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of Glasgow

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[Undergraduate degree]

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University
of Glasgow

School of Social and Political Sciences

*'As a woman I have no country'? - Gender Analysis of Women's Political
Participation in the Indian National Movement.*

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of gender relations and the role that they play in the process of nation-building and the construction of spaces of political participation. I am going to be arguing that the political process of nation-building is an inherently gendered process - referring to the case of the Indian National Movement (1885 - 1947). As well as arguing for the centrality of gender identities, I will emphasise the importance of traditional and patriarchal gender relations and how active women in the movement were in constant negotiation of these roles. My method is to analyse dominant nationalist ideologies communicated by leaders of the movement and then explore the way in which particular groups of women have interacted with, negotiated and challenged gender identities in order to facilitate their own political action. My main approach is feminist as I will be exploring the ways in which nationalist ideology and practice distinctly affects the political activities of women.

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Glossary

<i>Ahimsa</i>	The doctrine of nonviolence
<i>Charkha</i>	A wooden spinning wheel operated by hand on which <i>khadi</i> cloth was spun. <i>Charkha</i> was the basis of the <i>handloom</i> industry, as opposed to the <i>power loom</i> industries encouraged by the British.
Civil disobedience	Withdrawal of all voluntary association with the British Government and its institutions. Also incorporated non-payment of taxes.
Constructive Programme	Coined by Gandhi. Describes nonviolent action taken within a community to build structures, systems, processes or resources that are positive alternatives to oppression.
<i>Dharma</i>	This can be variously interpreted as a doctrine of righteousness, sacred law, or a general code of conduct which is appropriate to each class and each stage in the life of an individual.
Durga	Mother goddess; mother of the universe and believed to be the power behind the work of creation, preservation, and destruction of the world
Kali	Goddess of destruction
<i>Khadi</i>	Coarse, hand spun cloth. Khadi was also a cultural symbol of nationalism and <i>swaraj</i> .
<i>Purdah</i>	Originally derived from a Persian word meaning ‘curtain’, it carries an implicit meaning of subordination. For example, in Hinduism women are encouraged to remain inside the home or to cover their heads when in public view.
<i>Sati</i>	Refers to a funeral ritual in which a recently widowed woman commits suicide by fire, typically on the husband's funeral pyre.
<i>Satyagraha</i>	Social boycott of the legal and political institutions of the British Government.
Sita and Savitri	Two women figures from Hindu mythology. They are noted for their obedience and devotion to their husbands
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Literally translated this means ‘for my country’. The concept was promoted to encourage the Indians to spin and weave indigenous cloth and forsake foreign cloth. Also incorporated all activities that promoted self-reliance.
<i>Swaraj</i>	Independence

Map of Pre-Partition Indian Subcontinent



Timeline

Chronology of key events mentioned in this dissertation.

1857 - Indian Mutiny. Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, leads revolt against the East India Company.

1885 - Indian National Congress founded as forum for emerging nationalist feeling, by Allen Octavian Hume.

1920 - Mahatma Gandhi becomes a major leader in the Indian National Congress

1921 - Gandhi launches his first Civil Disobedience Movement

1922 - Gandhi suspends the civil disobedience movement after the Chauri-Chura violence.

1927 - Katherine Mayo writes 'Mother India'

1930 - Gandhi begins his Dandi Salt March

1937 - Provincial autonomy begins in India, with Congress winning power in many states. WWII breaks out which leaves political deadlock in India.

1942 - Congress launches "Quit India" movement - the rise of Subhas Chandra Bose as a national leader. Indian National Army is formed.

1943 - Indian National Army comes under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose - Bose forms the all-women Rani of Jhansi regiment.

1945 - INA and the Rani of Jhansi regiment is disbanded.

August 1947 - The end of British rule. India is partitioned into mainly Hindu India and a Muslim-majority state of Pakistan.



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Women picketers preparing for a protest in Madras in 1930. Photo: The Hindu Archives.

1. Introduction

This dissertation is a study of gender relations¹ and the role that they play in the process of nation-building and the construction of spaces of political participation. I am going to be arguing that the political process of nation-building is an inherently gendered process - referring to the case of the Indian National Movement (1885 - 1947). This anti-colonial social and political movement witnessed the mobilization of women, from a diverse range of backgrounds, on a huge scale. The cause, significance and character of this mobilization has largely been ignored in political analyses of the movement until recently. Many accounts of the period are completely ignorant to the issue of gender relations further supporting the classic theoretical assumption that nationalism is a gender-neutral ideology/practice. I will be engaging with this debate and adopting a feminist approach which identifies 'gender' as a legitimate unit of political analysis. Feminist approaches to nationalist projects have explored the way in which gender identities interact with and become mutually constitutive of wider political relations. This understanding is important because it illuminates the way in which political processes such as nation-building distinctly affect women. I hope to contribute to this understanding of the relationship between gender-identity and nationalism by exploring the way in which particular groups of women have interacted with, negotiated and challenged gender identities in order to facilitate their own political action. In doing this, I will argue that active women in these cases maintained a dialogue with traditional and patriarchal gender identities, demonstrating that these roles were still crucial in determining the frameworks of participations. This will hopefully provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between gender, nation-building and political agency.

Researching women's involvement in political and social movements is important for many reasons. Primarily, it is important to challenge the idea that simply inserting women into politics will empower them. I will be tapping into a wider debate about the participation of women in politics. The goals of liberal feminism are to see wider representation and participation of women in political and economic life. A critique of this, which I will be supporting, is that this approach does not challenge the wider oppressive forces at play and does not tackle the roots of gender inequality. Although the emphasis on women's political participation during the Indian National Movement was remarkable and certainly effective for the goal of nationalism, it is important to explore the terms and limitations which form the parameters of their participation. Empowering women is about more than just bringing women into the public sphere. It is also about challenging the wider forces of patriarchal oppression which can be present in the gender roles ascribed to women in society and politics.

¹ "the construction of identities, roles, and relations based on sexual differences"(Sen,2000:1)

Through my review of the existing literature surrounding this topic, I will formulate the following research questions:

- *RQ1. In what way was the construction of nationalist ideology during the Indian Nationalist Movement an inherently gendered process?*
- *RQ2. In what way was political participation for women during the Indian National Movement informed by restrictive or patriarchal gender roles?*
- *RQ3. How did politically active women in the movement negotiate and challenge the gender relations present in mainstream nationalist discourse in order to enable their own active participation?*

I will address these questions firstly by providing a gender analysis of dominant the dominant ideologies of the Indian National Movement. I will then provide two case studies - the first being women involved in the Salt protests and the second being the radical Rani of Jhansi regiment of the Indian National Army - which I believe demonstrate the way in which women negotiated gender identities in order to facilitate political participation. All the while, I will support my argument that the nation-building project was inherently constituted by patriarchal gender relations. My study begins with an overview of the existing relevant literature on this topic. I will establish the theoretic framework that I will be applying, as well as the theories that I will be challenging, and identify the gaps in the existing research which I hope to fill. The following chapter describes my own methodology more specifically and identifies the limitations of my approach.

2. Literature Review

In my literature review I am going to incorporate a brief summary of the theories which inform my approach - mainly the theories of nation-building and political participation from a feminist perspective. I will locate my first research question within this existing literature. I will then look more closely at the existing debates surrounding my particular focus of study, i.e. gender and post-colonial nation-building. In light of this, I will identify the shortcomings of major perspectives within the field and draw out a second and third research question on the basis of this.

2.1 Theories of Nation-Building and the Feminist Intervention.

Since the 18th century the nation-state has ‘classically’ been understood as a political entity which organises, divides and orders human subjects (Ozkirimli,2000:10). The nation-state has been seen as the central political actor in modern history (Hastings,1997:9). Classic understandings of the nation-state view it as a ‘black box’ - a uniform unit within the sphere of international politics. But, since the 20th Century explosion of new nation-states, we have a much more critical understanding of the process of nation-building and the importance of nationalism in the creation of political states (Ozkirimli,2000:3), as well a differentiation of ‘states’ as legitimate, sovereign actors, and ‘nations’ as ideologically “imagined communities” (Anderson,1991). The aggregation of nation-building projects in the 20th Century is recognised as one of the most significant of geopolitical phenomena in the past 100 years. Because of this, the Social Sciences have produced a rich interdisciplinary body of literature attempting to understand the process nation-building (Mayer,2004:154). Scholars have explored the ethnic origins of nationalism, its ideological make-up, as well as psychological, economic and cultural components (ibid:153). This scholarship has identified nationhood as a social construct informed by many components. Feminist scholars introduce ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ as components in the process of nation-building and, according to Mayer, (Ibid: 153) took the study of the nation to a whole new scale.

Virginia Woolf famously pronounced that “in fact, as a women I have no country” (cited in West,1997:xi) reflecting the first-wave feminist idea that women have been excluded from decision-making processes and by extension, the construction of nations (ibid,xii). Within the ‘classic’ view of nationhood, there is an assumption that nation-building is a masculine process (Ozkirimli,2000:204). In contrast, the feminist contribution to the understanding of nation-building has identified that the lack of recognition of women in this process is not due to their lack of participation but because ‘gender’ has been largely ignored in the critical understanding of nationhood. As McClintock states

“theories of nationalism have tended to ignore gender as a category constitutive of nationalism itself” (cited in Ozkirimli,2000:192). In my reading of political theories of nation-building, a majority of the texts which I referred to do not incorporate gender in any way (Smith,1999 ; Smith,2001 ; Hastings,1997). Anthony D. Smith even claims that gender identity exists on a separate ‘level’ to that of nationalist politics (2001:137). Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have identified both ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender’ as legitimate categories of political analysis and put forward a gendered theory of nationalism which describes the social constructs of ‘gender’ and the social construct of nationality as mutually constitutive (Mayer,2004:153).

This is where i locate my first research question. The Indian National Movement is an important example of how nationalism was instrumental in the anti-colonial construction of an independent nation-state. Most historical understandings have viewed women’s involvement in this movement as a ‘side-note’ (Thapar-Bjorkert:1997 ; Spencer & Wollman,2002:149). In light of this, I believe that a gendered reading of the Indian National Movement will provide significant insight into nation-building as an inherently gendered process:

RQ1. In what way was the construction of nationalist ideology during the Indian Nationalist Movement an inherently gendered process?

2.2 Gender and Nation : Two Perspectives.

In 1997, Anne McClintock claimed that “feminist analyses of nationalism have been lamentably few and far between” (cited in Thapar-Bjorkert & Ryan,2002:303). In the past couple of decades this has changed dramatically. Many scholars have analysed the interdependence of gender discourse and nationalist projects but, as Yuval-Davis points out, this is “a very recent and partial endeavour” (1997:3). Scholars who have explored the relationship between gender and nation in a significant and systematic way include Chatterjee (1989); Enloe (1989); Jayawardena (1986); Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989); Peterson (1995); McClintock, Mufti & Shohat (1997) ; West (1997); Yuval-Davis (1997); Rao (1999) ; and Mayer (2000, 2004). These scholars all identify that “gender relations are crucial in understanding and analysing the phenomena of nations and nationalism” (Yuval-Davis,1993:621). A majority of these scholars have been particularly informed by postcolonial feminism, in that they challenged the eurocentrism of classic national theory by examining the gendered impact of new nationalist movements on Third World women in post-colonial countries. The impact of their work has inspired many scholars of European nationalism to apply a gendered framework. I have found that these scholars generally hold one of two opinions regarding the way in which gender is utilized in nationalist projects. I therefore want to propose a dichotomy of two

different perspectives within this field. The first perspective claims that nationalism benefits and propels a feminist agenda, even ‘resolving’ feminist tensions in colonial societies. The second perspective that I have identified is one which claims that nationalism utilizes oppressive gender identities for women and therefore nationalism and feminism cannot be compatible. I will argue that both of these perspectives are oversimplified and I will propose a ‘middle way’ that will be reflected in my research questions.

The first perspective argues that nationalism and feminism share some common ground, and this argument is mainly derived from the fact that anti-colonial nationalist movements and feminism ‘appeared’ during a similar period -

“In many third world contexts, nationalism is intricately connected to feminism, not only in the sense that nationalist movements often assisted in the birth of feminism, but also in that nationalists and feminists frequently collaborated in their pursuit of a common goal” (Herr,2003:136).

Partha Chatterjee argues that Indian Nationalism ‘resolved’ the feminist agenda of women’s groups in India at this time (1989). The argument follows that middle-class women’s interest and (limited) participation in the struggle for independence ‘opened the door’ for the construction of female identities in the public sphere and that female oppression and colonial oppression share the same source. I believe that this perspective has an extremely oversimplified view of the sources of oppression and the terms upon which women were encouraged to participate. This perspective does not show how mobilization could be derived from very traditional identities and how nationalist discourse might duplicate patriarchal gender identities. This will form the basis for my second research question:

RQ2. In what way was political participation for women during the Indian National Movement informed by restrictive or patriarchal gender roles?

The second perspective that I found in the existing literature argued that feminism should distance itself from nationalist ideologies in post-colonial states and that nationalism was ultimately oppressive for women. These perspectives point out that women are central to nationalist ideology in that they are seen as ‘symbols’ and ‘reproducers’ of the nation. This appropriation of women’s bodies carries with it the control of women’s bodies and behaviour (Mayer,2004:156-7). These scholars argue that nationalist ideologies usually entail the reiteration of a domestic role for women (West,1997:xvii) and apply moral constraints on how women can acceptably be and behave. Furthermore, scholars from this perspective have argued that:

“To draw women into the political struggle is a tactic necessity for any anti-colonial or national liberation struggle.” (Mies cited in Thapar-Bjorkert & Ryan,2002:305)

But that;

“Once the goal of national independence is achieved the newly established state quickly reaffirms traditional gender roles and excludes women from much of the political activity they had experienced during the years of national conflict.” (ibid.)

Furthermore;

“Women joined the (Indian National Movement) with the approval of their families and not as rebellion against predominant gender ideology. It was clear that most politically active women chose respectability over solidarity with their fallen sisters.” (Forbes,1996:134)

We can see that this view completely counters Chatterjee et al.’s argument for the compatibility of feminism and nationalism. But I believe that this view is also problematic. It implies that women were being manipulated through gender identities in order to benefit a patriarchal nationalist agenda. This perspective does not position women as active agents of political and social change but suggests that they are passive and compliant, I want to show that nationalist ideology and the dominant nationalist discourse surrounding gender was, indeed, highly informed by traditional roles for women and patriarchal assumptions. But I also want to show that women made a significant impact upon this movement as active agents rather than passive ‘victims’ of gendered discourse. I believe that we can find evidence of women actively participating in the nationalist politics of the Indian freedom struggle by forming dialogues with hegemonic gender identities and adapting and negotiating their traditional roles in society in order to be active participants in social change. This informs my final research question:

RQ3. How did politically active women in the movement negotiate and challenge the gender relations present in mainstream nationalist discourse in order to enable their own active participation?

2.4 Conclusion

In my literature review I have provided background on the theories that inform my approach. I have shown that feminist perspectives of ‘gender’ have significantly altered the way in which we conceptualise nationhood and nation-building. The feminist perspective of the gendered process of nationalism shows that gender identities are crucial in the construction of national identities. My first research question locates my analysis directly in line with this approach. I then reviewed the existing literature which surrounds the field of gender and nationalism, arguing that most theorists adopt one of two simplistic views of the relationship between gender issues and nationalism. My second two research questions attempt to overcome the shortcomings of both of these perspectives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

My analysis is focused on how meanings of gender inform and saturate understandings of the political capabilities of people within a society. My assumption in this approach is that gender is an inherently political dimension of analysis. This is informed by an understanding of politics from a feminist perspective. Feminist contributions to theories of nationalism have shown that men and women do not participate in national projects in the same way (Mayer,2004:156). As Megan Cope states, “feminists have been instrumental in breaking down dichotomies between formal and informal politics” (2004:71) - in other words, the ‘personal is the political’. This embodies a rather expansive view of what constitutes political action, but my attempt is to show that gender identities were crucial in dictating the character of political participation in this movement. I aim to show this by demonstrating in my analysis that groups can be mobilized through the discourse surrounding gender identity. My specific method is to identify the gender discourse present in nationalist ideologies of the movement and then analyse them in light of my research questions. In employing a feminist approach to my analysis I do not wish to project a feminist agenda onto the women’s groups within my analysis. I cannot claim to reproduce the motivations for women participating. The feminist approach that I use simply enables me to critically analyse constructions of ‘gender’ and how they relate to nationalist politics.

3.2 The Limitations of my Research and Analysis

There exists very little official data on women’s participation in the Indian National Movement (Kasturi & Mazumdar,1994:2). This is largely because a great deal of the political activities undertaken by women in this movement took place in the domestic sphere - i.e. in households and families - which is inevitably more difficult to measure and research because there exists little data recording it other than oral histories. The official data that does exist fails to problematise women’s participation and identify women’s motivations - “we cannot understand from these records how these women saw themselves as participants in a volatile political situation, and what it meant for them to be political actors in a male- dominated space” (Thapar-Björket,1997:91). Furthermore, I recognise that India was and still is a hugely pluralistic and hierarchical society. The nationalist movement itself was a dynamic, splintered and diverse movement as well. I have therefore chosen to limit my focus towards the ideologies of mainstream leaders associated with the Indian National Congress. I believe that, despite being a limited representation of the movement as a whole, it still displays significant interplay between gender identities and mobilizing political discourse. Similarly, the women involved in my analysis are only a small representation of the huge contribution that many different kinds of women within Indian society had towards the movement. Women as a

group in India are divided and oppressed across lines of economic, caste-determined, regional, linguistic, cultural and religious differences in India. My analysis is mostly focused on the middle-class women in India because this group was most often the focus of dominant nationalist ideologies. Still, I believe that the examples I use show that at least in a couple of cases, women were more than just passive symbols of the movement.

4. Analysis of Gender Relations embedded within the Indian Nationalist Movement.

In this section I am going to show that the construction of nationalist ideology was an inherently gendered process. I will do this by analysing the prescribed role given to women in earlier nationalist discourse and the later ideology of Gandhi. We will find that women were viewed as both symbols and participants of the cause. I am going to argue that women's role within these dialogues was embedded with patriarchal assumptions regarding the traditional division of labour between men and women. I will show that women's role within these dominant ideologies was confined to a domestic role and that even their participation within the movement (in the eyes of nationalist leaders) was constrained by moral expectations and social constructions of 'true womanhood' rather than being liberating for women in Indian society. I am going to provide an overview of colonial discourse regarding gender relations because an understanding of this is crucial for understanding how and why the position of women was important to nationalist ideology and legitimization of home-rule. I will then provide gender analysis of early nationalist discourse and Gandhian ideology regarding the role of women in the freedom struggle. My aim in this section is to emphasize the importance of traditional gender relations to the movement as a whole and show that nationalist ideology in this instance did not resolve issues for women, as claimed by Partha Chatterjee (1989).

4.1 Gender and Colonialism.

I will begin by examining gender relations presents in colonial discourse and show that constructions of masculinity and femininity contributed towards the distinction between 'East' and 'West'. Colonial gender relations are crucial for understanding how women were viewed as both symbols and participants of the Indian National Movement.

Susan Jeffords describes masculinity as a "set of images, values interests, and activities that held importance to the successful achievement of male adulthood" (1989,xiii). Femininity, therefore, is the corresponding set of values and images held important for female adulthood (Banerjee,2003:168). Research has linked dominant masculinity in this period to the institutions of empire (Ibid; Chowdhury,2001) and, in turn, colonised subjects were associated with femininity. Geraldine Meaney argues that "a history of colonization is a history of feminization. Colonial powers identify their subject peoples as passive, in need of guidance, incapable of self-government, romantic, passionate, unruly, barbarous" (1993:233). This draws upon the theory of Edward Said (1977) who argued that European tropes of the colonised East construct a 'feminine Orient' (138; 182; 206). This "process of feminization" distinguishes the Orient as the "weak, irrational, non-martial 'other' in contrast to a rational, strong, martial European 'self'" (Banerjee,2003:169-170). The colonised nation,

therefore, is gendered as female. Furthermore, the colonised male is gendered in a way that stresses his inferiority and immasculinity in relation to the colonial male. Parallel to this, the colonised female is gendered as an inherently passive, tragic perpetual victim. She is a victim of the barbarous cultural practices of the uncivilised colonised men and must be 'saved' by the 'rational Europeans'. British colonisers and feminists in India undertook a 'civilising mission' in which they condemned many practices found in India such as sati, child marriage, polygamy, premature maternity, purdah and female infanticide. The assumption behind this pursuit was that the British colonisers and feminists were ultimately more enlightened than their Indian counterparts and therefore had a right to protest the Indian practices which they deemed barbaric. The treatment of women in India, therefore, was a benchmark from which to gauge their own sense of modernity and civilisation and a means of legitimizing British rule.

A prime example of these gender relations can be found in the orientalist text 'Mother India' by Katherine Mayo (1927). Mayo argued against the nationalist claim for home-rule. Her argument was that the 'debauched' sexual practices found in Indian culture had destroyed the bodies of Indian women. She argued that women's bodies had become corrupted because of the prominence of child marriage and early pregnancy which, in turn, had depleted the bodies of Indian citizens (Nadkarni,2008:806). On the basis of this, Mayo calls into question India's ability to reproduce itself and therefore its ability to self-rule. Mayo associates the condition of women in Indian Society to the condition of the body politic as a whole. She represents Indian women as "universally weak, passive victims of the barbaric Indian male, and as too backwards and ignorant to find any means to resist their oppression," (Liddle,1998:504). Gender relations are therefore hugely important for Katherine Mayo's analysis. This is because in her argument the vulnerability and pathology of Indian culture is constructed from the image of a sick and diseased mother, unable to care for her children. Mayo's comparison was the basis of an argument (or propaganda) supporting colonial rule.

We can see that gender relations were crucial in the colonial process of constructing a hierarchical distinction between East and West. This mainly consisted of the emasculation of Indian men and the view that colonial women were perpetually victimised by barbaric cultural practices. In the eyes of the British, the treatment and status of women in India reflected the inability of its citizens to rule themselves. I will now look at how the nationalist project, as it emerged in the late 19th century, modified these gender roles which challenged the legitimisation of colonial dominance. I will provide an analysis of the modified gender roles present in this discourse.

4.2 Gender, Nationalism, Anti-Colonialism - Women as Symbols.

The goal of the nationalist project in the late 19th century was to fashion an image of the Indian nation as which would inspire people to mobilize against colonial rule. The task was to project an essentialist idea of Indian culture (often more specifically Hindu culture) which was superior to Western culture. Indian nationalists could not deny the material subjugation of Indian people, so instead emphasised the superiority of India's "spiritual domain" (Thapar, 1993:82). It was the spiritual domain of Indian society which was seen to encapsulate the 'true identity' of the Indian people and in which colonial intervention should be resisted. The Indian nationalists stressed the need to protect this spiritual domain against alien forces in order to preserve the essence of Indian culture (ibid). But how were gender roles important to this construction of India's spiritual domain? Partha Chatterjee (1989) claims that the dichotomy of material and spiritual domains in this period related to the domains of men and women respectively (242). Women were seen as the "keepers of traditional culture" (Thapar-Björkert & Ryan, 2002: 305) and representatives of the sacred, spiritual domain that made India great. The construct of the 'new women' conjured up by Indian Nationalists was highly relevant to how the nation itself was visualised in the mind of supporters. The idealized feminine role of the 'new woman' played the foil to the new projection of Indian masculinity as champion of the material world, and thus capable of self-rule. It was also distinguished in relation to the 'common woman', setting the moral limits of women's behaviour (ibid:83). This common woman was thought to be a coarse, vulgar, promiscuous public woman, associated with the lower classes and the freedoms enjoyed by Western women. In contrast, the 'new women' was essentially middle-class, spiritually 'enlightened', self-sacrificing, pious and devoted to her husband and family. She was drawn from culturally available allegories within Hindu mythology which represented the epitome of ideal Indian womanhood such as Durga, Sita and Savitri (Thapar,1993:84). The idealization of motherhood was central to nationalist ideology. Mothers were sanctified not only within the familial role but also, like Durga, as mothers of the nation. 'Mother India', in contrast to Katherine Mayo's reading, was the divine spiritual creator of Indian society. This solidified a sense of unity within Indian people as it positioned all members of society as either daughters or sons of this supreme mother. The evocation of the India as a mother who has been held captive by colonial rulers was a powerful visualisation of the freedom struggle, to which all Indian women were seen to be representatives of. We can see from these examples that the construction of nationalist sentiment was an inherently gendered process. What do these gender relations tell us about the role of women in early nationalist discourse? Do the nationalist views on womanhood challenge or reaffirm patriarchy?

It could be argued that women seen as much more dignified than the colonial perception of Indian women. But within nationalist discourse, women are still treated as passive and essentialized. This more dignified role for women still exists within a structure of hierarchy. The idealized construct of the 'new woman' exclusively referred to Hindu middle-class women. This construct

shamed lower-class and unchaste women and did not accommodate for Muslim women, who made up a sizable minority of Indian society at the time. The idealization of docile and maternal women and the glorification of the nation as 'Mother India' set moral constrictions of how women should be and behave. The place of Indian women in national life was as mothers only. Therefore, the gender roles present in the early nationalist project could not be considered empowering. Furthermore, the construct of the 'new woman' determined that women could only relate to the nation in regards to their family role. Also, when women and mothers become embodiments of the nation itself, women lose agency over their bodies. Their bodies transcend and 'belong' to the nation at large. They are not authors of the nation-building project; rather they are deemed static icons of the nation. Their role in relation to the Indian nation, therefore, is immobile.

4.3 Gender and Gandhian Ideology - Women as Political Participants.

Mohandas K. Gandhi's assumption of leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1921 had a tremendous impact on women and their role in the struggle (Thapar,1993:86). I will show how Gandhi's ideology regarding social and political change was crucially shaped around matters regarding gender. In particular his policies of political protest - *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* - were inherently gendered. Some critics have even argued that he encouraged "feminized modes of protest" (Sen, 2000:18). Women's participation in the movement was certainly a priority for Gandhi. But, after analysing his ideology, I will show that the terms upon which the nationalist leader encouraged women to participate in public life was based on morally prescribed roles which trapped women within an essentialist ideal of femininity.

So how exactly did Gandhi envision women's participation in the movement? Women inhabited a vital role within Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist agenda. Not only did women's participation legitimize the movement, bolster claims of Indian social unity and undermine the 'civilising' mission of the British, who claimed to be the protectors of women. Gandhi realised the significant role that women could play in the movement from his experience during the civil rights movement in South Africa. Gandhi was aware of women's potentialities as passive resisters (Basu,1995:101). This was based upon a similarly glorified projection of the essential nature of women:

"To call women the weaker sex is libel. If by strength is meant moral power, then a woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, then the future is with women." (1925, cited in Bakshi,1987:99)

Gandhi believed that self-sacrifice and silent suffering were special qualities of Indian womanhood, based upon women's existence as mothers (Kumar, 1993:82). Therefore they fitted perfectly into his Constructive Programme:

“I do believe that woman is more fitted than man to make *ahimsa*. For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is any way superior to man” (1938, cited in Mies,1980:125.)

We can see that Gandhi is emphasising particular qualities of women which benefit his campaign of non-violence. Furthermore, women were crucial to his campaign of *satyagraha* which partly involved the domestic production of materials such as cloth in order to boycott foreign products and promote self-sufficiency from foreign-rule (*swadeshi*). Gandhi advocated the spinning and weaving of *khadi* in order to be self-sufficient and identified this as women's *dharma* or duty:

“To look after children, to dress them, is the mother's duty and therefore it is necessary that women should be fired with the spirit of Swadeshi.” (cited in Arya,2000:41)

Spinning on the *charkha* was a hugely important aspect of Gandhi's Constructive Programme and his campaign against colonialism. The *charkha* became the physical embodiment and emblem of the movement. Later on it was recognised as the national symbol and incorporated into the national flag of India. This illustrates how important the domestic duties of women were to the movement as a whole. *Stri Dharma*, a women's nationalist journal even argued that:

“Because the qualities which this new form of warfare is displaying are feminine rather than masculine, we may look on this life and death struggle of India to be free as the woman's war” (1930, cited in Everett, 1979: 76)

Women were central to the movement, therefore, because of their domestic role. It is evident that nationalist ideology in the 1920s and 1930s revolved around gender relations, specifically the social constructs of womanhood and motherhood. We can see that he relied on the traditional idealization of women as mothers and asserted an essentialized view of the dutiful nature of women. Gandhi continuously emphasised Sita as the ideal role model (Forbes,1996:129), a Hindu goddess who was the glorified embodiment of self-sacrifice, purity and spousal dedication. But Gandhi also modified and extended women's role in Indian society and rewrote passivity and self-sacrificing as strength rather than victimhood. Certainly, Gandhi believed that women's role was “different but equal” (Weber, 2011) to that of men. In this sense, his views of women as participants were considered revolutionary and progressive (Thapar,1993:86). Gandhi notably criticised oppressive practices towards women and highlighted gender inequality, particularly *purdah*:

“Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capabilities...Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which

she had no hand... The rules of social conduct must be developed only on the basis of cooperation and consultation, and should not be imposed by one sex on the other ... men have not realised this truth in its fullness...they have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends and co-workers” (Gandhi, 1962 cited in Jayawardena, 1986:95).

In his ‘different but equal’ dialogues, the nationalist leader is synthesising the Hindu idealization of womanhood with liberal, Western concepts of ‘equality’ in the public sphere (Patel,1998:159). In doing so, Gandhi enables women to have a role in public life without challenging the hierarchal structures of division of labour and traditional feminine roles.

Upon analysis, Gandhi’s discourse surrounding the participatory role of women is not empowering or progressive. On the one hand, he helped ease women into the public sphere but prevented further emancipation. This is because of a process of what we might call the ‘domestication of the public sphere’ during the late nationalist movement. This is reflected in that Gandhi’s ideology of *ahimsa* and *swadeshi* reconciled domestic and public values, evident in the prominence given to the household object of the *charkha*. Also, women’s participatory role was tied with their role in the household dynamic. Furthermore, domestic items such as cloth and salt were given national significance. Because of this process of domestication, women were able to participate in public life without disassociating themselves from their household role (Thapar-Bjorkert,2006:22). In other word, we could argue that women’s contribution in Gandhi’s eyes was ultimately apolitical. Gandhi did not alter the role and perception of women. Rather, he altered the conditions and character of political activity in a way that did not challenge the oppressive structures of society. So, the changes brought about by Gandhi did not actually seek to change the position, image and role of women within the family and society, rather they reinforced the image of women’s primary role as wives, mothers, and daughters (Dhingra,2014:53). It should also be noted that Gandhi only encouraged women to participate under the approval of the head of their household. Some might argue that he was ‘opening the door’ for women in the public sphere by appeasing societal expectations of women. But I would argue that his ideology was deeply rooted in patriarchal assumptions. Within Gandhi’s dialogues surrounding women there remains a sharp demarcation of women and men’s public and private roles. His policies are embedded with a traditional division of labour - reaffirming women’s role in the household without assigning any significance to women’s productive role in society and in the economy. Furthermore, as Anupama Roy points out, the visibility of women in the public sphere in this period was surrounded by a discourse of ‘true womanhood’ which trapped them within a social construct of femininity (410:2010). Therefore, women’s participation in Gandhi’s eyes was not liberating because they were not ‘free to participate’. In their participation, they were constrained by moral limitations of how to behave.

In conclusion, I think it is clear that women's participation in the freedom struggle in the eyes of the nationalist leader Gandhi was not empowering for women. Instead, his ideology created a reconfiguration of what political action involved in order to broaden public engagement rather than significantly challenge the patriarchal structures within Indian society. Women's participation, in the eyes of the leaders, was to benefit the political cause rather than advance women's status and opportunities.

4.4 Conclusions

I will now relate this analysis back to my research questions.

RQ1. In what way was the construction of nationalist ideology during the Indian Nationalist Movement an inherently gendered process?

From this analysis we can see that gender relations were crucial to the development of nationalist ideology in India. Firstly, colonial understandings of masculinity and femininity contributed towards the distinction between East and West. The colonial construction of Indian men as feminized and barbaric and Indian women as perpetual victims was used to justify foreign rule in India. Constructions of gender also contributed to the assertion of a new, dignified Indian identity to encourage nationalist feeling and support for home-rule. Idealized visions of womanhood and motherhood became symbols of the nation. Furthermore, constructions of women's role as participants were crucial to Gandhi's dialogues, modifying the idealised vision of womanhood in order to construct a space for women's participation so as to broaden mass support without challenging the patriarchal structures of Indian society. Overall, we can see that the nationalist movement was an inherently gendered process, challenging the claim that the nation-building processes are blind to gender.

RQ2. In what way was political participation for women during the Indian National Movement informed by restrictive or patriarchal gender roles?

In this analysis I have identified that in early Indian nationalist ideology women were only encouraged to relate to the nation as symbols rather than as active participants. The prescription of active roles for women would have challenged the gendered division of labour which was crucial to the ideology. These gender relations, therefore, determined that women could not acceptably participate in the movement due to the importance of their familial role within the domestic sphere. Gandhi's ideology surrounding womanhood similarly idealized and essentialized women/ mothers, but he modified the traditional gender constructs in way that enabled women to be seen as more than

just symbols. In his domestication of public action, woman could rightfully participate in the movement. But Gandhi's gendered discourse encouraged women to participate only as an extension of their domestic role. Overall, my analysis has shown that dominant nationalist ideology set very limiting constraints upon how women could acceptably participate in the Indian National Movement. Gender relations assured that women could not be seen to participate as equals to men.

RQ3. How did politically active women in the movement negotiate and challenge the gender relations present in mainstream nationalist discourse in order to enable their own active participation?

My analysis in this section had not shed any light on how politically active women negotiated or challenged gender discourse in the nationalist movement in order to enable their participation. I will now go on to provide two case studies which I believe do provide significant insight in showing how women did contribute as active agents of social change in this movement, despite the limitations of nationalist gender constructions.

5. Case study 1

What role did women play in determining their own participation? This case study is an example of women negotiating the limiting role prescribed to them by leaders, and the overwhelming impact that their reaction and involvement had upon the nationalist movement as a whole.

5.1 Women and the Salt Protests

In 1930, Gandhi was given the responsibility of organising the first non-cooperation act against the British government. He began with a *satyagraha* of the British salt tax. At the time, British powers had monopoly over the production, collection and selling of salt including a tax. Salt was freely available to a large portion of the Indian population living by the coast but it was illegal to produce salt outside of the colonial government. In order to boycott this British law and institution, Gandhi initiated his widely publicised Dandi March in which himself and 71 other volunteers would march from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to the coastal village of Dandi in order to make salt at the coast and break the salt law (Chatterjee,2001:42). Throughout the duration of the march he encouraged others to join in the protest and break the salt law, mobilizing a mass boycott of the British law. Gandhi chose salt as the product to boycott, despite criticism, because of its symbolic significance. As Gandhi stated “next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life” (1981:349) The salt tax was something that everyone within Indian society could oppose; Hindus, Muslims, peasants and the landless - “the poor needed salt more than the rich who got it from their foods”(Gandhi, R., 2007:303).

The use of salt as a symbol was intended to encourage the mass participation of the population and encourage a unified sense of nationhood but Gandhi and the National Congress Committee did not want women to participate in the salt *satyagraha*. Gandhi disapproved of women’s participation and his initial call to break the salt laws excluded women entirely (Menon,2008:551). His reason for not including women in the salt *satyagraha* was that:

“Just as Hindus do not harm a cow, the British do not attack women as far as possible. For Hindus it would be cowardice to take a cow to the battlefield. In the same way it would be cowardice for us to have women accompany us.” (Gandhi, 1971:12)

In other words, because of the symbolic nature of women in regards to the nationalist movement and in the eyes of the British colonists, participation of women would have been seen as cowardly. This is because, in the eyes of Gandhi, government officials would not have wanted to harm or arrest female participants and this would have been perceived as an unfair advantage on the part of the

nationalists. This, again, feeds into notions of chivalry and patriarchy. His claims are reaffirming the idea that women do not belong in the public political activities of the nation as equals to men.

This drew considerable resentment from women; initially this criticism was mainly from female freedom fighters and upper/ middle-class women involved in the movement already. Margaret Cousins, founder of the All India Women's Conference, wrote a letter of protest to Gandhi saying that:

“In these stirring critical days of India's destiny, there should be no water-tight compartments of service. Women asked that no conferences or congresses dealing with the welfare of India should be held without the presence of women. Similarly, women must ask that no marches, no imprisonments, no demonstrations organized for the welfare of India should prohibit women from a share in them.” (Ali, 1991 :100)

Other women famously wrote to Gandhi and strongly protested the decision, such as Durgabai Deshmukh, a freedom fighter and follower of Gandhi ; Khurshedbhen, the great-granddaughter of Dadabhai Naoroji (the first Asian to be a British MP in 1892) ; and, Mridula Sarabhai, a student at the time and future freedom fighter and congresswoman (Taneja,2005:123). Eventually Sarojini Naidu (president of the Indian National Congress) joined Gandhi on the last day of the march. In doing so she defied the decision that no women were to participate in the *satyagraha* and signalled to women across the country that they could participate (Basu,1995:102). This resulted in an overwhelming response from women across the country, from all class, caste, and regional backgrounds. The “trickle of women who had so far participated in the national movement turned into a torrent,” (Chatterjee, 2001:43). As nationalist leader Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay recalled:

“By sunset of that first day it had turned into a mass movement and swept the country. On that memorable day thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper... Women young and old, rich and poor, came tumbling out in their hundreds and thousands, shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them for so long. Valiantly they went forwards without a trace of fear or embarrassment.” (quoted in Kumar,1993:78)

Furthermore, women began to form organizations to facilitate their participation in the salt law protests, among them the Desh Sevika Sangh, The Ladies Picketing Board and the Nari Satyagraha Samiti (Menon,2008:395). In the end, women across India participated in the protest and of the 80,000 arrested during the salt *satyagraha*, 17,000 of them were women. This signalled a new level of female participation within the movement as a whole. It involved women from all walks of life in India and the majority of female participants were ordinary village women, breaking the nationalist movement out of its “upper-class enclave” (Hemispheres, 2009:60). Women's participation is

generally understood as what made the protest so successful (ibid.) and it certainly changed the nature of the movement as a whole.

5.2 Conclusions

Why is women's participation in this civil disobedience movement so significant? I will now relate this analysis back to my research questions.

RQ2. In what way was political participation for women during the Indian National Movement informed by restrictive or patriarchal gender roles?

The gender relations at the core of nationalist ideology determined that women were *not* encouraged to participate in the salt *satyagraha*. This is because the British colonial treatment of Indian women meant that they could not be perceived as equal participants in public action. Nationalist leaders were acutely aware of how the British government viewed women and believed that their active participation would delegitimize the protest in the eyes of the government. So in this instance, restrictive gender identities determined that women were excluded from part of the civil disobedience movement.

RQ3. How did politically active women in the movement negotiate and challenge the gender relations present in mainstream nationalist discourse in order to enable their own active participation?

We can see from this case study that women as a whole were not coerced and manipulated by nationalist leaders to participate in order to broaden the mass participation of the movement. Instead, this case study shows that women's participation occurred at odds with the limitations set by nationalist leaders. We can see that certain women (admittedly already politically engaged women from the educated middle/upper class) scrutinized the nationalist leaders' assumptions surrounding womanhood and applied pressure to the leaders in order to negotiate a wider space for women's participation. But it was not just women within the politically-engaged, middle-class bubble of nationalist politics who challenged and negotiated the dominant ideology. I believe that the overwhelming response of women from all corners of India's diverse society reflects a reality that women were compelled to participate despite the position allocated to them within dominant gender relations. This completely counters the simplified understanding that gender discourse wholly determines how and why women mobilize in social and political movements. The mass participation of women in the salt *satyagraha* reflects that a wide range of women were prepared to challenge

British government of their own accord. This case study is an example of women negotiating, challenging and even defying the terms upon which they were encouraged to participate. Despite this, the salt *satyagraha* still remained in the 'domesticated' sphere of public action. It could be argued that women's participation in this civil disobedience movement, and the association with salt as a domestic item, can be identified as an extension of the domestic role for women. Therefore, despite mobilizing and having significant influence on this aspect of the campaign, the women involved were still in a dialogue with traditional gender identities.

6. Case Study 2

My second case study will look at how gender roles were negotiated, utilised and challenged by women who were active in militant nationalist politics, in contrast to Gandhian politics. Women in such campaigns not only challenged the effectiveness of non-violence as a political practice but also, and by extension, challenged the use of the passive, self-sacrificing idealized Indian women as a symbol of the movement and nation as whole. Such groups of women were active in the revolutionary and terrorist nationalist organizations particularly in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra as well as in neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia outside of the subcontinent (Jayawardena,1986:103). Women were also active in the Indian Communist Party in the 1920s/30s which was also opposed to nonviolence as the dominant political practice (ibid:105). I will analyse one particular militant women's group which I believe utilized and challenged gender discourse for political ends in a significant way.

6.1 Militant revolutionary women - the Rani of Jhansi regiment of the Indian National Army.

The Indian National Army (INA) was a guerrilla army which formed in Southeast Asia in alliance with the Imperial Japanese Army, aimed at fighting British forces in the region with the ultimate goal of fighting for Indian independence. The INA came under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose in 1943. In contrast to Gandhi's campaign, Bose advocated a violent anti-colonial struggle. Moreover, his campaign is seen to have incorporated a "violent feminism" (Rettig,2008:8) which I am going to unpack in this case study. The nationalist leader has been considered by many as "Bengal's champion of women's rights" (Rettig,2013:630). Geraldine Forbes has identified that for Bose;

"Improving women's status and *swaraj* were inseparable: until women's lives improved that nation could never be free; and until the nation were free women's' condition would not improve. The first step to *swaraj* was the education of women to their double oppression as colonial subjects and inferior sex." (1996:136)

We can see that for the nationalist leader, the condition of women was of much greater importance than simply widening mass participation or as symbols of national identity. Women's empowerment for Bose was an end in itself. He envisioned a drastic "total mobilization" which, by extension, included the formulation of an all-women regiment (Rettig,2013:628). This vision materialized as the Rani of Jhansi regiment, initiated in Japanese-occupied Singapore in 1943 and led by Captain Lakshmi Sahgal. The regiment provided a space for women from all kinds of backgrounds to

participate in the militarized struggle against the British government - but it was mainly comprised of female Indian prisoners of war held in Singapore, women who disagreed with the Indian National Congress's policy of nonviolence and civil disobedience as the only manifestation of the struggle, and younger unmarried women from the middle-class who did not identify with the middle and upper-class idealization of the domestic wife / mother role proliferated in mainstream nationalist politics. Their preparation as soldiers was essentially the same as men in the INA and they were to wear a uniform of caps, shirts, jodhpurs breeches, and boots just like the male soldiers (Forbes,1996:213) - much to the shock of the British soldiers who encountered the Rani of Jhansi regiment in Burma and Malaysia (ibid:214). Even though the INA was led by Bose and the Rani of Jhansi regiment was initiated by him, research into the testimonies of Rani of Jhansi veterans has suggested that:

“(The regiment) belies the image of passive compliance by women to the rigid agenda and charismatic leadership of a man. In fact the Ranis consistently took bold initiatives and often challenged Bose to prove his commitment to involving women in the nationalist cause” (Hills and Silverman,1993:745)

The regiment itself was led by Captain Lakshmi who also had the role of recruiting women for the regiment door-to-door across Southeast Asia, whilst Bose had the role of giving rousing speeches across the region in order to garner support and recruitment for his insurgency army (Rettig,2013:627). Capt. Lakshmi led the all-women's regiment from Singapore into Burma where they launched their war for the liberation of India, at this point having a thousand women in all ranks (Menon,2008:551). The campaign was unsuccessful and the INA was forced to disband in 1945. Despite the failings of the campaign, it is notable on one level for its “unprecedented mingling of women from varied backgrounds” (Hills and Silverman,1993:741). Furthermore, I believe that this case gives a fascinating example of how feminism and nationalist politics can intersect. So why might the regiment be described as having a feminist agenda as well a nationalist one? I believe that this is evident in the construction of womanhood embedded in the campaign.

Bose named the all-woman regiment after Lakshmibai, the Rani (Queen) of the princely state of Jhansi (Rettig,2013:630). Lakshmibai was a historical figure who became legend in oral history, murals, and literature in the 20th century (Hills and Silverman, 1993: 743). The Rani of Jhansi was a Revolt heroine of what Bose referred to as the First Indian War of Indian Independence (Rettig,2013:630) but what other historical accounts refer to as the 1857 Indian Mutiny. She was the widow of the Maharashtra of Jhansi who famously led her subjects into battle in retaliation against the territories being taken over by the East India Company (Rettig,2008:8). Lakshmibai was therefore a perfect symbol for Bose's regiment because she represents the political and military leadership of women as well as the resistance to British rule. Her militancy was appropriated by Bose to be given a subcontinental, nationalist meaning which would appeal to the nationalist politics of the freedom movement. She is popularly depicted as a warrior goddess, usually on top of a horse in battle,

wielding a sword and carrying her adopted son on her back. Hills and Silverman describe the mythical roots which provide context for the Rani legend:

“The Rani legend also had multiple sources in Hindu cultural and religious tradition, rooted in the prehistoric Mother, the primal Shakti, the most potent force in all Hinduism, and the female avenger Durga/ Chandi/ Bhavani” (1993:743).

The cultural points of reference evident in the construction of the Rani of Jhansi regiment reflect a vision of womanhood which was powerful, proactive and commanding. This symbol was intended to galvanise women as empowered warriors and demonstrate that despite *pardah* women could assume political and military leadership (Rettig,2008:8). The implication is that women could fight in anti-colonial combat as equals to men.

We can see that Bose similarly drew upon archetypal tropes of womanhood and motherhood derived from Hindu mythology. But the Rani legend harbours a striking contrast to the idealized Sita-like women that was central to Gandhi’s mobilizing ideology. For Gandhi, Sita was utilized in order to proliferate the virtues of passivity, nonviolence and domesticity in political action for the benefit of his *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* campaigns. It was this domestication of political affairs which carved a space for women’s political participation. Alternatively, the utilization of the Durga trope by Bose puts forward an expanded role of participation for women which is proactive, powerful and confrontational rather than passive and compliant. Although the Ranis are still depicted as mothers, they represent a greatly expanded understanding of motherhood which is not confined to the moral limitations of Gandhi’s glorified Sita role model. As Hills and Silverman state:

“The responsibilities outlined for Ranis were based upon accepted but greatly expanded roles for women as ‘mothers’...mothers could play inspirational as well as sustaining roles. Though these might appear to be little more than traditional female occupations, Bose envisioned an enlargement of their universe and influence in which they would leave their protected homes to enter barracks, hospitals and army camps to join the men of the INA.” (1993: 755 - 756)

The warrior goddess and supreme mother archetypes of Durga and Kali that Bose emphasised are imbued with matriarchal vengeance and blood-thirst (Thapar-Bjorkert & Ryan,2002:309). Whereas Gandhi’s gendered discourse places women in an enlarged but familiar domestic space, Bose’s discourse on women envisions a much larger realm of influence for women as wholly equal participants rather than ‘equal but different’ participants.

6.2 Conclusions

The example of the all-women Rani of Jhansi regiment of the INA provides an insight into the complex relationship between religious tradition, nation-building politics and gender identity. But, this example also shows that gender roles are malleable and not necessarily confining for women. I will now relate my analysis back to my research questions

RQ2. In what way was political participation for women during the Indian National Movement informed by restrictive or patriarchal gender roles?

Women's participatory role in this particular regiment of the INA was informed by a gender identity which drew upon the mythological Hindu images of Durga and Kali. This created a cultural space for women to participate as equals to men. Although women's participation in this sense was informed by a socially and culturally constructed model of Indian womanhood derived from tradition, the role was not a reiteration of patriarchal gender relations but rather the role was used to mobilize women to be equal participants to men.

RQ3. How did politically active women in the movement negotiate and challenge the gender relations present in mainstream nationalist discourse in order to enable their own active participation?

The Rani of Jhansi regiment utilized a participatory role based upon a negotiation of the traditional gender identity of mothers. I have previously identified that mothers, in their familial role, were viewed as crucial symbols and reproducers of the nation at large. In mainstream nationalist discourse, the use of mothers to determine women's relationship to the nation was a constraining factor which set moral limitations upon how women should be and behave. Compared to this, the Rani of Jhansi women's projection of motherhood was broadened to encompass much more active and authoritative participatory roles of women. We can see that although the regiment demonstrates an empowered conceptualisation of womanhood, this gender construction still maintains a dialogue with traditional gender relations.

7. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that the nation-building project in India was greatly determined by dominant gender relations and gender identities. I have also argued that traditional roles for women in Indian society greatly limited the way in which particular groups of women were encouraged and able to politically participate. I have shown this through analysis of the dominant ideologies throughout the movement - for instance, anti-colonial nationalist ideology which positioned women as symbols of the nation and symbols of the distinctness and unity of Indian culture. I also demonstrated this through analysis of Gandhi's principles of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, which put forward modified gender roles that were an extension of women's traditional role in the domestic sphere. Both of these ideologies contribute to moral limitations of womanhood. I then developed my argument to show that despite the centrality of gender relations, certain groups of women were still able to be active participants of social and political change. I demonstrated this by providing two case studies in which groups of women are seen to challenge and negotiate dominant gender identities. In doing this, I further showed that gender identities are central because despite certain women's active defiance and negotiation of traditional gender roles ; they are still in constant dialogue with them.

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