Hence, the reason behind this account retaining its significance to justify the skin colour of the Africans is still a perplexing idea. Some believed that it was the close proximity with the Sun that resulted in the blackness of the Africans. Hence, if moved to colder climates there were chances that the native Africans will become fairer. However, the baseless hypothesis was soon proved wrong as the English realized that the African's complexion was innate.

The next parameter of difference that Jordan discusses is the variant religious beliefs and rituals of the two races. An ontological question that Jordan asks here is why the English didn't find the Africans suitable for conversion to Christianity in the initial stages. He says "to eradicate the point of distinction which Englishmen found most familiar and most readily comprehensible" could lead to a psychological imbalance. The

English could not distinguish between the African's lasciviousness and savagery from his heathen religion. Hence he consciously chose to overlook the question of conversion which did only happen in the 18th century.

In the second part of *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Jordan talks about the 'provincial decades' primarily on the foundations of the development and the logical justification of oppression associated with slavery. The New World had its own set of necessities and the newly discovered expanses of land resources required (re)structuring of the social and economic systems. There existed a fine distinction between English servitude from slavery. Jordan didn't just identify this distinction but he also asserted that with time the limited nature of servitude in the New World ceased to exist substituted with an unnecessary/undesirable role. A close examination of the actions and the ideologies of the Spanish and Portuguese in initiating slavery unravels the deep influence they had in the establishment of English slavery as well. Jordan evidently points how the Spanish and Portuguese traders enslaved native Americans and Negroes for a lifetime and in this opportunity the English recognized chances of an extremely lucrative business. They started supplying slaves to the Spanish and Portuguese. Another remarkable aspect of Jordan's work is his analysis of chattel slavery and its gradual development in the New World. He particularly focuses on the geographical locations of New England and the colonies of Maryland and Virginia. It was the peculiar geographic conditions that ensured a variant trajectory of development of slavery in the southern colonies that was distinct from the northern parts. The settlers did not take much time in realizing that to develop the fertile lands of the south into strong agricultural reserves the number of workers needed to be increased. Hence there was a huge increase in the amount of slave importation from Africa. As a result by 1705 it became necessary for Virginia to create a body of codified laws in order to regulate the slaves.

On careful introspection one cannot deny the fact that Jordan strategically absolves the English from the responsibility of establishing a harsh labour system that pronounced perpetual bondage for not just the Negro but also his offsprings; and that too for generations. In the chapter titled "Unthinking Decision" he states how without any purposeful intention the English designed a system which stripped the entire Negro race

from any natural/human rights. Jordan suggests that the American slave system that grew in and around the early tobacco colonies was the result of a conglomeration of factors. To mention a few would be superficial information gathered from under-researched books, imitation of the foreigners and obviously the English reaction to the 'negro'. Though all these factors played significant roles in the establishment of the system however the foundational reason behind it still remained to be the skin colour of the black and how it was considered to be a marker of his inferior status as a human being.

In the third part of the book which is titled *The Revolutionary Era 1755-1783* Jordan discusses the influence and impact of the American Revolution on slavery as a system. Once the Indian and French War was over it became clear that the New World had evolved a society whose political, social and cultural ideologies were an amalgamation of English mores and immigrant folkways. Hence, the people that emerged of this fusion were not English anymore, but they were American. Jordan focuses on the implications of these new perceptions which resulted in an obvious political upheaval. This was also the time when the colonists were asserting to the fact that "all men were created equal" forcing an assessment of the treatment meted out to the blacks. Both the whites and the slaves hoped for a better future and consciously supported a struggle for independence against England. In addition, the affirmation of religious equality and natural rights theories pronounced a process of self-scrutiny leading to secularization of the 'ideology of equality' in colonies like Virginia. The growing system of slave labour, chances of impending slave retaliation and the loss of social and economic stability created an atmosphere of deep fear amongst the slave holders.

In the final two parts of the book, Jordan studies the society and the prevalent thoughts from 1793 to 1812. The primary element of study in these two sections is the germination and development of a national identity and its effects on the slaves. Jordan points out how the three-fifths compromise "was a practical resolution of political interests, but it embodied more logic than has commonly been supposed. For the slave was, by social definition, both property and man, simultaneously partaking of the qualities of both". Such an argument creates the chances of an ideological imbalance. The slave was considered a 'man' as long as he suited the socio-political and economic

needs of the political players and the slaveholders. He was in no way deemed worthy of the pursuit of happiness or the freedoms invoked in the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson. The 'manhood' of the slave was only determined by his natural physical attributes embodied by the two arms and legs, his fingers and his soul.

In spite of its vivid and descriptive approach, it is more than undeniable that the second half of *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* lacks the concise analysis evident in the first half. In addition, the typical use of dated terminology and exclusion of any historical analysis within the significant contexts of gender or capitalism are some of the questionable drawbacks. Furthermore, one can't help but notice the fact that Jordan doesn't include any "black voice" in the entire discussion of race and race relations. This might not be a prejudiced decision however it does mark the erasure of a very significant historical period. Often the information and the arguments in the second half appear repetitive and tiring. Nonetheless, one cannot help but accept that Jordan's seminal omnibus throws light on significant themes, attitudes and developments concerning the rise of slavery and racism in America. Jordan, through a process of logical analysis unravels the racial prejudices that were elementary in the development of the white man's world. A fitting product of its times, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* is undoubtedly an erudite source for understanding the development of racial prejudice and discrimination in the early days of the United States of America.

About the Author:

Winthrop D. Jordan (1931-2007) was a Professor of History at the University of Mississippi. Some of his other significant works include *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* and *White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. This particular work won numerous accolades including the 1968 Francis Parkman Prize, Society of American Historians, the 1968 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award, Phi Beta Kappa, the 1969 National Book Award and the 1969 Bancroft Prize, Columbia University.

Review of *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550*, Second Edition. By Winthrop D. Jordan. With new forewords by Christopher Leslie Brown and Peter H. Wood. The University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina, 2012. Pp. 696 : ISBN: 978-0-8078-7141-6. USD 35.

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Acknowledgement

As we publish JSHC's second issue for our readers we are constantly reminded of the contributions of all those who have stood by us throughout the past two years. We have indeed come long way from the initial stages of conceptualizing JSHC and the publication of our first issue.

Our editorial advisors have always been of great help. Our peer reviewers, web developer and editorial assistants everybody have done their bit. Among our editorial assistants Shinjini Chattopadhyay and Sneha Jha deserve special mention for taking out time from their research schedules and aiding the internal processes. Our web designer Bhuvan Singla completed the design changes to our issue and redeveloped the website from scratch at a moment's notice – a herculean task for which we can never thank him enough.

All our peer reviewers and members of the editorial team along with our editorial assistants worked tirelessly to help us publish the second issue of JSHC. It has been a collective effort all along.

Ranita Chakraborty Dasgupta's book review is a wonderful addition to this issue.

We are grateful to Professor Dwijendra Narayan Jha, who welcomed us to his home, and gave us an interview which provides an insight into an academic's viewpoint of all that ails us in South Asia.

We would like to thank Professor Harbans Mukhia, who readily agreed to write a special article for us, also giving us permission to reprint one of his earlier works. The reprint section as we have constantly maintained is an important link between works which are as relevant today as they were when they were first published. Professor Mukhia's article is self explanatory in this regard. It gives us an important insight into the continued use and abuse of history.

We are glad that Professor Sugata Bose could take out time for the interview despite his teaching and research commitments.

Journal of Studies in History & Culture

To all others who this acknowledgement may have missed out, your effort is what helps us to continue publishing JSHC.

The Editorial Team