THE GENDER OF THE NATION: ALLEGORIC FEMININITY AND WOMEN'S STATUS IN BENGAL AND GOA

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This joint paper is the outcome of collaborative efforts through joint teaching and joint publication. Our central aim is to compare the nationalist period in India – when gender was endorsed both as an ideal and an ideological program, to the post-independence era. Our comparative analysis tries to understand the status and social role of women after Indian independence, when they were drawn into the nationalist movement through their participation in the mission of cleansing the earth-land, the mother land. Adopting an anthropological and historical approach to women in Bengal and Goa, we are theoretically concerned with postcolonial gender construction, and the meaning of "woman" within contemporary national constructs of the personhood.

The first issue that we address in this paper is the articulation of gender and Indian nationalism. We are not, however, critiquing the topic of the alleged feminizing of male Indian nationalists vs. British imperial virility; nor the way the feminine gender in India has been incorporated in the discourses and representations of the nationalist agenda.

As Ray suggested, femininity has long been theorized as a non-identity, securing an illusion of male phallic plenitude (Ray 2000: 7). Gandhi offered a new approach to this perspective; indeed, Gandhi's life-long fight on behalf of the untouchables had as its counterpart his modern concerns towards women. According to Gandhi's conception of the essential oneness of humanity, men and women could not be regarded as different in essence. On the other hand in his nationalist project for independence, women played a decisive role, both as symbols and as makers of the future nation.

Despite this fact, however, we must acknowledge some ambivalence in Gandhi's ideology. In addressing to women Gandhi argued that they should rebel against men and refuse to be treated as things or as objects of lust. He insisted firmly that women had a superior capacity compared to men in their ability to work out the cause of truth and *ahimsa*. But the strong moral power and courage of women would only be exercised provided they remained true to their nature. Gandhi maintained that at the core of a woman's nature were the personification of self-sacrifice, the embodiment of silent suffering, and the incarnation of *ahimsa*, non-violence. Being careful not to oversimplify his ideas, we would suggest that Gandhi's perspective of Indian women encompassed a syllogism: women represented, to a large

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extent, the symbol of the nation, of which the core was Hinduism, that is, India's tradition, therefore the nationalist project made women effective repositories of tradition.

It was Gandhi who managed to "temporarily" deconstruct the unseen yet unquestionably observed cultural code of conduct that caused separation between gender and social spaces. Nationalists' debates and discourses were not privatized; instead, they were publicly discussed and argued out. Although the nationalist movement in its effort to dismantle the colonial presence in India took on a feminized character, its symbolism was female in tone and meaning. Gandhi in particular among the (male) nationalists is believed to have played a crucial role in the "feminization" of nationalist activity. To liberate the motherland was tantamount to protecting women's "purity" by deploying a rhetoric of (Indian) female exceptionalism and purity (Roy 1998: 139). With women's purity serving as the underlying signification for the cause of fighting for liberation, the nationalists' anti colonial movement took on an Indianized symbol through the feminization of land and political actions. The pioneer women's movement was not at the vanguard of the feminist movement; first and foremost there was a singular central concern, the nation. Female fighters, especially Sarojini, critiqued Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India* (1927) for speaking on behalf of all Indian women. She understood that through the nationalist movement "women's uplift could only strengthen male nationalist demands rather than be counter posed against them" (Roy 1998: 141).

Gandhi did combine what he saw as the strong ties between religious ideals and nationalism. The country, *Bande Mataram*, was positioned alongside the highest of Hindu religious ideals.[1] It is clear that he drew the connection between Durga, the mother goddess, with India, the country, also symbolized as the deified earth, or the sacred mother/woman and land. The earth Sita-femaleness was physically the land, the country and the feminine deity. As claimed by Sarkar,

> The Mother land has become the Mother Goddess, dominating the world of Gods and demanding the highest sacrifice from all. The special Implications of all this for women, held to be aspects of *shakti* herself, were not left unexploited. Mobilization of women in the nationalist movement was made repeatedly along this lines: unless the Sita principle of *shakti* imprisoned in women is released, the great act of sacrifice will not be complete (Sarkar 1989: 238).

Gandhi the nationalist did leave a generation of confused and alienated women freedom fighters. Nonetheless, these women fully supported the war

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[1] As stated by Sarkar, "... patriotism was subsumed within religion, the country became a vivid new deity added to the Hindu pantheon, and, but a sleigh of hand, became at once the highest deity from the moment of her deification: it is your image that we worship in the temples..." (Sarkar 1989: 238).

against colonial rule. In *Daughters of Independence*, Riddle and Joshi point out clearly that women during the nationalist movement did not attribute nor translate their oppression to men as a group. Instead these women argued that women's issues could not be "separated from the question of foreign domination and this analysis had the effect of defusing male opposition and winning support for the women's cause within India" (quoted in Roy 1998: 140).

Nationalism is a sentiment confronted by all who inhabit a common space. Gendering nationalism was a play to usurp symbols of power to effect an intended change. Women, along with the symbols of deities, femaleness and the concept of the mother all served the national goal of liberation.

Hanging over a specific, local process of anti-colonial struggle against British and Portuguese rule, Bengal and Goa help us to make the above argument. As India gained freedom, Goans too began to assert a political identity as Indians and to consider themselves "children of Mother India". Nevertheless, the failure of both Catholic and Hindu Goans to fight together in a mass nationalist movement created a leadership vacuum that politicians in other states attempted to fill. During the 60s, the non-Brahmin Hindus (handled by the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP or MG) promoted a merger with Maharashtra, thus opposing a regional movement to a nationalist one (Rubinoff 1998: 19). As a result of their minority position in the territory, it was the Goan Christians who pursued integration into the larger Indian Union in the form of statehood. During the 1967 Opinion Poll, Christians bonded with Hindu Brahmins in order to advance the konkani language. The promotion of konkani became therefore a "nationalist" struggle in Goa. From the beginning of Portuguese colonialism, konkani was considered a useless dialect of toddy tapers and fishermen, at the most a minor variant of marathi, the term "konkano" used to describe uncultured hicks, often acquiring an anti-Hindu sense as well (Newman 1989). As a consequence, given the absence of an official language policy, four distinct scripts were created to write konkani, further dividing the Goans. Systematically evaluating the Portuguese refusal of Goan culture through linguistic means can be taken further. Even in 1947, when India became independent from the British Raj, the Salazar regime paid no attention to the appeals of Gandhi or to those of local *satyagrahis* led by Lohia (nevermind to the Freedom Fighter movement, which conjoined both Hindus and Catholics, together, engaged in a freedom struggle against Portuguese colonialism). The Freedom Fighter movement had two main traits that should be emphasized: 1) in spite of some internal divisions, a large number of those in the forefront of the liberation movement were Catholics, many of whom spoke Portuguese or had been educated in Portugal (Newman 1989: 5); 2) similarly the Konkani Bhasha Mandal (Konkani Language Group), from which came many Freedom

Fighters, led the struggle for the development of the konkani *mai* ("mother"), a language that was in fact spoken by the majority of Goans.

What should be here underlined is how the promotion of konkani as the main "nationalist" struggle in Goa, meant that language became a feminine entity, playing a specific feminine role, e.g., "mother", *mai*. Already considered in a previous paper has been goddess' prominence over the gods, in both Hindu and Christian religious contexts (Perez 1998). In the first case, worship of the goddess Shantadurga (a contradictory term, since *shanta* means "peace", an antonym of *durga*), was imposed all over the territory, the ritual and political borders of which she helped to enhance.

In Goa, as in other Indian states, goddesses and other mythical figures served to provide the platform needed to create a new Indian nation. We concur with Roy that the Indian woman was "remade under nationalism", and after fulfilling the national mission, was restored to the *ghar* (the private world). P. Chatterjee (1993) alludes to the nationalist Patriarchal solution "bringing women" out into the public debates as co-workers, a liminal solution that found his place of women abrogated after independence. The two competitive realms of activities, situating women "in" and "out" of the central national discourse, resulted in the establishment of the Indian nation-state. These actions did not imply that the elite women accepted the remaking of their image by the patriarchal nationalists, and in fact challenged "the new patriarchy which nationalists discourse set up as a hegemonic construct [that] culturally distinguished itself not only from the West but also from the mass of its people" (Chatterjee 1989: 251). Women were not in accord with, and did not tacitly approve or participate in the construction of the new "woman" image. Emergence of the women meant having or "coining" a closed principle, bringing a private matter into a public debate. P. Chatterjee's (1989) woman's question refers to the nationalist period during which women were unshackled. Both the pre and post independence life of a Hindu woman revolves around the axis of family and marriage. Women show respect to their parents, husbands and other family members.

This has not changed in terms of the society's attitudes towards its women since the turn of the century. Misra's recent study of early autobiographies shows that women accepted their low position and referred to themselves as *meyemanush* and as *manush*. In this cultural context, the works of the early pioneers are impressive. They shared the family ideal and thus attempted to socially and symbolically institute "homes" for destitute and abandoned women and children. Gandhi made an impact on these women's aims. But the traditional family model that Gandhi espoused and that early women activists assiduously followed is the target of a series of cultural critiques today. Gandhi was not interested in changing either the family base or the structure of the male-female relationship. Mack, drawing on Mehta's

work adds that Gandhi saw women as "selfless and motherly, stemming from the demands of childbearing and child dreaming" and "therefore better qualified than men to preach the art of peace to the warring world" (Mack 1986: 464).

The message to Indian women from Gandhi the political man and Gandhi the personal man were quite contradictory in the kinds of behavior each solicited: action in one realm and passivity and suppression in the other. Gandhi did not offer women the needed support for restructuring gender within the family. Gandhi was clearly not a feminist although he exhibited and publicly acknowledged his feminine self.

Nationalism and feminism

Katherine Mayo' s controversial book *Mother India*, published in 1927, was an attack against Indian self-rule; the book marked a crucial turning point in the history of modern nationalism and feminism in India. The central argument of Mayo was that the root of all India's problems lay in the sexual organization of Hindu society. The sexual excess of the Indian male, Mayo argues, made him too weak to "hold the reins of Government" (Mayo 1927: 92). This excess, the origin of which was the very essence of Hinduism, was reflected, according to her, on the deplorable status and situation of Indian women (early sexual intercourse and premature maternity, lack of social protection, backwardness).

We know that Mayo's self-ascribed role as a champion for the rights of Indian women eluded her proximity to conservative women's groups in India, and inversely her distance from feminists. We also know that the topic of the "woman question" in colonial India had already become an ideological battleground between Indian nationalists and British Imperialists long before *Mother India* (Sinha 2000) was published, and that it has long represented a moral justification of British Imperialism. It should be added that *Mother India* conveniently ignored any negative impact that colonialism had on the condition of women in India…

Nevertheless, the controversy provoked by Mayo's book reverberated into both nationalist and feminist movements in India, which shared a common slogan: "India cannot be free until its women are free and women cannot be free until India is free" (Sinha 2000: 1). The issue of feminism in India does not fit into the scope of this paper. Within the limited scope of this paper, we would like to emphasize that Hindu and Muslim women's negotiations of models of femininity and national identity were both colonial and colonialist from the beginning (Ray 2000: 6). Colonial and nationalist patterns were, for the Indian elites, quite close, leading us to reproduce Ray's ques-

tion: "what happens when mimicry, which is meant to be a guarantor of difference, becomes indistinguishable from mimesis?" (Ray 2000: 9).

Sati, whose prohibition in 1929 has been "canonized by colonialist and nationalist texts as a founding moment in the history of women's emancipation in modern India" (Mani 2000: 1), could be used as a significant illustration of this issue. Lata Mani thesis is therefore quite accurate, stating that

> the debate on *sati* was shaped by a specifically colonial discourse, which simultaneously privileged brahmanic scriptures as the locus of authentic tradition and constituted woman as a site for the contestation of tradition (Mani 1999: 2).

In the end, one wonders what happened to women after independence? Having an apparently crucial role in the nationalist project, were women in fact effective subjects, or were they rather a category, merely a metaphor to be manipulated by nationalist ideology? Were women condemned to return to their Hindu background, therefore replicating the traditional hierarchy of gender? The seeming paradoxes over the woman's question were the results of the conflicting and confusing aspects of the ideologies of the nationalist movement. Here we concur with Chatterjee's remark that

> the nationalist did in fact face up to the new social and cultural problems concerning the position of women in 'modern' society and it did provide an answer to the problems in terms of its own ideological paradigm (Chatterjee 1989: 237).

In addressing the women's question in the nineteenth century, the nationalist did so "in complete accordance with its preferred goals" (Chatterjee 1989: 237). Women participated in the national causes, which ironically excluded issues of gender, equality and women's rights. The national ideology of women was the whole question for the impetus to reform their status, and the need to protect their minimum rights and to improve their status through education. The new woman, therefore, would be misplaced in the traditional matrix. She would have had a new configuration designed to contain the demands and eventualities of the new nation-state.

How was the new woman constructed, cast, generated or restructured? Are the ideals of the nation-state dictated in equal terms to all of its citizens, and would that apply to both males and females in India (in this case, Bengal)? Do we find parallel and concurrently contradictory levels of ideologies and beliefs for gender equality? Nationalist concerns and discourses were a dialogue against the colonial presence. The home symbolized the land, as well as the nation; it was

> the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing

this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues; the crucial need is for the protection of the inner sanctum (Chatterjee 1990: 127).

Adapting to Western and modern ways, would eventually annihilate your own essential culture and values.

Protecting women was tantamount to the protection of the land. In the "entire phase of the national struggle, the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture" (Chatterjee 1990: 239). Women were, and the case holds true today, the embodiment and the nurturers of values and tradition. The case made for the protection of women and family was strongly held. Women social workers from upper and middle class families safeguarded their values and worldviews by conferring the same gender ideals onto the girls in the *home*. Alternative gender structures were not nurtured nor were they encouraged for the girls in the *homes*. Nationalism was gendered and seen through femaleness. As stated by Roy, "It is precisely the dialectic between the heroic submission of these mythical women and the (Indian) modernity of the contemporary woman that nationalism seeks to maintain rather then repress" (Roy 1998: 136). The "new" gendered "invention" of the woman was recast along traditional models. The desire for nationalist freedom fighters motivated men and women to collaborate in a joint mission, the production of the cultural fiction of the 'new woman' the object of a reform movement of which the subject-agents were men. Men fought for women's rights and encouraged female literacy; what they were not ready to relinquish however was the end of or changes in the patriarchal structure.

Gender was used as the marker for the newly purified social spacing country vs. home, public vs. private, and in the binary view of the social order, women were the containers, the vessels for cultural values. In a new nation, the colonial threat to values and family was removed, and the confused women were left within a structured patriarchal family with an unchanged gender structuring and the sexual code of conduct. Unqualified to question the status quo, women lacked the sense of "being". Identities of a woman's father and husband reflected their identity. Chatterjee's insight into the two conflicting and competing messages is clearly articulated. He asserts that the two opposed spaces of home and country contain different gender based ideologies:

> While the nationalists divided the domain of culture into *ghar* and *bahir*, the first associated with femininity and the latter with masculinity, they were also ingenious enough to accommodate a metaphoric understanding of these seemingly opposed spaces (Roy 1998: 135).

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Gender liminality and the question of the Bengali person

In a study about social movements, Mack observes that the nationalist move-ment did lack positive influences for women. Women thought they were fighting against political and gender inequality, but as women came out of the traditional households, they renounced their physical and symbolic "veils". They became part of a movement, under the impression that they were occupying positions equal to men, that their accomplishments were measured and assessed. Feminine or gender concerns became central to some of the movements. Yet, Mack states that the nationalist movement (the social reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj) and the Gandhian movements were a "temporary outburst," liminal to the structured and traditional society that disallowed changes in the construction of gender. Feminine symbolism, seen as a kind of reserve ideology was put on hold, treated as myth or folklore during some periods, but put into practice as a model for "human activity in others" (Mack 1986). Femininity went through a liminal change and was referred back to its structured world and social order. In this way, neither femininity nor gender equality progressed. As Chatterjee concludes the

> new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of "female eman-cipation" with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new and yet entirely legitimate subordination (Chatterjee 1990: 130).

It is not clear if Chatterjee means to tackle the sexual subordination or the silencing of women from participating in public culture. Furthermore, we challenge the concept of subordination, suggesting that it should be rede-fined, or reconstructed, so as to take in many of the contradictory historical and social accounts of women's contributions to a creation of an alternative gender model. Nineteenth-century women acknowledged the primacy and needs of the nation and returned to the center of the hearth. Men controlled the call, the direction of women, and ultimately the containment of the family. The family, the nation and the women of the nation all merged into a singular symbol of tradition.

We stated earlier that Turner posits that a dialogue exists between liminality and communitas, and that antistructure as liminal time occurs during specific historical moments. In relation to gender issues, a parallel exists between structure and masculinity, communitas and femininity. Indian women in the nineteenth century lacked the sense of "self" and "being", an identity of their own other than that of their fathers or husbands. They were imprisoned in their society, like "caged birds," as a nineteenth century woman writer, Sasundari, referred to herself and other women in a similar predicament. It is not uncommon for contemporary women's movements to

pursue a different track in the execution of their work. Social or humanitarian work is not only politically forceful, it seems to come from a deeper motivation and an urgent need to restructure societal values. Pioneer women social workers seem to oppose reconfiguring the boundaries of the patriarchal familiar structure. Most of them come from stable upper and middle class families as was the case in the past, are themselves married, and do not seem especially to favor gender related changes. Residents/beneficiaries of the *homes* are orphans as well as destitute girls. Cultural cleavages prevail between the two classes of women, those who serve and the ones being served.

These in turn affect women's working relationships and the messages they pass on. Conflicts underlie the messages, which women social workers transmit to orphans, destitute girls and women in the homes, which in turn affect the working relationship. Thus, home, is encompassed within the society and treated as an extreme form of a kinship-based *bari* or *ghar*. The use of a non Bengali term, *home*, signifies a different and separate cultural meaning and interpretation to the physical structure that houses the girls, offering them the basic facilities outside of the family. The female residents of the *home* known as "*homer meye*," become the newly constituted family members. Age marks the new relatives as sisters or mother's sisters. This reckoning of kinship terms applies to the social workers, which in turn become either a mother's sister or an elder sister to the girls in the home.

Two sets of maternal kinship ties and relationships pervade the running of the home. Those with whom one shares space, *home*, and those who provide nurturance and support but not space, are all one's new kinship ties. A young Bengali girl is socialized to think of her father's house as a temporary place to stay. She is taught to think of two journeys or lives, one lived in her father's household and the other lived in her husband's. *Homer meye* is not governed by the same kinship based on rules of the constructions of gender – theirs might be a single journey into a home. What these women control is their education and a career in an income generating activity. In a strange and contradictory way, they are empowered to control their lives, though within the confines and adversities of the home. It is conceivable that *home* girls will find themselves outside the *home*, sharing the same social and cultural gender beliefs and ideologies. Double consciousness underlies the status quo of these girls, and the conflict surfaces due to the reality of the image and that which they are disciplined to emulate. Ultimately, the increasing number of unmarried girls in the *home* contributes to the psychosis of the place, in that the socialization process does not execute nor undeniably project reality for the girls. The prevailing gender ideology and beliefs are inadequate. Some of the more progressive feminists groups seek alternatives for gender construction outside the Hindu cultural framework: some groups challenge the notion.

In short, *home* girls are nurtured and socialized according to the gender based code of conduct upheld by the social workers. They aspire to ideals, ideals rarely attained; nonetheless this remains the underlying status quo. It is not the intention of the social workers to confuse the *home* girls who in turn impact their own upheld values and beliefs, the knowledge they received from the woman in their household.

Homes have a disciplined rule through which their daily management and the girls training are conducted. Deciphering the code of conduct and settling the underlying ideology, one finds that the code inside of the *home* reflects and delineates a strong male concept and principle. The doctrine through which the *home* girls are nurtured and socialized reflects a continuity of the prevailing social order outside the walls of the *home*. From the onset, the behavioral pattern for action reveals a strong male dependence emphasizing the male genealogy and the importance of marriage. Since the complementary relations of male and female divine powers underlie the basic foundation of marriage, these symbols of *prackriti* and *shakti* (male and female divine power) accentuate the emphasis of what is communicated during the socialization of the girls.

Marriage, procreation and cultural emulation rather than emancipation and self-sufficiency are underscored. At the cultural, and emotional level, *home* girls are disciplined to think in terms of dependence, taking protection from their male household members, fathers, brothers and husbands. This cultural reflection subsumes a person with known kinship ties and locality, where girls are daughters of lines or wives of lines, in which case, independence from the cultural code of conduct, aiming for individuality, will be submerged. As the *home* conjures up a sense of permanency, the high level of frustration of eighteen-and-nineteen-year-old girls is predicable.

The sense of an unchanging and unfluctuating adherence to a cultural bond, a philosophy, which the social workers nurture in the *home* girls, adds further to their anxiety. They are well aware that social alternatives exist, but, in practice, the cultural beliefs (especially those attached to the construction of gender) remain static, and *home* girls see no opportunity to be rehabilitated into society, nor do they envision a life for themselves outside the *home*.

Achieving economic equality with the social workers is far less of a challenge than being able to live in society in an acceptable manner. The realization of the cultural taboo imposed on women outside the familial bonds is a far more serious hindrance and challenge to the *home* girls than society is ready to acknowledge. This brings us to the question of values and morality issues which are taught to the *home* girls. How does one prepare a girl to face and accept her own society, which in turn is hesitant to accept her? What about self-sufficiency questions and her ability to earn a self-supporting income, one not supplemented or shared with anyone else? What we find is

that the configuration of the expressed nurturing ideology is confronted and challenged by *home* girls, a liminal group or community, within the larger social structure. "Home" girls experience impediments for a complete rehabilitation in their society; they confront resistance and denial for accommodation from their own society. *Home* girls do not know their kinship ties, nor genealogical reckoning, their place of origin, and consequentially, their life style. Girls in turn, question the socialization of their place of origin, their life style, seeking a new cultural justification for establishing a new identity for themselves. *Home* girls have a specific goal in mind, and in most cases, it is to emulate the role model of the social workers, their *masimas* (mother's sisters) and *pisimas* (father's sisters), because the nurturing and socialization of the girls comes from the societal model of kinship-based home referred to as *bari* or *ghar*, which is the kind of private home where the social workers live with their families.

Girls who have to fend for them need to understand and cope with the problems they will have to face in the society outside of the *home.* These girls, unlike the social workers, have the challenge to endure the exterior social world which seems to belong to everyone except them, as they are housed outside the mainstream world of normal family relations and traditions, somewhat haphazardly forced to decipher social intentions and act upon their own discoveries.

Social workers are presented with the challenge of socializing and home nurturing the *home* girls; but the girls, recognize and perceive the challenges differently. Issues of empowerment and self-sufficiency consist of blurred messages because while girls want to emulate the ideals of typical women, their affliction stands in the way. Challenges deflect into frustration, and when anxiety sets in, the harmony of the *home* changes and takes on new dimensions. Culturally, home girls will find it difficult to settle and live lives like other women in their society because the society does not carve out what are the clearly demarcated roles for liminal members, other than that they have lives of marginal existence. Kinship ties and the locality of one's origins are crucial to juxtapose place and person on uninterrupted lines of familial connections. If girls were asked about their aspirations in life, they would say without hesitation that they aim to be able to stand on their own two feet, but their less empowering self will not help them to achieve their dreams.

Contradictions apparent in the organization of a *home* come from the reality of the two groups, the social workers and the girls; the problem is critical when assigned to the orphan. No one questions the actual training of the girls, without which their adversity would seriously hamper their progress. Trade training in weaving, printing and block printing, sewing, cooking and so on, earn them an income, which is not sufficient to subsist on. These girls' careers are never meant to achieve economic independence. The problems of

the girls in the *home*, whether they are sheltered widows or battered women, are such that they need adjustments within the expectations and realities of their societies.

Women in Goa: contentious traditions

As Newman warns us,

> almost every author over the last century who described Goan society wrote as if it were composed of discrete units, quite separate from one another, Hindus, Catholics and Muslims succeeding one another, being usually subdivided according to caste group (Newman 1989: 9).

This description of Goa as a set of separate communities is still prominent up to the present day and the opinions of Portuguese and foreign observers do not differ significantly. However, economic changes occurred (in fact quite soon after liberation from Portuguese rule), as new classes have risen and old ones have declined. Changes took place too quickly and too dramatically, especially when the impact of tourism on Goan society is concerned.

Although the previous view is too narrow, since continuities existed overtime in Goa between Hinduism and Christianity, as we have tried to show in other papers (Perez 1997, 1998), out of simplification they will be conceived as "discrete units" when dealing with gender. The issue of woman in Goa is a complex subject but for this article we will focus on the nature of Portuguese colonialism in India. In addition, we will analyze the condition of Goan women compared to women in other parts of India. We will not focus on rural women, whose status was ultimately the more stable as well as the less affected by political, economic and social changes that Goa underwent before and after liberation.

During the colonialism era, the Portuguese had developed different institutions (such as "*Misericórdias*", "*Recolhimentos*", and around 1951, at the close of Portuguese rule, the "Instituto de Nossa Senhora da Piedade") and both the religious and the non-religious institutions aimed to protect, and to control women. Yet these institutions reproduced a recurrence that we find elsewhere: the systematic discrimination of Hindu women. Education had pushed forward this discrimination, giving Catholic women more opportunities than those offered to their Hindu mates, although ideally also confined to the domestic sphere by traditional and moral patterns.

This situation changed after 1961, and the above asymmetrical poles have interchanged. Many Catholics, pro-Portuguese, pro-Europeans and those lacking an Indian identity, left the State and moved to the metropolis, reducing their occasional visits to Goa for visits to family and social tourism.

But one fact strikes us in terms of Catholic women, who stayed in Goa after liberation: their extremely fragmented identities. In fact, having predominantly Portuguese/European values, patterns and codes of behavior, they were faced with a real lack of references, leading to a permanent feeling of nostalgia, a nostalgia that Chakrabarty refers to as the worst sin of postcolonialism (Chakrabarty 1992). In time, some of the Goan Catholics came to terms with their Indian-Ness, adopting an "Indian" identity, but it was still unrooted and remained rather romantic. Although Goan, their image and status reflects *Golden Goa* as opposed to *Goa Indica*, according to Ifeka's dichotomy (Ifeka 1985).

They were Portuguese speakers; wore Portuguese clothing, shared a Portuguese dominant religious creed, had Portuguese houses and furniture (little by little condemned to devastation by inclemency of time and need of economic resources), their cuisine used Portuguese food stuffs (so that they soon began missing ingredients like olive oil, cod fish, sausages, and coffee imported from the African colonies), and most of all they had a Portuguese nationality. India was therefore to many Catholic women a remote reference, with which they were neither familiar nor comfortable. Even when speaking fluently the official language, konkani, they felt that they were speaking a "foreign" language, more unfamiliar than English, the vehicular means of communication in the country. To a large extent, they remained closer to their family that had migrated, due either to economic necessity or as a result of political persecution.

Decolonization, on the other hand, did not take place as such. After more than a decade ignoring international and Indian pressures to leave the country, Salazar's regime was forced by Nehru's military forces to let the 500-year-old possession of Goa fall under Indian control. The effects of the policies of the stubborn Portuguese dictatorship were far more dramatic among the Catholics than the Hindus. The glamorous past soon became a sad faded picture. Economic deprivation was in the way, caring along it male unemployment, drastic reduction of domestic stuff, hard efforts to keep up with the public appearances in order to ensure suitable husbands for the girls. In most cases women took on new skills, and accepted small jobs they were not trained to undertake.

Of course the above situation affected the new Catholic generation and middle-low castes for less, as they were far more adaptable to new challenges and new roles. On the other hand, the Hindu women were much closer to Indian values and tradition, which allowed them to take the lead after liberation. Due to the brevity of this paper, we choose one particular situation to illustrate our comparative argument.

From the nineteenth century Western perspective, women symbolized a type of erotic chattel, fitting within the harem. Women were meant to per-

form a particular role – that of dancing – through which they exhibited the erotic potentialities of the feminine body. Within the imperial confrontation between the orient and the occident, the "civilizing mission" (which the occident claimed exclusively for itself) was undertaken through the domestication of violence and licentiousness, both ideas contrary to European repressed and desexualized sexual morality.

Violence and lust have operated as efficient justifications to legitimize Western intrusion in the East, and they were therefore considered by the colonizer as politically and culturally powerful warrants for domestication. In Goa, the stigmas associated with violence and lasciviousness were assigned to two categories of Hindu women. The violent side was represented by *sati*, the wife who would immolate herself on her husband's pyre; the lascivious side was prefigured by the *devadasi*, the ritual dancer.

The Portuguese sources also show an awareness of *sati*, and the Portuguese authors rejected it before the British legislators did. Catholic morality contradicted itself in what it held it as an assault on the woman's body, as this same morality kept its eyes closed to other manipulations and violations of the Indian feminine body, such as that performed by the dancers.

At a very early stage European accounts would ritually and sociologically corrupt the intrinsic meaning of the *devadasi*. Furthermore, this corrupted meaning of the concept, would be incorporated by the Portuguese colonizers towards their understanding of *devadasi*. In Portuguese and European narratives on Goa the *devadasi* represents eroticism, and beyond that, lust – the perfect incorporation of an oriental stigma that we have mentioned above. To the colonizers this stigma fit perfectly into their sexual needs. In fact, repressed by the stern Judeo-Christian morality of their culture, in India, they seemed to find something that otherwise was not available to them: the promised (Paradise of The One Thousand and One Nights).

Obviously, the ritual role of the *devadasi* was culturally speaking as odd as it was problematic for the colonizer. In other words, if cultural translation revealed itself to be a difficult task concerning many other Indian subjects, how were they able to interpret this Hindu performance, and how would one translate the Hindu morality, into that of the Christian? This is one of the main reasons why the colonizers would be tethered to the first European translations of the *devadasi*: a woman of infamy, in Abbé Dubois' words, a prostitute, although, he said, a more sophisticated woman than other Indian women: as she could read, sing and dance (from the true translation of konkani *kalvant,* from *kala* "art").

Early Portuguese sources clearly exhibit references to the *devadasi /* "bailadeira". Nevertheless we cannot make a uniform interpretation of those references. Effectively, little by little we can notice a polarization between the deritualized dancer and the "public" dancer, the former being characterized

by future orientalist traits, the latter as a prostitute. The dominant trait is however that of a *kalvant,* conceived as a prostitute, a fact that from the beginning of the seventeenth century has led to the emanation of preventive and prohibitive legal dispositions concerning this ritual practice. In the same century, an *Alvará* was ordered to proclaim their expulsion from the Goan territory, under the argument that they would ruin Catholic morality. Let us now move to the contemporary ethnographic field. *Devadasi*, means literally "servant of the deity" fulfilling the role as the temple dancer, intimately related to the temple's rituals. Both concerning state and status, she is a very unique type of woman. First, because she is symbolically married to the temple's god, she does not marry a common man; secondly, theoretically, she is not ascribed to any sociological origin, that is through local nomenclature anyway, and as such, she has no caste.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Gomantak Maratha Samaj was created in order to ensure *devadasi'*s children the right to get their marriages officially recognized. In 1961, the G.M.S. was formally accepted, bringing together the *devadasi*, their children, the musicians and different ritualists of the temple into one group/caste. From then on, many unexpected changes took place. The members of the new caste attained high level of education, breaking thereafter the traditional barriers of seclusion. Of course the earlier *devadasi* stigma remained in place. But the effects of this phenomenon are far from being despicable. New generations of Hindu women began contesting arranged marriages, as well as the traditional gender hierarchy, and they proceeded to develop a carrier of their own, crossing different professional jobs. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following analysis, tradition dies hard, and marriage continues to be crucial to a woman's social recognition, even to those who bravely resisted giving up their innermost identity.

Conclusion. The new woman: changes of values

The title for the paper centers and juxtaposes two opposing (at times conflicting and competitive) gendered spaces – home (private) and work (public). Nationalist wars of independence correspond and symbolize a liminal moment in time, when the social order is in chaos, awaiting a return to a "structured" solidity. Encoded in the meaning of Diaspora is in fact the anti-structure nature of the society. In the diasporic time, liminality underlies the everyday sphere of activity. Absence of a gendered tradition, the lack of a code for activities separating women from men, the imposition of strictures for doing "the women thing" do not represent nor daily confront women in the Diaspora.

In the Diaspora it is the nationalist agenda that defines the worldview of the displaced, their mission and their dreams. As an Indian loses physi-

cal ties to the colonized nation, identity centers an individual. In the Diaspora, perhaps the clearest articulation of what and who one is, one's identity as a person is crystallized. Identity is suspended in time and space. Time and space set the parameter, the building blocks for the formation of identity, which is frozen, nurtured and protected.

After independence, participating in the newly independent country, questioning the nation, the gendered agenda, the reconfiguration of the new "woman" formed the basis for new concerns confronting the "woman citizen" in India. Gender was the marker of the newly purified social situation, country vs. home (private vs. politic). Women and the feminine nationalist ideology contributed to the configuration of the new woman citizen.

Unable to question the status quo, women had lacked the sense of "being", identities of one's father and husband reflected that of women, theirs was an unfailing self to contradict the premise or basis of the configured self and image. If Indian society could view the strictly cast roles for males/ females, insiders/outsiders as the *home* girls or the temple dancers did, the communities would have had a view from which the typical model of gender construction could be challenged. *Home* girls stand in opposition to the dominant society, demand alternative solutions, and become the catalyst for creating a new status for women. The emergence of this woman stands in opposition to the traditionally accepted ideal woman. Women's level of training is suitable only for unskilled professions, for which they will compete against men and other migrant laborers. They will compete for scarce resources and highly competitive jobs in the political sphere. Women societies today should take into consideration the stark changes, facing abandoned women and girls, which are starkly different than in India's pre-independence days.

Indirectly, women in a liminal position have contributed to the understanding of feminism in India. They are able to secure jobs outside the home and most probably will not render or adhere strictly to the cultural norms of the accepted code of conduct. If married, these girls will enter on an equal footing with the men they marry. The social consciousness of the girls forces the society to accept and reckon their existence through a blue print, which outlines a different code of conduct than that of mainstream society. Poverty, loss of kinship ties, and social detachment set these women apart from others. Some women will be contained by the social structure, and others will retain a separate (though not parallel) and different role in the same society. Accepting women outside of society is awkward and difficult because it signals a challenge to the status quo; and the break from old views is bound to raise further questions, making it imperative to begin facing even those concerns and pressures that can be heard from the margins of Indian society. Women at the margins aim to emulate the model role of women in the

structured society. They have the challenge of enduring and facing the exterior social world, which seems to belong to everyone except to them.

They are housed outside the mainstream world of normal family relations and traditions, haphazardly forced to decipher their social intentions. Issues of empowerment and self-sufficiency consist of blurred messages because while women want to emulate the ideals of married women, their affliction of being orphans and dancers stand in their way. Challenges deflect into frustration, and when anxiety sets in, the harmony of the home changes and takes on new directions.

Culturally, liminal women encounter difficulties settling into their society because the society does not have clearly demarcated roles for liminal members, kinship ties and the locality of one's origins being crucial to juxtapose place and a person on uninterrupted lines of familial connections. This is the case both for the *home* girls in Bengal and the dancers in Goa, as we have tried to show in this paper.

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O GÉNERO DA NAÇÃO: FEMINILIDADE ALE-
GÓRICA E O ESTATUTO DA MULHER
EM BENGALA E GOA

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*Este artigo resulta de um trabalho de colaboração das
autoras aos níveis da docência e da publicação. Preten-
de-se comparar o período nacionalista na Índia, du-
rante o qual o género foi assumido quer como ideal,
quer como programa ideológico, e a época
pós-independência. Através de uma análise comparati-
va procura-se compreender o estatuto e o papel social
atribuídos à mulher após a independência da Índia.
Adoptando uma perspectiva   histórico-
antropológica na abordagem da mulher em Bengala e
Goa, o artigo centra-se, em termos teóricos, na cons-
trução pós-colonial de género e no significado da
mulher no quadro das actuais representações nacionais
da pessoa.*