

Exploring the Political Function of Gender in Contemporary Nationalism

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In ancient Greece, *'oikos'* which could be roughly translated as 'household' is considered to be the basic social unit of the *'polis'*, the 'outside world'. The dichotomy between *oikos-polis*, home and the outside world has been discussed in literature widely. This subject gathered attention not only from male but also women writers. For a long time, household chores that require corporeal strength are exclusively reserved for women. The more intellectual and cognitively enabled works are kept for men to accomplish. Women writers across the world have successfully transgressed such stereotypical social constructs. To cross over these codified and monolithic structures has been an extremely challenging task for them. Now, writing is no longer an exclusive reserve for men, it has come to identify itself with women as well. The aim of this paper is not to pit South Asian women writers against their male counterparts. Rather, it explains that these women writers have addressed some of those vital issues which hitherto either neglected or are pushed to the margins. These writers have skillfully addressed issues of migration, labor, diaspora, trauma, faith, and global Muslim identity and the like. These issues are definitely sensitive and unconventional but at the same time are relevant from the point of view of society and nation. They provide a multifaceted and universal understanding of gender and the role it plays in their formation. Following this string of thought, this paper makes use of Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of illusions* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. I speculate that women writers through their writing have impacted the formation of national contours by engaging the readers in a form of dialogue. Their narratives open space for negotiation and dialogue recuperating the world from becoming something obnoxious. At the same time, it locates the role of women in nation building and significance of the image of Indian womanhood in deciding the political contours of nationalist discourse. Though nation is a product of male fantasy it conveniently uses female currency for consolidating its nationalist agenda.

"Bande Mataram" (I revere the mother) is the most revered slogan in Bankim's novel *Anandamath* (1882) and is representative of the nationalist movement in the early decade of twentieth century. It is symbolic of the vigor to see India free from the colonial rule. Bankim uses the image of the mother in the text as a manifestation of the nation. This idea is played upon a lot of times so much so that it pushes one to compellingly wonder about the origins of this elusive presence in the text. She is mother to all and has thousands of children who are ready to lay down their lives for her. She is used as a motif to inspire the characters to join the nationalist struggle. The mother/motherland is shown as comprising of both constructive and destructive energies. The more fragile aspect is represented by goddess Durga and goddess Kali symbolizes the more fierce aspect. The fierce geometry of her body clearly demonstrates the purpose. Lipner in introduction to *Anandamath* states, "the "Mother" clearly is represented by a young, smiling woman in a sari seated on the

upper curve of a large, tendril-like root at the base of the tree. She has a child nestling in her lap, and her two hands (in one of which there seems to be a fruit) are stretched downwards. This is a rather cute, idyllic picture of a bountiful and fertile mother and her *offspring*" (104). A similar picture is seen in Aurobindo Ghose's translation of the poem *Vande Mataram*. He writes, it is at the same time a benign mother "richly-watered, richly-fruited, cool with the winds of the south" and a goddess with weapons whose "image [is] raised in every temple. For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war" (Bhattacharya 72).

Aurobindo Ghose plays a major role in discerning the religious significance of *Vande Mataram*. He found a mantra in the religious semiotics of the song. In fact, he is responsible in making Bankim's ideology to reach the remotest corners thus making nationalist movement a mass movement. However, for Aurobindo it is the song which is more significant because, "the bare intellectual idea of the motherland is not in itself a great driving force', the vision that inspired people was something more-'a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart'" (Bhattacharya 47). Now, if the idea in itself is not sufficient, it becomes imperative to question the vision which proved to be far more productive. What significance does the image of ten handed goddess evoke which has turned millions of people into a fierce storm. Why is it that the image of mother is deployed to signify Indian nationalism and not any other role stipulated by patriarchal society for women? A certain pattern of thinking emerges if one unveils these thinking mechanisms. The most essential question is how to situate the problematic of 'woman's question' in the era of nationalism.

The Inner-Outer Dichotomy

Partha Chatterjee (1989) points out that it is tempting to believe that woman's question is completely ignored, "but in reality it is because nationalism had in fact resolved 'the women's question' in complete accordance with its preferred goals" (237). Now, if nationalism claims to have resolved the woman's question, it is far more interesting to see the way it locates or fixes this problematic within its claims. It is to be noted that the modernization of women is considered to be a result of western influence. The more conservative societies in India are unable to digest the idea of women going out to work, or wearing western outfits or for that matter even educating women is considered to be a western monopoly. There is a constant fear that if women cross the threshold of the home or if they are given desired education, they would start to rebel. This in turn would ruin the sanctity of the home. Thus, women are constantly tied in a dilemma of keeping the sanctity of the home intact and pursue their ambition which is possible only if they move out. This dichotomy of the home and the outside world is played out in the preservation of national culture. In order to make women the preservers of national sanctity which is equivalent to preserving the sanctity of the home, it is essential to accord a very crucial status to women. Women are to be given a position of reverence which would not only lend them the desired respect but would also serve as a model for women to constantly fashion themselves. Motherhood is often projected as the most powerful dimension of the personality of a woman. According to Sikata Banerjee, "[...] The term 'Motherhood' has vast dimensions, it extends beyond the family to town, society, country, nation, and the entire universe. Hence, the personality of a woman is all pervading" (119). The world is full of stories illustrating the power of motherhood and the way she fights to protect her children. This image is a very convincing portrayal of a woman being no less than a warrior. The image of woman as a warrior is deployed by the nation

builders to endow them with a responsibility and also giving them a purpose of protecting the nation. This fosters that in order for women to protect the nation they should learn to protect themselves as well. Woman is a metaphorical extension of the honor of a man; in this context mother-nation becomes the honor of all citizens and any atrocity committed against her is tantamount to shattering the honor of all citizens. At the same time, "it worked as an effective cultural metaphor because such an interpretation of honor is understood by both communities" (136). A mother has two sides to her personality: she loves and caresses her children and she is also ready to confront those who try to bring harm to her children. In this manner, woman (mother) becomes the symbolic representation of the nation and the people inhabiting it are the children of mother nation.

Such a deployment served a threefold purpose: First, the problem of modernization of women and giving them the legitimate respect, status, and freedom is solved as she is now revered both as a mother and as an extended metaphor for a nation. This comes about as the "selective appropriation of the western modernity" such that the tradition is preserved and same time new trends are selectively inculcated within the traditional parameters (Chatterjee 238). One of the underlying thoughts is if women are given freedom then they would stop giving attention to their home. Family is considered to be the basic social unit of the society and is significant in nation building. If family runs in a smooth manner then society, locality, state and finally the nation would also run smoothly. This further strengthened the hold and gaze over the movement of a woman. This is the reason why the whereabouts of woman becomes pertinent. There is a constant gaze that follows her not only outside the limits of the home but within the home itself. Chatterjee avers that, "the nationalist paradigm in fact supplied an ideological principle of selection. It [is] not a dismissal of modernity; the attempt [is] rather to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project" (240). In this manner, society gets rid of the stigma of being labeled as downright conservative or orthodox. The freedom sanctioned for women by the patriarchal nation builders comes with its own terms and conditions. It comes with a designated role, which means women here do not have the freedom to choose their role at any given point. It is a role selectively designed for women to take active participation in nation building. The corporeal representation of nation as 'Mother India' or 'Bharat Mata' is to use their bodies as a political weapon and ensure their uncompromised commitment to nation building. It is to, "[...] draw women out of their homes in limited ways, to participate in riots and demonstrations and then push them back into their designated spaces and roles" (qtd. in S. Banerjee 113). The significant point here is that while men after the execution of their role retreat into their private sphere; women continue to work for the dissemination of the idea even when she is at home by indoctrinating her children. The "multifaceted image of woman, using motherhood and family values to support woman's public speaking, political mobilization, discussions of tensions between home and work, and analyses of women's vulnerability in the public sphere" is an example of the "creation of transgression within tradition" (S. Banerjee 130).

Second, her modernization is no longer a threat to the existing patriarchal society as she is now accorded a new role to aspire and emulate which is both liberating and limiting at the same time. The imaginative corporeality of the dominative view of nation is the construct of "male fantasy" (S. Banerjee 6). Thus, nation is in its essence is a masculinized entity but is given a feminine orientation to serve its personal agenda. It is assumed that the presence of femininity could dilute the ultimate purpose of nation as feminine signifies passivity, weakness, and emotions. Thus, the idea is to bring about a change in the emotional appeal of women by turning her into a collectivity which coincides with the

national honor, dignity, culture and ethics. This way their presence does not weaken the national mission. Chatterjee (1989) explains the ridicule which Bengali women who, "are trying to imitate the way of a European woman or *memsahib*" are subjected to when they are successfully westernized. It is believed that, "the westernized woman [is] fond of useless luxury and cared little for the well-being of the home" (240).

Third, along with taking care of the national culture women now take care of the spiritual essence of the culture. The home and the work get condensed into a dichotomy between the inner and outer spheres. The household is considered to be the domain of woman and this sphere is of primal importance. If the inner sphere functions in a right manner, outer would automatically do so. It signifies the spiritual, pure, virtuous, untouched and away from the reach of the outsider. The outside world by contrast is meant to be the domain of males which symbolized the pursuit of material interests and is exposed to harshness and vulnerabilities of the world. Men being physically stronger are the vigilantes of this sphere and they could fight the extremities of the outside world only if they are ensured of the well-being of the things back at home. During colonial rule, it is the inner sanctum of home which is threatened as the Christian missionaries influenced the very core of the social unit. Chatterjee (1989) expostulates that the Indians uphold that as long as they are able to preserve the inner spiritual core, "could make all the compromises and adjustments to adapt to modern material world without losing identity" (238). This dichotomy gives a clear idea of the identification and management of social space by men and women. The westernized woman is taken to be a threat to this proposed division of spaces. Thus, both the home and the nation are required to be well taken care of.

The Fabricated Ideal of Beauty

In Jhumpa Lahiri's story, *Sexy*, the central character Miranda has an affair with a man named Dev, who is already married. She is a bold, educated working woman who is infused with a unique representation of the idea of female beauty. Ironically, as the customary glance on the title would furnish, she is not 'sexy' which the title of the story mentions. In fact, it is one of the questions which story raises, "what does it mean to be sexy?" or who do we call a sexy woman? There are two parallel narratives of affair in the story": one of Miranda and Dev and other that Laxmi narrates to Miranda about her cousin's husband. The real meaning of sexy comes across through the words of Rohin, her cousin's son. Rohin is left with Miranda for a day to be taken care of as Laxmi has to help her cousin out with her divorce. Rohin asks Miranda to put on a "silver cocktail dress" which afterwards she reluctantly puts on when further insisted upon by him. Rohin is taken by surprise and admires her in that dress saying, "You're sexy" (107). For Miranda it is slightly difficult to comprehend that compliment coming from such a small kid. Last time she gets the same compliment from Dev. She asks Rohin to explain to her the meaning of the word 'sexy'. He answers, "it means loving someone you don't know" (107). He further clarifies, "That's what my father did. He sat next to someone he didn't know, someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother" (108). Story implicitly conveys that married women are categorically excluded from being labeled 'sexy'. It is women who are outside marriage, those who are working, have chores apart from household ones and who get to interact with the outside world frequently are included in this. Such a woman is considered a threat to the prototype of the ideal woman who takes care of the inner sanctum. Miranda realizes the damage she has incurred to the family of Dev when she comes to know her real position in his life. She thereafter maintains distance from him.

Dev's wife on the other hand is portrayed as a naïve beautiful Bengali woman who is entirely dedicated to the service of her family. In comparison to Miranda it is not as if she is less beautiful or appealing. Miranda now knew that there is difference between being sexy and being beautiful. She felt numb when she realizes, "that Madhuri Dixit, whom Dev's wife resembled, was beautiful" (108). It is difficult for women to not only express but also understand their sexuality outside the parameters of marriage. The social standards are established in such a fashion that their understanding of sexuality is constantly being refashioned. Women are, "forced to deal with female sexuality in the form of wives who fail to provide unambiguous support for their husband's participation in war, highlighting the presence of sexual love and desire, albeit within parameters of marriage" (S. Banerjee 142). Thus, there is a constant attempt to redefine the definition of feminism and to valorize the figure of the 'heroic mother' who not only encourages and supports her husband and son but also remains loyal to them (142).¹

Thus, loyalty and chastity become the hallmark features of a woman and Miranda certainly doesn't feature in this category. Lahiri shows the fabricated nature of the idea of beauty through the character of Miranda. Also, it is Miranda who realizes there is something amiss in their relationship, not Dev. Describing the disposition of Miranda, Lahiri writes, "In spite of herself, she longed for him. She would see him one more Sunday, she decided, perhaps two. Then she would tell him the things she had known all along: that it wasn't fair to her, or to his wife, that they both deserved better, that there was no point in it dragging on" (Lahiri 110). This is a typical conventional move wherein, "any inappropriate attention is constructed by the women [...] as being their fault for not following a proper form of sexual respectability" (S. Banerjee 146). Women need to be their own vigilantes and had to constantly remain under self-surveillance so that they do not need men to make them internalize their responsibility. In such a context, forms of sexual aggression on part of men, like "eve-teasing, getting pinched, poked, and/or verbally harassed", and rape are seen as a result of women's carelessness in maintaining their sexual respectability (146). The general reaction in disapproving tones marks such incidents as a result of their own fault and they should have been more careful. In addition, "the discourse of shame around female sexuality prevents women from resisting these types of aggression" (147).

Women as Disembodied and De-sexualized Beings

In such a scenario, it is ironic to see that woman's body functions both as sexual objects and as revered beings who are elevated to the role of mother. This dichotomy leaves no space to imagine them anything other than these. The image of nation represented as a mother/motherland disseminates a limited view of women's identity. It definitely fails to capture the multiplicity and heterogeneity immanent to their existence. This is a limited model of femininity which is made compatible to the patriarchal cultural discourse. Such a model of feminine representation is aptly deployed in the epics, for instance, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have Sita and Draupadi like characters represented in allegiance to this model. Such women characters represent the true model of Hindu femininity. There have been several renditions of both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from multiple points of view and it is interesting to note the manner in which they portray their female characters. They are portrayed as "contested and unfinished identities", de-sexualized beings that are "in service to the masculine priorities of nation" (Taneja 4). Priya Taneja discusses about the use of "strategy of disembodiment" in the depiction of women characters both

in media and print (3). They are portrayed as helpless beings reduced to subservient status for transgressing patriarchal cultural norms. Famous characters like Ahilya and Surpanakah have personally experienced the wrath of the male dominated society: “[...] they are turned to stone, made of mist, [...] illusions; their bodies are obscured by clouds or fragrances; or they are silenced by having words put into their mouths” (3).² These are shunned because it is believed that their conduct is not in accordance with the appropriate behavioral standards prescribed by society. Their sexuality is shown either as a breach of societal standards or not within the parameters of marriage: “Ahilya is turned to stone as a punishment for adultery and Surpanakha is violently mutilated for her sexual agency” (Taneja 246). For all the injustices incurred upon women, they are expected to remain silent, a conspiratorial silence similar to one maintained by all patriarchs when Draupadi is being disrobed in front of their eyes. Draupadi refuses and claims that she is being unjustly staked but all remain silent. Had she too been silent who would have come to speak on her behalf? Elaborating on anthropologist Irawate Karve’s views, Taneja writes, “if only Draupadi had made an emotional appeal, instead of ‘standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pundit’, things would have gone much better for her” (316). Does this mean that her silence would have spared her the wrath of those men? Is there nothing else worth questioning in this entire incident except for her outspokenness and boldness of spirit even when faced with such a humiliating circumstance? Such a treatment of sexuality sends out a message to the society about what is deemed appropriate and inappropriate female behavior. Above that, how does such treatment contribute to the formation of national culture? Aren’t these formed in strict accordance with patriarchal cultural values which dovetails well with the national discourse?

Disruption of Mythical Landscape

Chitra Banerjee in *The Palace of illusions* present a counter-narrative to the proposed model of femininity. The novel is a retelling of *Mahabharata* from the point of view of central protagonist of the story, Draupadi. The unique thing about the novel is that it recounts everything from her perspective. Draupadi is portrayed as an inquisitive child who excels not only in beauty but also in statecraft. The conventional narratives would rather show her as an obedient daughter and wife that, “strips her of her attributes of knowledge, learning and statecraft. Her desire for vengeance, which drives the action of the story, is entirely omitted” (Taneja 248). These narratives does not portray her as a subversive figure who has a role to play in the destiny of history and this is so because it doesn’t suit the narrative paradigm of nationalist entrepreneurs. The patriarchal intelligentsia is busy in designing a narrative framework which allows women to be figured within an array of specific roles. The textual rendition of female icons in epics show them as divorced from their bodies and especially sexual desires so that they could serve as an example for other women to emulate. Taneja expresses concern in this regard as she writes, “the contribution of women characters to the wider nationalist project also deserves exploration” (250). Banerjee transgresses this conventional landscape of epics by allowing Draupadi to be the way she would want to be.

Thus, by outdoing the norms of representation Banerjee secures a niche for herself in the canon and launches a new pattern of writing. The disruption of the popular myth sets in a new pattern of thinking which allows readers to envision Draupadi from a completely different dimension. This allows for a radical transgression in the general reception of epic narratives which are popularized as ‘readerly’ texts meant to be passively

consumed and not 'writerly' which calls for active consumption.³ This to me resonates with the idea of Mikhail Bakhtin, the idea he proposes in 1941 seminal essay *Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel*. By allowing epics to be under the scrutiny of common eye, one is essentially puncturing the aura that circumscribes its narrative. Readers generally look upon characters like Achilles, Hector, and Zeus which are considered no less than gods. The disruption of the sublime, lays bare to the common eye the mundaneness or the commonality of these characters. It is similar to bringing gods down upon earth right from heaven. Epic is always presented as a monolithic structure which cannot be tampered with both in its form and content. Its fixity and stubbornness is often mistaken for its alliance with truth which is not at all the case. That which is rigid and unsusceptible to change cannot be taken as a blueprint or panacea for contemporary issues. There is a reason behind the stories of epics being same over the decades. These contribute to the formation of a selective national culture that prefers men to be viewed as heroic warriors and women as self-sacrificing mothers. There could be alternative versions of a particular story but none of these could be taken as less authentic to the other. Here again, only those versions are allowed to proliferate wherein the original message of the story is not discounted for.⁴

Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* has the liberty to ask questions. She is an active character who not only asks questions but challenges authority. She is no longer disembodied and de-sexualized. She actively expresses her sexual desires and emotions even outside parameters of marriage. These lines from the text vividly enumerate her emotions even on mere mention of Karna:

Heat rose to my face at the sudden mention of Karna's name. [...] I remembered the otherworldly expression on Karna's face in the portrait. He looked as though, sometime, somewhere, he'd been touched by a divine hand. I wished there had been a way for me to buy that portrait, to secret it away, to look at it whenever I wanted. But of course such an action was impossible. A princess has no privacy. (77-78).

Dhai Ma acted as a mother figure in Draupadi's life and she is spontaneous enough to correct her at slight transgression. Dhai Ma opines, "Sometimes I talk too much. If you know what's good for you, you'll put that story out of your mind and behave in a way that doesn't bring shame to your royal father" (78). The story here is the story of mysterious birth of Karna and Dhai Ma is smart enough to trace her reaction on this. Draupadi confesses: "I knew what she was referring to, and she was right. But my disobedient heart kept going back to Karna, to that most unfortunate moment in his life. We'd both been victims of parental rejection— was that why his story resonated so?" (78). This description is important because here Draupadi is not presented as an infallible creature, godlike or least driven to transgression. She is shown as a human being who is as much inclined to feel and commit mistakes. Taneja opines that it is because of Darupadi's subversive status that it is extremely difficult to appropriate her. She is not accorded the, "status as a goddess to be worshipped in her own right. Her polyandry means that she cannot be subsumed in the service of nationalist ideology- she has no home, she has no 'husband' she has no mother-being born of fire, the deity of which is male [...] Her sexuality renders her dangerous and therefore marginalized in the world of the nationalist epic" (Taneja 319). Years after Draupadi's marriage, thought of Karna doesn't seem to leave the crevices of her memory. She says,

I finally faced the truth: what I wanted—even if it was only an admiring glance from Karna—was sinful. Was I not married, five times over—and worse, to men with whom

Karna was at enmity? Words from our scriptures came into my mind: *a wife who holds in her heart desireful thoughts of a man who is not her husband is as unfaithful as a woman who sleeps with such a man.* (Bannerjee 185)

Feminists in India recognize Draupadi as “self-affirming and courageously questioning of patriarchal norms” (Taneja 320). She doesn’t ascribe to the model of a submissive wife which turns her into a threat to the Indian cultural setup. Miranda in this sense could be likened to her as she too isn’t married and in the absence of a husband and family she couldn’t relate to the importance of family as a unit in nation building. *Mahabharata* is a classic example illustrating the crucial import of family in keeping the nation together. The feud between Kauravas and Pandavas ultimately led to the disintegration of the entire nation. The popular opinion holds women responsible for the war, especially Draupadi. As a woman she is expected to imbibe the qualities of keeping a family intact and these qualities generally are acquired from mothers. Now, Draupadi is born out of fire, should the absence of mother in her life be held responsible for her inability to keep Kauravas and Pandavas together. The narrative clearly illustrates that clans of brothers never really got on well together from the very childhood. Sheer intervention from Draupadi couldn’t have eradicated the long lodged hatred amongst them. Draupadi, like Miranda might not feature in the category of women who could set an example for Hindu wives according to patriarchal cultural discourse. They are expected to remain silent and passive. The infamous scene where Draupadi is publicly disrobed, male narratives depict her as a helpless creature who has no control over her situation and her own body. They do not show her standing resolute in deep and practiced meditation as that would emphasize her spiritual strength. She is to be shown as devoid of all sorts of strength, unable to cope with this ordeal. As a result of this she swoons on being publicly humiliated as an attempt to show her weakness of character. Banerjee, in her narrative is smart enough to outwit this representation. When Draupadi is summoned, she is careful enough to establish her status as she avers, “I’m a queen. Daughter of Drupad, sister of Dhristadyumna. Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can’t be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl” (Banerjee 190). Despite this she is dragged to the court and humiliated. Interestingly, here it is Dussasan who swoons while disrobing her not Draupadi. She stands firm, resolute in deep meditation. Banerjee writes,

I opened my eyes. I was still clothed, and Dussasan was on the floor in a swoon. I stepped over him and spoke to the assembly in a voice like cracking ice. “All of you will die in the battle that will be spawned from this day’s work. Your mothers and wives will weep far more piteously than I’ve wept. This entire kingdom will become a charnel house. Not one Kaurava heir will be left to offer prayers for the dead. All that will remain is the shameful memory of today, what you tried to do to a defenseless woman.” I spoke to all, but it was Karna I looked at, his gaze I held. Of one thing I was glad. What happened today had stripped away all ambiguities from my heart. (194)

Here, Draupadi makes the reader aware of her significance in the narrative which is otherwise ignored. The ambivalence which is often attributed to her character is now disappeared and she is no longer vulnerable. Thus, the way a story is narrated is of crucial import in a sense that it could impact the formation of perspectives. For instance, the systematic contextualization of women as guardians of traditions, mothers and wives by the male writers further consolidated their supposed inferiority (the very assumption that women need empowerment asserts the idea that they are disempowered). Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee have successfully transgressed the intellectual embankments

established by male writers. They have contextualized masculinity within the construct of nation to use this as a point of departure and questioned the theoretical rooting of the most complex of questions in a simplistic manner. By questioning the fixity of patriarchal discourses, they have unshackled the chains that continue to tighten with every passing moment so that this leads to the creation of a society and a nationalism which is more open to dialogue and negotiation.

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Notes

- ¹ Penelope, wife of king of Ithaca, Odysseus is known for her connubial fidelity since she waits for twenty years for her husband to return after he leaves to take part in Trojan War. In his absence she doesn't take any suitor instead she devises strategies to keep away suitors. Thus, she became the prototypical model for an ideal wife and woman.
- ² In *Ramayana*, sage Gautam Maharishi curses his wife Ahilya/Ahalya that she would turn to stone because he is suspicious that she slept with Indra, the king of gods (who disguises himself as her husband). She is cursed on grounds of infidelity and disloyalty to her husband. Most of the narratives have no account of Ahilya resisting this blame and she is shown as a passive being who silently takes the curse. There is no mention of resistance or questioning from her side. When Ram is living in exile in forest, he encounters Shurpanakah, sister of Ravana, King of Lanka. She is enamored by his looks and proposes him for marriage. Both Rama and Lakshmana deny her proposal. She is infuriated and attacks Sita; when Lakshmana comes to know this he cuts off her nose.
- ³ Roland Barthes formulates the idea of 'readerly' and 'writerly' in *The Pleasure of the Text*.
- ⁴ An essay called *Three Hundred Ramayanas* written by A K Ramanujan is omitted from the syllabus of University of Delhi, History course as one of the right wing party members expresses that it hurts Hindu sentiments. It is essentially the heterogeneity of the narrative which is questioned and countered by expressing the homogeneity of the Hindus and their sacred texts. The resistance imparts a clear message that Hindus are one, their language is one and their sacred texts are also one; any attempt to render them banal shall not be entertained.

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