

Whose Mother (land)?: Visualising and Theorising National Identity

- Karen Gabriel -

Introduction

Using established and familiar iconographic representations of the nation, this paper will make two intertwined arguments. The first of these is that by and large, narrations of the nation have a melodramatic structure. The second is that, the iconic and mythogenic figuring of the nation as Mother India/Bharat Mata, contrary to enduring assumptions about it, is, strictly speaking, not a 'national' one at all. To do the above, the paper will critically review the relations between

- a) melodrama, gender, the organisation of sexuality, the family and the nation;
- b) The principle of maternity, the maternal body and nation.
- c) It will examine the ways in which central symbols of the national iconography of Mother India/ Bharat Mata have been cognised and reworked

Some art instances and modern cinematic narrativizations and representations of the nation in mainstream Bombay cinema will be used to exemplify the precise nature of the relations set out above and the arguments being made. The argument will rest in the main on the work of cinema, since cinema remains a key representational site at which the mechanics of melodrama as these pertain to the nation-state are clearly deployed and visibilised. This specific dynamic was inevitable, in manner of speaking, given Bombay cinema's historical involvement with nationalism, the nationalist movement and ideas of nation: this powerful cultural apparatus early on officially declared its commitment to promoting nation-building, national integration and patriotism. In that sense the medium always retained a sharp awareness of the historicity and the material bases of iconography and national discourse. Cinematic transformations that

the figure and figuring of the mother have undergone, index the medium's awareness of the politics of representing the 'national' mother. This dynamism also captures the relations between the mythical significations of this figure, its social significations and the conditions of its production. Its actual discursive influence – functions of its location and availability in the public space, its magnitude, the protocols of viewing it and its commerciality – have shaped it as a narrative medium that remains explicitly aware of a national agenda that it continues to negotiate. These negotiations manifest as we shall see in continuities and departures in the sets of relations outlined above in films like Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), Rakesh Roshan's *Karan Arjun* (1995), J P Dutta's *Refugee* (2000) and Mahesh Bhatt's *Zakhm* (1998). They also illustrate and exemplify the uses of the organisation of sexuality in narratives of nation-state. One specific set of relations that this paper will render and explicate is that of the mother-nation and (her) citizen-son. The complex dimensions of this relation will emerge as I examine the figure of maternity, the politics of its morphology, its significations and the discursive apparatus that it mobilises and enables.

The figure and figuring of the mother – whether as the generic Mother Nation or the specific Mother India/Bharat Mata – are part of routine discourses of nation and of visual representations that deal the thematics that pertain to nation, nationalism and the nationalistic citizen. In fact '[m]aps of India, with the body of a woman, often a goddess, mapping its territory, were commonplace among Indian nationalists' (Butalia 1996). Images 1 and 4 -7 below illustrate this point. But the point is that India has been personified not just as woman but as a goddess, Bharat Mata, both within and outside cinematic discourse. Personification itself has been identified as crucial to territorialisation which in turn roots the conceptualisation of the nation (Thongchai, 1994). The precise characteristics of such a figuration vary within and across time, but importantly, tend to maintain certain crucially significant markers continuously. The reasons for such a representational continuity we shall see are primarily political in the widest sense of the word. They serve also to both signal and establish markers of exclusivity and legitimacy and thereby contain within their significations, the characteristics of a desirable, acceptable and ideal national corpus. Figuring the national space, actually embodying and detailing it, are thus the highly political acts of socialising, culturing and claiming that space politically and ideologically. The material attributes that are bestowed on this body (at once social and divine) are designed to render it simultaneously contemporary and

immediately relevant, prophetic and forward looking, historically retrospective and epic, reaching back into real and symbolic time, thereby signalling a notion of the nation that attempts to assert the fundamental social, cultural and consanguinal continuity and commonality between its contemporary inhabitants and their ancestors, both historical and epic.

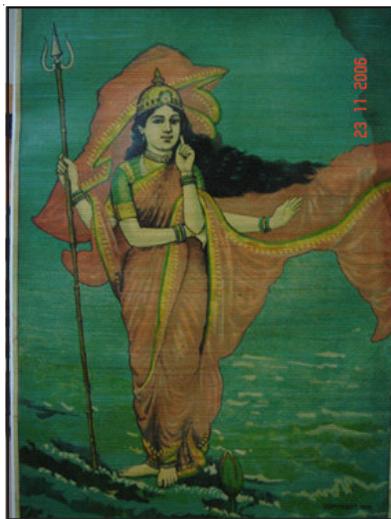
A quick review of some of the influential imaginations of this figure and its implications alerts us to some crucial ideological and discursive drivers behind its semiotic arrangements. Some of these will be considered as indicative of the dominant imagination of nation-state itself. Neumayer and Schelberger (2003) have examined the various avatars of this figure in some detail and we note here that Bharat Mata was first conceived of as Banga Mata in 1905 by Abanindranath Tagore and was personified as the Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, is dressed as a Vaishnava sadhvi (image 2)¹. They also note that earlier, Ravi Varma had painted Bharat Mata in a deep red sari and standing against a halo of light. She held the paraphernalia of Durga and Britannia in her four hands². The presentations of Bharat Mata within a fundamentally religious idiom is continuous and even a Ravi Varma thirties painting of a 'secular' Bharat Mata surrounded by persons of different religious and ideological persuasions (but no Muslims), is as a Hindu Goddess (image 3). The religion ascribed to this body gets reiterated in one way or another, implicitly or explicitly with differing degrees of obviousness or subtlety, detail and sparseness. In the 1970's representation of Bharat Mata, for instance, no Muslims or Christians appear to be included within the goddess-nation's corpus, which contains other 'Hindu' denominations – Sikh, Jain, Buddhist – and the fakir Shirdi Sai Baba (image 4). In this visual representation, the rigorously and fractiously contested composition of the category and community Hindu – as inclusive of Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists – gets asserted. A popular Sangh Parivar's visual representation of the nation as a Hindu goddess, whose body maps neatly onto the map of India, was transformed at the time of independence:

On 14 August, 1947, the day before the country was partitioned and became a 'nation', the front page of a Hindu right-wing weekly, the *Organiser*, carried a map of India on which lay a woman. Her right limb (which mapped Pakistan) had been severed, with Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, leaning over her holding in his hand a bloody knife (Butalia: 1996).

Though the mythic and gendered representation of the national body is well established and widely prevalent, the foundational ideological grids that support the construction and characteristics of this mythic figure and the discourses of nation that it activates are rarely clarified or interrogated. This is a crucial lacuna since the appeal of this figure lies as much in what it has become emblematic of within nationalist discourses, as in what discourses and structures it sustains *beyond* the margins of its own body and the literal. That is to say, the embodiment of the nation is so powerfully symbolic, because it signals *both* a putatively transcendental entity *and* a host of social-historical identities and the hierarchies that they conjure. The politics of the historical and social identities that are signified include those of religion, caste, class and ethnicity. The implications of embedding these identities within the corpus of the epical and mythical are rarely elaborated; they are in fact frequently naturalised within these narratives. Hence, while the social station of the (national) maternal body is never specified, it has an implicit but unmistakable class, caste, ethnicity, religion, morality and sexuality. Bharat Mata/Mother India is signalled both as mythic and epical national Mother Goddess, and as historical Hindu, upper caste, upper class, ethnically northern Indian and sexually and morally 'respectable' woman (see all images below).

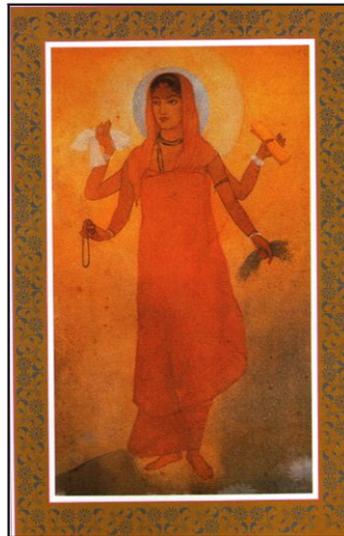
Image - 1:

Bharat Mata literally constitutes India, in a print from the 1920's-30's



Source:http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/congress/Bharatmata/bharatmata.html

Image - 2:
"Bharat Mata", Abanindranath Tagore Ca. 1905



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharat_Mata)

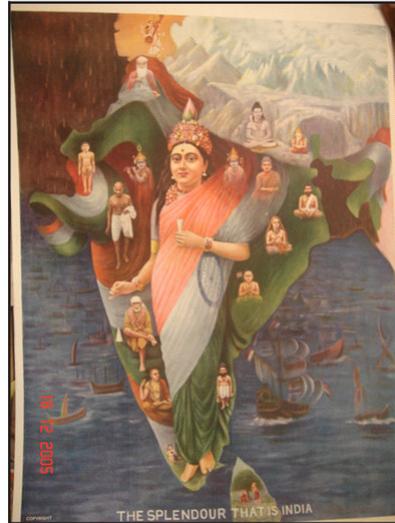
Image - 3:
"Message of love": a serene Bharat Mata inclusively interpreted, with room for everybody (Ravi Verma Press, Trivandrum, 1930's)



http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/congress/bharatmata/bharatmata.html

Image - 4:

A Bharat Mata from the 1970's, with no Muslims or Christians included



Source: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1800_1899/congress/bharatmata/bharatmata.html

Image - 5:

Durgaesque Bharat Mata, Contemporary Postcard, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Karnataka. Original of this (with a red flag)



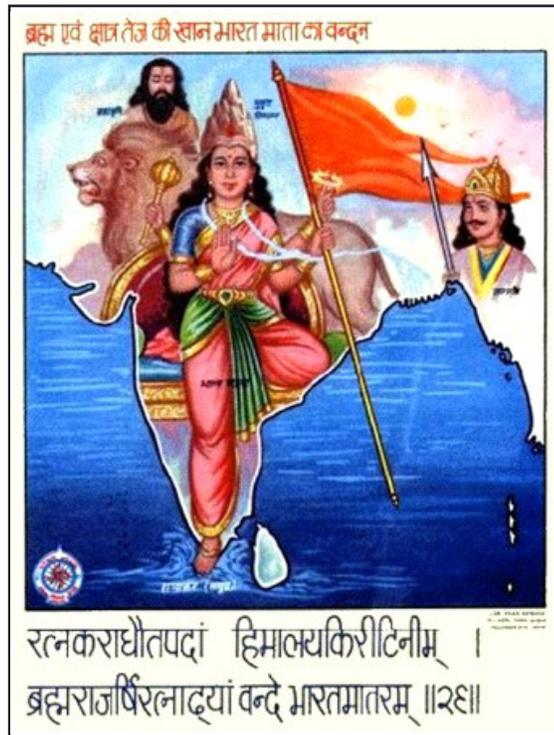
Available on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharat_Mata

Image - 6:
Bharat Mata or Vande Mataram, painting by P.S. Ramachandran
Rao, Coimbatore, 1937. Used on Independence Day



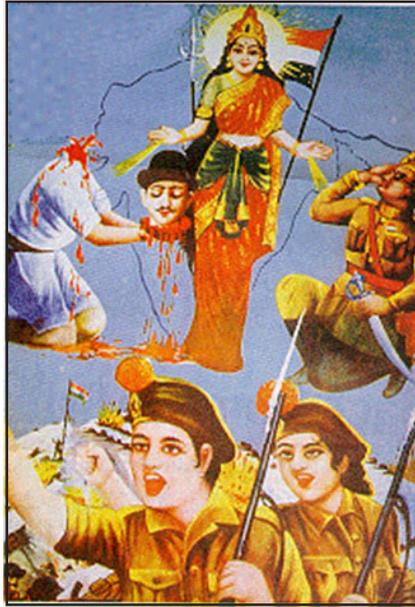
From www.thehindu.com/.../images/2003081700160201.jpg

Image - 7:
Obeisance to Bharat Mata



http://www.freeindia.org/bharat_bhakti/page29.htm

Image - 8:
The Call of the Mother, c. 1966



That is, even while the maternal body of the nation is always in a sense metaphorical and abstract, the power and significations of this metaphor derives from the literal social structures of caste, class, religion, gender, social status etc. that power it, bind it, validate it and give it meaning. Indeed its appeal and evocativeness are directly related to its social significations. Since each of these functions as a referent for discrete sets of material, discursive and ideological practices, we understand that these - both individually and collaboratively - a constellation of mutually sustaining and influential social hierarchies, are encoded as desirable. Moreover, each of these has its own symbolic and approbatory weight. While it continuously evokes the religious, the idea and representation of Mother India is unlike formally religious iconography. It is primarily secular, attaching as it does to the nation, itself a secular construct and self-consciously so in the context of the Indian nation-state. The icon itself is politically rooted in and refers a secular context that has been reiterated sufficiently. The expectation that this particular icon therefore be true to its secular referent is a valid, even important one, and the exposure of its sociality differs from the deconstruction or understanding of religious or other icons given the palpable investment in the realms of the social and the

(fractious) historical. It thus has a distinctive and resonant sociality. Yet we note that the sacralization of the nation itself is undertaken by its iconicization. The artistic and aesthetic negotiations with modernity and 'true' Indianness continuously negotiated the traffic between the secular, the modern, the traditional and the national.³ In this instance then, the iconographic process in addition to taking "on the gravity of the symbolic" (Kapur 1987: 82) endorses the intricate social traditions that are thus symbolised. I will be arguing that, powered by symbolism, the influential and 'desirable' social hierarchies that the Bharat Mata icon bears, are reinforced as normative within dominant notions of nation, a move that in turn promotes as normative, the social, discursive, cultural and institutional hierarchies of religious majoritarianism, caste and class and the orthodox sexual politics that are suggested through the figuration. I will show how the meanings of nation, nationalism, national identity and citizen would tend to change once the social location and meanings of this body alter. I will speak to what happens to both discourses of nation and those of motherhood if this body is marked explicitly as non-Hindu, or as belonging to an 'unacceptable' or 'un-Indian' ethnic community or as low-caste or as sexually active or sexually 'perverse'. What would happen to the sense of national allegiance that this allegorical bodyscape allegedly evokes if it were to be marked as non-Hindu or lower caste or promiscuous or diseased or destitute? Changes in morphology are always politic, always entail changes in discourse and narrate the politics of their production.

Commenting on Doulati's dying gesture in Mahesweta Devi's "Doulati the Bountiful"⁴, Ramaswamy (2001) says that by inserting Doulati's disease-ridden and dying body into the traced map of India, "Mahasweta's story mocks a century of popular cartographical practice in which the female body has been used to produce a possessive 'male-centred sense of territory'". (p110)

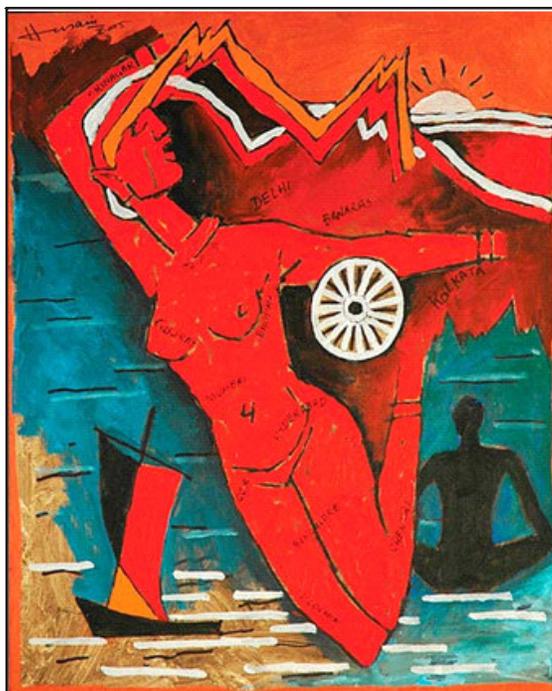
While this is true, what in my view is truly subversive about the placement of this body within the cartographical space of the nation-state is its iconoclasm. Doulati's body and gesture both invert the semiotics of hierarchy which imbue the iconography of Mother India. It replaces the usual signs of divinity, antiquity, purity, timelessness and immortality with a vision of the "...spreadeagled kamiya-whore Doulati Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease,

having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs". As an 'improper' ethnically othered, tribal and lower-caste body that has been sexually 'immoral' even promiscuous by most social standards, as a body that has been destroyed by abuse, time, history and society, Doulati's body comes to signify the exact opposite of what the venerated Bharat Mata does. It works to interrogate and supplant the traditional symbolic with the sociality inherent in iconography, replacing the mythic with the social, the symbolic with the literal, the sensual with the material. But interestingly, what powers this gesture is its bedrock of social truth. By representing and emblematising the nation's '...immense and equally unacknowledged subaltern heterogeneity' (Spivak 1989-90: 108), the corpse queries the representativeness and therefore the legitimacy of the Bharat Mata iconography.

The outrage at Hussain's 2006 interpretation of Mother India (below), along with allegations of treachery and heresy against him must be situated within the context of exclusive ownership over and legitimacy within the national corpus.

Image - 9:

M. F Hussain's Untitled ("Bharatmata"), 2006



Both issues – of ownership and of legitimacy – are articulated within the contexts of representation, representativeness and interpretation. These are extended into informal but influential notions of rights to/over symbolic systems and the traditions that they sustain. Moreso, since the iconographic is linked to the impulse and the politics of authenticity. Authenticity itself, in a completion of a logical circle, is linked to and derives from legitimacy which is rooted in social privilege. The right to represent the nation whether politically or symbolically is thus rooted in the ramifying subtleties of rights and privilege. When the issues of ownership and legitimacy occur within the context of rights over the body of the nation and to the representation of it, they become even more fractious. Particularly because the national body is a female body. But more significantly as will be argued later, because it is a fertile maternal body, one that generates and regenerates the citizen-subjects of the nation. ‘Hussain’s painting, like Mahasweta Devi’s “Douloti” rejected, erased, compromised, overwrote or re-inscribed some central signifiers of orthodoxy signifiers of divinity, sexuality or social propriety’.

Melodrama and the Nation

The troping of the nation along gendered, sexualized and familial axes that has been observed is due to melodramatic narrativisations of it. The gendering and sexualization of the nation in much political theory, in narratives of nation of the religious right and in representations of it (cinematic or otherwise), feed on and are fed by historically contingent and culturally specific organizations of gender relations, sexuality, family, kinship structures, conceptions and practices of motherhood, relations between mothers and sons⁵ etc.. This last cognate – mother-son – defines and focuses on an emotive and intimate relation that comes to signify the relation between the nation and the universalized (male) citizen of the modern democratic nation-state. It does so by narrating and defining the two – nation and citizen – both intimately and abstractly, domestically and publicly, individually and communally. Thus, conceptualizations of the nation have components that are ideational, ideological and emotional. The rationality of the nation-state—citizen relation doesn’t contravene the need for intimacy since, as will be argued, intimacy and eroticism are built into the imagination and theorisation of the nation (state) in relation to its citizens and vice versa. In fact this paper will show that the family and especially the mother-figure, is the emotive *and* erotic mediator and glue of a rational relation that

consequently becomes naturalised as an intimate and primordial one. It provides an emotional conduit between the gendered (mother) nation and its gendered citizen (son). A somewhat similar manoeuvre is followed while narrating the state which, though gendered like the nation, is associated more closely with patriotism, patrimony, rights and duties inherited from the father. These rights, while constitutionally provided, are linked to the cohesive 'pre-political' ties of birth and inheritance. As rationalised political rights, they may be acquired; not just inherited. Yet the principal of kinship whether biological or adoptive, remains, underscoring the affect inherent to the nation-state—citizen relation.

This affect is partly what is mobilised and experienced as patriotism, a personal love and devotion toward both state and nation that need not be earned. Patriotism may be understood as an attitude, a moral value and an affect; it has strong associations with the state and with nationalism, both of which strive to generate universal feelings among the populations that they address (accounting for the universalisation of the family, of the mother and of motherhood). Patriotism has conventionally signified an affective affiliation with and to a country⁶: where 'nation' invokes the idea of a people, their culture and kinship, and 'state', a set of institutions, even an organisation, 'patriotism' is directed toward a country, which connotatively includes both state and nation, and is usually more territorially defined. Etymologically, it indicates a patrilineal connection – signifying descent, inheritance, proprietorship, and allegiance to patrimony. In most cases, it is also evident as an implicit constitutional obligation, insofar as the constitution lays out the terms and conditions of the citizen's rights and duties – the terms of patrimony and allegiance. It is an obligation that is supposed to override all rights, including (perhaps especially) the right to life⁷. Its melodramatic quotient resides in this unstated excess.

The excesses of both emotion and action that patriotism expects and succeeds in generating (e.g. sacrifice of lives, organised rape, murder etc), owe to and are in direct proportion to its melodramatic quotient which explains why patriotism is shrillest during times of conflict including war, and why kinship is invoked most sharply then.⁸

Towards Understanding the Politics of Melodramatic Narratives

Melodrama is a discursive, narrative and representational mode that is often available within a mass-cultural framework. The melodramatic format typically includes the classic order-conflict-complication-resolution structure, acutely polarised forces, the affirmation of 'dominant' moralities (Frye: 1957) and social 'decencies', the intense personalisation of the social world and of conflict (Brooks: 1976), the presence of a symbolic heroic ideal and his dramaturgical counterparts (villains and fools), who inspire veneration, abhorrence and ridicule respectively. Melodrama furnishes us with models of the (often ambivalent) resolution of personalized, intensely enacted social conflicts that are often featured as primal ones. This in itself reveals its particular usefulness for narratives of nation. As a mode of narrativization, it tends to submit its subject matter to these requirements and is therefore prone to being an intensely conservative social artefact which often stages a public and ceremonial repositioning of politics and economics toward the prescriptions and proscriptions of mainstream cultural values (Himmelstein: 1994). These formal conventions and their reinforcement of society's dominant values at any given cultural and historical moment render both the genre and the melodramatic mode significantly centrist cultural mechanisms that stress order, stability and stasis⁹. Frequently the site at which the conservative impulse finds its most resonant articulation is that of the female body. This is especially because the female body remains a signifier of both crisis *and* continuity within melodramatic narrative conventions *and* within the dominant and mainstream narratives on femininity. In fact, it is precisely these 'feminine' functions of continuity and stability that are threatened by the 'improper' sexual behavior of some (normally male) 'other' (seduction, abduction, rape etc) or itself (via female sexual agency that violates the rules of patriarchal sexual exchange). However, melodrama also typically requires and manifests a crisis (Nowell-Smith: 1985), the very representation of which involves the representation, articulation of and desire for dissent, profanity and deviance. The representation of crisis therefore triggers both a critique of systems (e.g. gender) or institutions (e.g. family) and the reinstatement of them; a desire for these and for something outside of these. Narratively then we find a dynamic and productive oscillation between norm-abnormal, interrogation-affirmation, center-margin etc. Hence the melodramatic narratives of national identity, including communal identities, simultaneously

generate both challenges to it and the affirmation of it. Frequently, resolution involves and indeed requires the affirmation of the normative, frequently portrayed in gendered and domestic terms as melodrama often displaces onto the familial realm (Elsaesser, T. 1985, Neale, S. 1986, C, Gledhill. 1987). However as will become clear, melodrama actually does something more ingenious and intricate: it displaces narratives of conflict and resolution not just to the domestic, but to the more fundamental and subterranean realm of the sexual economy. This accounts for the pervasive, often violent protectionism toward orthodox sexual economies: the 'proprieties' of legal, endogamous, monogamous, heteronormative and orthodox heterosexual sexual alliances. When these, or the integrity of a community, are perceived as violated – during the representation of crises (e.g. war or heterodoxical (sexual) alliances) – we see the activation of melodramatic excess (war, rape, dramatic sacrifice of life and limb, murder, suicide etc). Hence the crises, their articulation, and the resolution of them occur in both gendered and sexualised terms. Nevertheless, we remember that the presentation of the crisis itself publicizes alternatives, a straining against the grain that may come to function at some stage as paradigmatic.

The argument on melodrama and narratives of nation can be made at two levels: first, at the level of theories of nation and second, at the level of narratives of nation¹⁰. Even while theories of nation may not be melodramatic in themselves, they acknowledge the melodramatic quotient inherent in certain kinds of nationalism, mythogenic conceptualisations of and narrations of nation (e.g. Kedourie, 1993 (63), Anthony Smith 1991). They may do this by retaining the gendered and/or sexualised basis of (national) community formation, or by explicitly endorsing and legitimising orthodoxical organisations of sexuality and gender that are available in many rightwing models of nation – religious or otherwise. At the second level, the level of narratives of nation, narratives and mythogenesis of nations consciously mobilise the melodramatic: for instance, they work with the drama and energy of crises, site themselves within the realm of the sexual economy and yoke the domestic and the social. This would account for, for instance, motifs of (sexual) purity, contamination, consanguinity and kinship that have long been circulated by narratives of (national) communities. Since narratives of a nation are specific to a particular nation – despite a generic resemblance nations may have – and are grounded in the specificities of a particular national history, variations in the structures of nations and in the narratives of them trigger alterations in the melodramatic elements

that are present in narrating them. These alterations serve to accommodate the uniqueness of each case being narrativised, which, for our purposes is the Indian nation-state. Consequently, the adjustments in the melodramatic mode and in its details (such as type of crisis, type of family, mode of resolution etc.) speak precisely to the specificities of the Indian nation-state and its narrativization and representation in public discourse. The melodrama will also accommodate and assimilate local modes of cultural production indexing the flow between various narrative *modes* and genres¹¹. Some of the paradoxes and peculiarities of the Indian nation-state that have gained consistent cinematic representation and that are relevant to the discussion at hand pertain to the basis on which the nation sustains. It is these that I will now address.

Some Notes on Nationalism and the State:

The construction of history along communal lines is usually foundational to nationalistic discourses, and derives as much from specific patterns in tradition and the past as from those of modernity and the present. Examining the ways in which a) nations are narrativised, b) nationalism is deployed as ideology and c) the nation-state works as conceptual apparatus, we may define nationalism as follows. It is both an ideology and a set of practices, infused by discourses of family, kinship, sexuality, nativity, property, community and territoriality that are deeply gendered and oriented towards defining an exclusive identity as well as claiming exclusive statutory rights and duties. Governance, the law and the family therefore become crucial sites of its definition. A key purpose of nationalist ideologies and practices is then, usually to integrate ownership, control and concept: the conceived nation with a territorially limited and defined state. To this end, nationalism may function as a **cultural** nationalism (addressing the notion of a *people or a nation*, embodying a nation) and/or a **political** nationalism (addressing a notion of a *country or a nation-state*). It is the relation between these two that yields the melodramatic potential of discourses of nation.

In the absence of any of the usual bases of national self-definition – common language, religion, ethnicity or race – the many questions about the definitive uniqueness of the Indian nation have been answered in a number of ways. One of these has been by extolling the virtues of plurality and heterogeneity ('unity within diversity'), and by claiming them as uniquely Indian. This plurality – which refers to the many cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious differences – is

recommended and celebrated even while the problems it has created both for theory and for governance have yet to be resolved¹². Under scrutiny, the now touristy slogan 'unity within diversity', begins to fall apart. Rather than a national scenario where there is an amicable and carnivalesque coexistence of equal differences, we get a picture in which the experience of difference and variation is actually quite traumatic, one in which difference often translates into inequality, where there are structured and exacting understandings of the normative and the mainstream. Difference, diversity and heterogeneity thus constantly gesture toward an assumed normative homogeneity from which they depart and against which they are measured and valued. They then refer equally to the inequity, to the implications of being viewed as different and 'excessive' in India. Plurality also refers to the Bharat-India divide, which, in a twist to the two-nation theory, officially concedes that two nations exist within a single territory. When we fully acknowledge that the Bharat-India divide is a shorthand that registers the social and economic disparity between urban-rural, agricultural-industrial haves-have-nots, upper-lower castes, we begin to realise the extent of the problems of representativeness within the nation. The problem of Special Economic Zones (SEZ), which creates zones of foreign territories within the country, intensifies the problem¹³. Farmer suicides, the Sachar Committee Report and the status of Muslims in India, the Reservation issue (both caste and women's), caste atrocities, the media's callousness towards issues of inequity, the often-hostile media commentary that accompanies reportage of caste and labour conflicts, struggles over resources and the plight of the underprivileged are troubling instances of how heterogeneity and plurality are manifested, received and experienced. They also manifest the hierarchies and values that grid the implications of being regarded as a heterogeneous element. Hierarchies impact on representation in governance as well, raising fundamental questions pertaining to the democratic fabric of the country. We see that we are dealing with a notion of nation, a state and a government that works best for a small and powerful minority. Issues of national self-definition, national integration and unity gain in validity and complexity, if to the above we add the nationality questions that have been dogging several parts of the country (e.g. Kashmir, the Northeast, and the naxal belt).

One might argue that the historically inherited exclusivist logic of nation-state does not provide for the diversity and complexity of Indian reality. In fact heterogeneity in India has generated several types of centrifugal nationalism, which do not recognise the Indian nation-state as primary, binding or benevolent;

but rather as an imperial coloniser that has to be thrown off (Mohanty: 1998). The self-determination movements in the country that advanced alongside the Indian nationalist movement and indeed provided the backbone in the struggle against British imperialism were later seen as a nuisance by the Indian state and delegitimized by it. Thus Naga, Telugu or Tamil nationalism that was understood as anti-British/pro-Indian till independence. These were to later turn into full-fledged nationality movements especially since issues of land redistribution and resource drain compounded the experience of political and cultural marginalisation (Mohanty: 1998). By the same token, language and culture became nationality questions leading for instance to linguistic tensions, the neglect of Southern and North-Eastern India and the dominance of the cow belt in national politics. Moreover, while it was the working class, the peasantry and sections of the middle class and their cultural activity that fuelled the nationalist movement, it was the elite to whom the reins of governance passed (Mohanty: 1998).

While the Indian state has treated most demands for greater representativeness and inclusion within the democratic processes parsimoniously, cinema has been quicker to affirm them. In fact, cinema openly recognized and addressed the relationship between political nationalism and cultural nationalism in its articulations of nation-state, nationalism, communities, family and the (gendered) citizen. Moreover, having declared its commitment to promoting nation-building, national integration and patriotism early on and reiterating it frequently¹⁴, the business of mainstream Bombay cinema is of particular significance in understanding and interpreting widespread narrations of the nation-state¹⁵. This cinema's investment in various discourses of nation and nationalism pre-and post-colonially, directly (in the genre of 'national' cinema) and indirectly (in the organisation of the sexual economy) is caught up with its historical and systematic links to the Indian nation-state. Its commitment to national integration is rooted in the somewhat synchronous birth of the nation and of the cinema industry. In fact, cinema's narratives, to the extent that they are narratives of the nation, actively participated in the process of actually building nationalism. It has for this reason among others, been particularly attentive to the exigencies of nationalisms in the Indian nation-state.

Both parallel and mainstream cinema (especially the social and vigilante genres), have been relatively at ease with the class conflict that has resulted

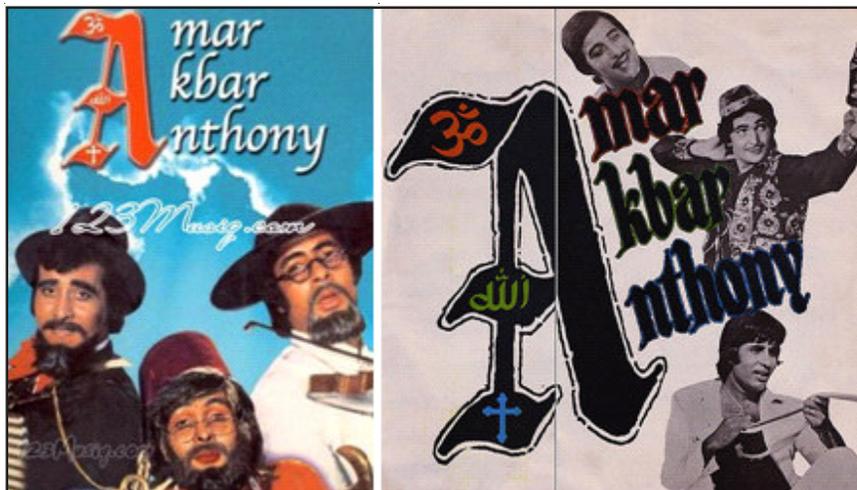
from the elite cornering the government and national resources. However it has departed cautiously from elitist and statist notions of the Indian nation-state when dealing with issues of self-determination and cultural marginalisation. Films such as *Drohkaal* (Nihalini: 1995), *Maachis* (Gulzar: 1996) and *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam: 1998) that deal with these issues more frontally are rare and timid. One immediately germane reason for this avoidance is the difficulty of the issues¹⁶. The difficulties of negotiating and defining “Indian-ness” are manifest in the ambivalence of Hindi cinema’s narratives of nation when these step outside the intellectual laziness of chauvinism. In jingoistic films (like many of Sunny Deol’s nationalistic films), the idea and continuity of the nation rest heavily on masculinist protectionism, territorial integrity and the reinforced patrolling of boundaries and borders that are typically and problematically, permeable and fluid.¹⁷ Territory demarcates and defines the identity of the occupant-citizen and symbolizes a national space. However, territory proves to be an insufficient marker of national identity in the subcontinent since it is often difficult to physically distinguish Indian nationals from their counterparts across the border, an issue that J P Dutta’s *Border* (1997) pinpoints. *Border* identifies subtler aspects of national identity and the nationality question as well in the context of cultural and linguistic overlaps between India and her neighbours which in fact permit fuzzy borders and border breach. Cultural similarities are explored and mobilised, but ambivalently. In fact the film remains deadlocked by its inability to genuinely reconcile the principles of territorial inflexibility and cultural fluidity. It eventually resolves this by taking recourse to the fable of the tolerant national Hindu proprietor. Unfortunately (since this is not the intention of the film), cultural plurality gets constructed as a consequence of border breach, not as a result of state/national policy. In fact, cinema has tended to be more accepting of both cross-border similarities and internal differences though cautiously or confusedly at times. Shared racial, linguistic, ethnic and cultural features that are raised by governments mainly as *problems of border breach* - migration and security issues – are often presented by cinema as signposts of common kinship or human affinity¹⁸. It has often incorporated these ‘excessive’ elements into the national corpus melodramatically since melodrama has provided the narrative wherewithal and strategy with which to incorporate difference/excess without displacing the hegemony of the normative. This possibilises an emotionally viable resolution of the conflict/disturbance that is generated by the presence of excess/difference/minority. *Amar Akbar Anthony* (Manmohan Desai: 1977) is an early

example of a melodramatic resolution of the issue of national integration. In the film, the three religiously dissimilar sons of a Hindu mother (Amar, Akbar and Anthony) who represent three major religions of India portray the problem of religious and cultural heterogeneity. In other words, they present one aspect of the problem of the basis of national self-definition and cohesion. Religion and culture are clearly and closely linked especially through the songs "Amar, Akbar Anthony" and "John Jaani Janardhan", during which iconic spectacles of each religion/culture are presented (a quawali signalling Islam, a catholic priest for Christianity; the Hindu alone, regarded as normative, is not marked semiotically). However, neither religion nor culture is fully definitive of the individual in themselves: national brotherhood trumps micro and individual differences. Absolute consanguinity (their blood groups are identical) and national kinship are established quite literally as the three brothers simultaneously donate blood to their weakened mother (nation). The scene emblematises their common origins, their basic unity, the primacy of national identity and the currency of secular nationalism (becoming a superb depiction of the secular and national slogan unity within diversity). Interestingly enough, it also depicts the literal rebirth of the mother through her sons and the complete absence of any traces of the father (not even in an Rh factor!). The notable absence of the father in many films that are concerned with issues of nation indicate the way in which cinema identifies a distribution of power between the hyphenated nation-state in which greater material power accrues to the (paternal) state and a greater emotive power to the (maternal) nation. Domesticating the issue works emotionally to generate loyalty toward the nation-state with all its peculiarities and differences. A spacious imagination of the nation-state that legitimises many religions, cultures and traditions, is advanced.

Following the rise of the Hindu right and its exacerbation of issues of religious and cultural identity, the idiom of inclusion is moderated, the narrative is tempered. Issue of difference are addressed more gravely and precariously; the blitheness that Manmohan Desai retains within his account of national heterogeneity is discarded in films such as *Border, Bombay* (Mani Ratnam, 1995) or *Refugee* (J P Dutta, 2000). However, the device of melodrama is retained and perhaps more urgently. For example, the explosive allegory of marginality and hybridity, liminality and inclusion that concludes *Refugee* defies the principal of exclusion, rewrites notions of community – religious, national and cultural - and underscores the importance of melodrama to resolve issues

of national heterogeneity. The film ends with the birth of a daughter from a possibly inter-religious, inter-national and importantly, an Indo-Pak love marriage, in international territory (no-man's land) on the occasion of a (multi-cultural) Sufi *pir's* anniversary. But, these events, perhaps inevitably, occur *outside* the borders of any nation-state, and, finally the normativity of monogamous, marital, reproductive heterosexuality is affirmed, revealing the limits of alternatives that are melodramatically driven. (Note the signifiers of unity such as the "A", that frame those of the diversity of multi-religiosity in the hoardings below).

Image - 10:
Amar Akbar Anthony, publicity hoardings



In other words, the film's melodramatic rendition of problems of borders typically requires that they be troped and displaced on the realm of domesticity and the sexual economy. The resolution that is achieved in the domestic realm is supposed to automatically signal the terms in which the public crisis may be resolved. However and ironically, precisely because of this displacement between two dissimilar – even if linked – spheres (the public and the domestic), the possibilities of a viable resolution dwindle. What works in the domestic sphere may not work at the national level¹⁹. But melodrama also displaces to the more fundamental domain of the sexual economy. These tactics (generally and in film), underwrite two intuitions that such narratives works with. The first is that transformations in the field of sexual organisation point to corresponding changes in other spheres and vice versa. The second is that, the energy of

sexual revolt (exogamous, inter-racial, inter-religious, same-sex or other heterodox sexual alliances) gets delimited if it is siphoned off toward restoring national or communal or familial integrity and their ideological bases. Thus, even if we are shown an inter-religious union (radical, disruptive, inclusive, 'abnormal'), it will often culminate in marriage (orthodox, deferential, exclusive, normative). So, in mainstream Bombay cinema narrations of national conflict, we note the impulse to negotiate exclusivist discourses of nationalism and nation by foregrounding their melodramatic quotient, thereby intimating alternative idioms of nationalism that nevertheless retain a conservative core. While heterogeneity and heterodoxy are accommodated, homogeneity and orthodoxy are affirmed. In cinema this is also achieved by separating the nation from state, a separation that captures the relative imaginative and material powers of both²⁰ and delineates the relation that each of them is perceived to have with heterogeneity.

As narratives of nation-state are troped onto an increasingly schematic representation of the extended or nuclear family, the politics of gender are clarified further. The family (extended or nuclear), functions as melodramatic trope, a microcosm of the heterogeneous nation, whose heterogeneity needs to be explained. (see images below).

Image - 11:
***Mother India*, publicity hoardings**



The trope of an indiscriminate and indiscriminating maternity has been a key device that (nationalist) cinema has resorted to in order to address intractable heterogeneity. Mehboob's *Mother India* (1957) is an influential early attempt in which the classic and enduring trope of Mother India and her two

warring sons, announces a nation that actually breeds diversity²¹. We note at once that heterogeneity in these filmic narratives is recorded through the two often-divided sons who are sometimes installed as part of national iconography imaginatively as well.

Image - 12:
***Karan Arjun* publicity hoarding**

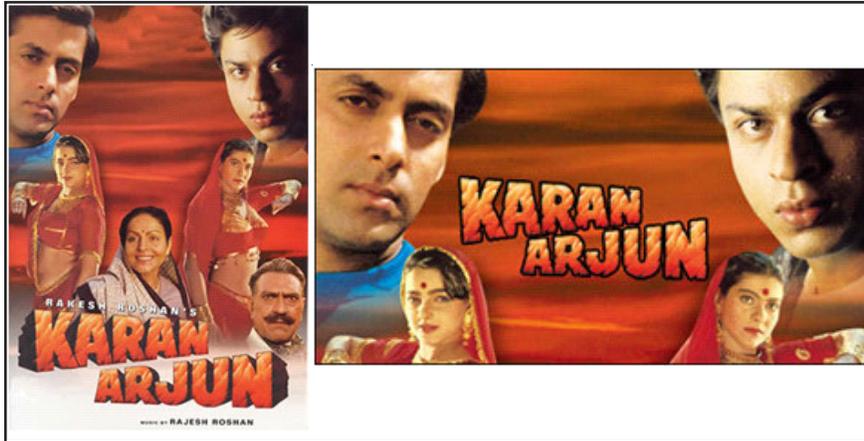


Image - 13:
***Deewar*, publicity hoardings**

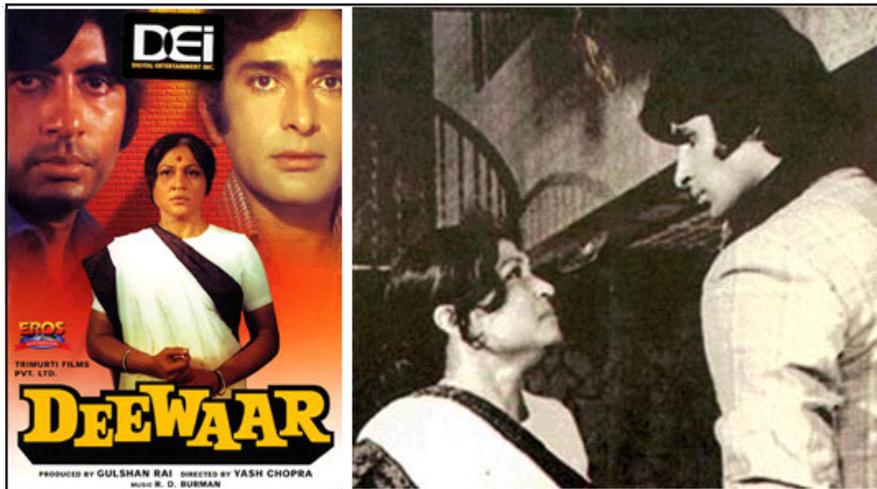


Image - 14:
Zakhm Publicity hoardings

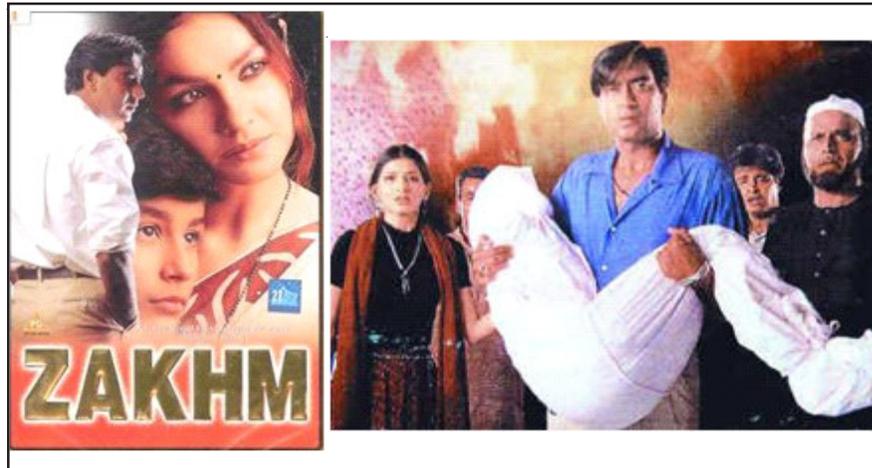


Image - 15:
Shakti, publicity hoardings



The masculine state/ the father or a father/ older brother/authority figure in the relation, is often at odds with this manifestation of diversity and the many practical and emotional problems it creates.²² These may be problems of law, order, insurgency, internal/domestic conflict, and are often rendered and resolved both domestically and communally. Indeed the father/authority figure may often be a representative of the state: a police officer, a judge, who is

then faced with the task of handling the crisis created by the conflict. It thus identifies, invokes and often ratifies a hegemonic dynamic in the nation-state relation. To put it schematically, the nation then is the persuasive hand of hegemony, and the state, the coercive one. (this was dramatised poignantly in *Shakti* in which father and son frame, enclose and even incarcerate the mother nation)

After filmmakers from the mid-sixties on began calling into question the institutional efficacies of the state (e.g. the police, courts, politics), and the honesty of its functionaries, depictions of the state as unjust or unfriendly increased. The phenomenon of the vigilante was a direct result of this crisis of legitimacy even though these films retained a strong impulse to restore the state. Later, in the 90s, following on the rise of the Hindu right in the 80s, when the viability of a heterogeneous national entity was being eroded, the nation-state gets posited as an exclusive, fragile yet masculinist and forceful one increasingly uncomfortable and insecure about its national identity (the *Bhagat Singh* films, *Khakee* (2004) etc). The state as institution itself is not discarded, but its functionaries - politicians, political parties and the bureaucracy lose credibility. The onus to make systems and institutions work – to save the nation now threatened by a corrupted state – falls on the heroic and beleaguered (male) individual (e.g. *Ghayal*, Raj Kumar Santoshi 1990; *Prahaar*, Nana Patekar 1991; *Damini*, Raj Kumar Santoshi 1993; *Hindustani*, Shankar 1996, *Shool*, E Nivas 1999). Thus the structure of the embattled, split family that we encounter early in *Mother India*, but see also *Deewar*, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, *Karan Arjun*, *Bombay*, *Zakhm*, records the struggle with the challenges with the formulation and imagination of the Indian nation, documents its diversity and even its fissiparous tendencies. As importantly it indicates to us clearly how sexual organization furnishes the theoretical underbelly of nation and nationalism, and how the discourse of nation is in powered by melodramatic impulses.

Much mainstream Bombay cinema that deals with the nation-state, has demonstrated this ability to zero in on the melodrama inherent in narratives of nation and of nationalism, to admit the tensions inherent in nationality questions and affirm national integration all at once. Hence it often releases notions of nationality, nation-state and citizenship that are ambivalent: at once elitist and egalitarian, exclusivist and inclusive, orthodox and radical. Its portrayals of family particularly in relation to discourses of nation speak of its negotiations with the notion of the nation itself.

The Nation, Family and Maternity

The contradictions of imagining and materializing the nation as inclusive and public yet specific and emotive, and the family as exclusive, specific and private – legally, institutionally and discursively – have political and structural roots that grow both ways. One upshot of narrating the nation simultaneously as modern political community *and* notional family is that the distribution and gendering of power and labor in producing, reproducing and maintaining the nation is reinforced. We do well to remember that the control over female sexuality and the relegation of women and their concerns to the private realm have created relations of dependence, not equivalence. This is an important consideration when it is brought to bear on issues of hierarchy, the distribution of authority, power and privilege in the public domain. Cinematic narrations of nation that signify the family (and vice versa), imbue the nation with a powerful emotive intimacy, but also (and conversely) reinforce the notion of family – as type, ideal, model – with the discursive power, authority and legitimacy of the nation. The notional family that supports the concept of the nation in narratives of nation is a culturally defined family. The notional family that grids narratives of nation and that is routinely available in the public domain, has been the highly idealised and gendered monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive family. Additionally, here has been a tendency to valorise the joint or extended family over the nuclear family in the Indian context.

The understanding of the family evoked in such narratives is accurate but not correctly historical. It is accurate insofar as it captures the nature, distribution and gendering of power within the realm of family and the presence of patriarchy in framing and structuring families, nations and communities. It is ahistorical insofar as it ignores the actual multiplicity of family forms, structures and organizations that are actually available. Therefore the touted cultural norm of the family in India – the largely mythical, harmonious, heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive, patrilineal, patrilocal joint family – and the propagation of it as a distinguishing and valuable feature of Indian-ness, essentially ignores intra-familial conflicts and the actual multiplicity of familial forms available in India – nuclear, broken, single parent, childless, same sex, unmarried. These are usually stapled to this normative and ideal family structure as a troublesome footnote. When these have been cognised they have often been treated the way fuzzy borders and unwelcome variations have been, as

legal and social problems, treading the borders of criminality. In this context, we note that the state has been consistently engaged with the control and organization of sexuality through legislation, prohibition, policing, population policies etc.²³ The important difference is that while the state is concerned with sexuality and the family in mainly legal and economic terms (with the dominant themes being efficiency, productivity, property, patrilineality); cinema is also preoccupied by the affects and erotics of these as they shape our relation to the nation. Its negotiations with structures and formulations of the family and of the gendered of relations within it has had a direct bearing on its negotiations with the idea of the nation.

Following the consolidation of the politics of Hindutva in India, there was a perceptible discursive shift in the notion of the ideal family. In these discourses, even the urban nuclear family was viewed as decadent if it violated the pattern of power distribution available a high-patriarchal model. Moreover and importantly, the model and imagined family was explicitly ascribed a religion and a caste which was Hindu and high-caste²⁴. Cinema during the 80s, but especially in the 90s, responded enthusiastically to this *parivariisation* of the notional national family. In fact with the new crop of 3rd generation directors like Sooraj Barjatya (who popularised the trend), Karan Johar and Sanjay Bhansali (who took it to new lows), films now bolster one form of orthodoxy with another to yield suffocating models of an extended, sometimes diasporic family, flush with funds and the worst orthodoxies of modernity and tradition²⁵. However, as we will see, there were other experiments with the family and the nation that were going on.

Despite the mythographies of motherhood that mark narratives of nation, mainstream Bombay cinema's conception of the mother beginning with *Mother India*, has rarely been as an unassailable figure. In fact on the contrary and paradoxically while we might expect to encounter a powerful goddess-like figure and while iconography of Mother India is rife with images of India as Goddess, in the narrativization of this figure, she has been imbued with vulnerability. Though this vulnerability is frequently sexual as well as social (*Mother India*), gradually the sexual vulnerability is submerged beneath social vulnerability as in films like *Deewar*, *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Karan Arjun*.

The specific nationalism that underlies this figure is qualitatively different from the other register of maternity. It is a nationalism characterised by the

discourse of lack and anxiety, strongly evident in the Sangh Parivar's representations of the nation. It is also a nationalism that is deeply engaged in the actual re-organisation of the family, and differs in this respect from the nationalism underlying the other register of maternity, in that the latter simply takes the notional family for granted (a sort of immutable given), and does not attempt to overhaul it. While these distinctions of register are not watertight and may carry degrees of overlap, the more pertinent point they help make is that the figure and figuring of the mother has changed discursively, historically and representationally, capturing in its dynamism the tensions of the conditions of its production.

In the films *Karan Arjun*, *Deewar*, *Baazigar* and *Zakhm*, the mother figure is a liminal figure, a point of rest in the sense of being both the site of eventual poignant blame and the source of strength and meaning. Drawing on the theme of violability to emphasise what will be reproduced through violation unless vigilance is maintained, approximates the ideological call of the community to its members. Maternity, by invoking the notions of source, sustenance and violation, is owned even as it produces and powers. The relations thus drawn between motherhood, community, sexuality, violability, and masculine identity – between the sexual economy and the nation-state, between nationalism and melodrama – are tracked critically and intricately in a film like Mahesh Bhatt's *Zakhm* (1998).

In *Zakhm* the erotics of gender and sexual difference are clearly grafted onto and structurally embedded in social and political formations. This mechanics is appropriate enough considering the run on between questions of power/lessness, sexual choice, nation and religious identity in the film that is shown as necessary for the formation of nation, community and citizen-subject. In the process of narrativizing nation, identity, desire and gender simultaneously mythic 'real' essences emerge as the uncomfortable bases of historical subjectivities and the female subject – whether mother or lover – gets memorialised always relationally to the male subject, as an imagined and desired national and cultural space.

Zakhm is situated in Bombay during the 1992 riots and deals with issues of social, sexual and communal identity. Ajay Desai (played by Ajay Devgun) is a successful music-director who has to 'confess' a family secret to his brother Anand (Akshay Anand). The secret is that Ajay and his Hindu extremist brother are bastard children of a (nameless) Muslim woman (Pooja Bhatt) and a Brahmin Hindu man

Raman (Nagarjuna) who dies the day Anand is born. Raman never marries Ajay's mother because his own mother threatens suicide if he does so. He eventually marries someone else though he continues to visit Pooja and Ajay. The director frames the issue of identity, the sources of its meaning and its liminality narratively in parallel plots of communal hatred, bastardy and political intrigue which impinge on each other. The fractures in Ajay's senses of identity become visibly harrowing as the riots take over the city.

The film launches its narrative through a series of flashbacks that emphasise the ineradicable and transformatory presence of the past in the present even as they work to clarify the meanings of both. We see Ajay witnessing his mother's sorrows, spending his whole childhood and a part of his adult life resisting the transformation of his mother from person to abstracted and contentious notion. The continuous switching between past and present is also distinguished by their discursive locations: the past (perceived through the uncomprehending and therefore inexorably secular gaze of the young Ajay) in the intensely private domain of the young boy's fragile family; and the present in the adult Ajay's increasingly public struggle to recuperate his mother from the body of the nation that she is, as it were, made iconic of. Temporal movement thus serves to reveal also the ramifications of the private into the public and vice versa. The identity of his mother and subsequently her burnt body become the centrepieces in a macabre political game²⁶. The game is rendered deeply ironic by the fact that Anand, who believes his mother to be Hindu, is the disciple of a Hindu fundamentalist leader Subodh Malgaonkar (modelled on Bal Thackeray), who decides to use the death to stir up greater violence. (Parenthetically, but not unrealistically considering the equation between India and Indira that Indira Gandhi established, this may be an allusion to the '84 when the Congress came to power through the anti-Sikh riots following the death of Indira Gandhi.) The myth that the precarious borders of communities are guarded *for* the safety of its women is sundered, by the bastardy as much as by Pooja's death at the hand of Muslims. It is precisely this border more than any actual threat (though these are real enough, and intensified during riots) that generates the sense of siege and jeopardizes the safety of women through the simultaneous disregard for and discursive investment in their bodies.

Ajay's hesitancy in revealing his mother's 'true' religious affiliation itself reveals the heightened sense of jeopardy. The dangers of minority identity in a Hinduised majoritarian India are made explicit not just in the violence of the riots, but in the fact of his and his mother's silence. This is broken only with her death, when

Malgaonkar (Ashutosh Rana) decides to claim the body as communal and cremate it ceremonially, in the customary Hindu manner, as the corpse of a universalized Hindu Mother. The problem with regard to the many claims that are made on this body and its meanings redouble as denials, claims and counter-claims mount. Ajay then 'has to' publicly reveal that his mother was a closet Muslim, and had wanted a Muslim burial. Catching Malgaonkar's warning look, Anand loudly accuses Ajay of lying. Malgaonkar invites Ajay to order matters 'properly': 'privately' and there he advises either a Hindu cremation (Hinduisation) or the donation of the body to a medical college (secularisation). Threats ensue and Ajay eventually warns Malgaonkar, "I will not allow you to treat my mother's corpse as a political platform to climb on". From this moment on the needs to claim the social identity of the corpse intensify.

In fact the crisis in the film results from a dispute over the meanings of her dead body and her death, and is toppled into an interrogation of her life and its meanings not just for her son, but for the community claim that is made on her. Is it a Hindu body or a Muslim one? Accordingly, is it an opportune or tragic death? Was her life worthy or shameful? What community did she belong to? In fact she had no community while alive nor did one claim her. Friendless, unmarried, derided by her lover's mother, betrayed by her lover till far too late, she is forced into a social and moral liminality that she never reconciles with emotionally or psychologically. It is important for the ideological trajectory that the film charts that Ajay's mother remains both nameless and narratively without antecedents (though this could be explained diegetically as the inevitably partial memory of an uncomprehending childhood). The specific ideological effect of this is to register the terms in which her Muslim identity may exist: erased of history or community, secreted, dissimulating as Hindu – in short, Muslim-ness as a state of unexplained, inexplicable guilt. A peculiarly mutant version of secularism-as-tolerance is thus revealed in the crafting of this figure, with all its attendant and unbearable contradictions: the history of the community as it sees itself is at complete odds with a widely circulated and 'commonsensically' accepted history of guilt, 'alien-ness', treachery etc., first sponsored by rightwing nationalism²⁷. Yet the historical resistance of Islam to being assimilated into Hinduism, has marked it with a distinctiveness that is an embarrassment to mainstream secularism-as-tolerance too. The only acceptable form of existence for the mother then, as the film reveals is through the denial of both histories, while secretly retaining the source of distinctiveness itself, i.e. Islam. These contradictions are overwritten in their

gendering²⁸: Ajay perpetuates the dissimulation of being Hindu initiated by his mother (leading to the tragic irony of Anand turning ultra-Hindu) as much to hide the illegitimacy of her sexuality – and consequently his own and his brother's illegitimacy – as to hide her Muslim-ness. In fact the illegitimacy of her Muslim-ness and the illegitimacy of her sexuality reinforce each other. The film thus makes a statement on the ways in which women's bodies, while becoming the sites of communal identification, communal continuity, and struggle, lose their subjective bearings to notions of proprietorship, communal and national identity. The continuity and the tension between this duality are evident in Ajay's reminder to his wife (Sonali Bendre), "Your mother and country do not change". The questions about communities and their definition, women and their meanings in the representation of the community that remain alive throughout the film attach to the eponymous wound. Who is the wound and whose wound is it finally? The several wounds of several people are sited on this body which carries its own wounds. Rajan, the hurt he inflicts, her identity as a Muslim, her subaltern status, her humiliation, her child's torment and loneliness, are all her wounds. For all these reasons, she explicitly defines herself to Ajay as a/his wound and asks him to bury her within him (hence Anand's ignorance of her past). Equally, this wound is an inherited one, visible as much in Ajay's conflicting feelings towards his wife's wish to leave the country (because she does not want her son to grow up in an environment of communal hatred), as in his conflict over revealing his mother's 'true' identity²⁹.

By focusing on (Pooja's) wounded life, on her plight as the eternally waiting (other) wife and dedicated mother, and on the fact that her identity is what wounds her sexuality and her life, the film resists the discourse of abstracting women and their bodies into ciphers of community. Yet the resistance is articulated through precisely this discourse, by refusing to let it remain abstract, and exploring its consequences as the lived and experienced realities of (Pooja) and her sons. At the same time then the film poses the vibrant and knotty question of defining the Muslim as a national wound and in gendered terms. By accumulating vulnerability around the figure of this Muslim woman and then magnifying her into the grounds of discourse of national communities and the nation itself, the film first draws attention to a patriarchal investment of these discourses in feminine violation. Then it interrogates the gendered bases on which communities are discursively defined, as well as the returned implications for lived gender relations in such communal definitions. The multiple meanings of 'the wound' are then located in

the tensions that result from the opposition between the discourse and its types on the one hand, and the intractability of lived experience to those types on the other. In the contradictory and multiple slippages of meaning that result, in a vicious circle from her liminal status, the Muslim community that the mother embodies is touted as national wound to the Hindu nation, even as this celebrated embodiment of maternity is revealed to be itself Muslim, and wounded for being Muslim, faithful and maternal³⁰.

There are several ways in which *Zakhm* is a unique treatment of the mother in mainstream Hindi cinema. It draws distinctly on a significant tradition of representing and narrating the mother (*Mother India*; *Deewar*; *Amar Akbar Anthony*; *Karan Arjun*) and retains key features such as her single status, the absent father, the conflicted son and the transmission of the wound from mother to son. Having thus located itself within this influential thematic and discursive tradition, it dramatically subverts and rewrites it by exposing the fundamental religious-caste-class-regional assumptions of that figure. Pooja's decision to bury her Muslim identity under an assumed Hindu identity, without ever relinquishing the former, is a strategic personal decision that ensures her own and her children's survival since it serves to conceal various other types of illegitimacy. More importantly, it is a strategic narrative decision which seeks to sustain viewer identification as the film unfolds the subversive agenda of nominating a Muslim woman as National Mother: like other such films before it, *Zakhm* too gradually propels the social mother into a national one. The visuality of iconography which serves as a mnemonic device and a visualisation of an abstraction which harnesses identity, identification and affect, is effectively left untouched even while the film subverts the icon politically and ideologically. One achievement of the film is that, it thus draws attention to the significance of the iconography for patriotic identification, even as it provokes the question, "if the Mother Nation is posed as upper-caste Hindu, who or what will the diverse religious minorities and marginalised caste groups identify with patriotically?"

(Endnotes)

¹ The personification of India as Goddess Bharat Mata or Mother India is particularly interesting. Abanindranath Tagore's 1905 *Banga Mata* was the personification of an undivided Bengal that was soon to be divided to serve colonial administrative ends. After the division of Bengal into the states of Bihar, Assam, Bengal, and Orissa that the picture of the Goddess *Banga Mata* was reincarnated as *Bharat Mata*. This celestial being carries four symbolic objects in each of her hands: a sacred manuscript; an *akshamala*-rosary of beads; a *vastra* or length of fabric; a sheaf of green foliage... (derived from Neumayer and Schelberger "Printing for Independence" in *Popular Indian Art: Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India*, Oxford University Press, 2003, vi + p.176). Her sari is severe, even to Puritanism, in its enfolding lines. And behind the noble sincerity of eyes and brow we are awed by the presence of the broad white halo. Shiksha-Diksha-Anna-Bastra, the four gifts of the motherland to her children, 'The life and times of *Bharat Mata*', Sadan Jha, *Manushi*, Issue 142, August 2004.

² These were the hook, the snare, the arrow, and the frond of victory, one in each hand. Lying at her feet were two African lions, suggestive of the goddess's powerful *vahana* or celestial vehicle. *Ibid*.

³ Guha-Thakurta's (1993) discussion of this is instructive.

⁴ Mahesweta Devi's "Doulati the Bountiful", is a story about Doulati, daughter of a bonded labourer who is forced into prostitution to pay off the family debt. In the process, she contracts venereal disease and eventually dies of medical neglect. At the end of the story she lies down to die within the outline of a map of India that has been traced on the earth by a school master. She is discovered within the contours the next day – Independence day, and the sight of this [desecration?] body

⁵ The citizen subject is normally assumed to be male. Pateman (1988) argues that women were excluded to a primordial space when the politics of liberty, equality, fraternity and political consent was inaugurated.

⁶ Habermas' idea of cosmopolitan patriotism is interesting as a polemical point, not as a conceptual one. In the process of signifying allegiance to a boundary-less set of principles it actually reinforces the territorial connotations inherent in 'patriotism', through the converse connotations of 'cosmopolitan'.

⁷ The USA Patriot Acts of 2001 and 2006 are unique but telling exceptions; they may be the only instance of patriotism being invoked by law, but insofar as they are more

concerned with enabling the state with almost sweeping surveillance and counter-terrorism provisions, they explicitly use the idea of patriotism to override constitutional safeguards of fundamental rights in the USA.

⁸ Versions of patriotism such as community loyalties also intensify during moments of communal stress.

⁹ For the distinction between melodrama as genre and melodrama as mode, see Gabriel, K. 2005.

¹⁰ The difference between the two is a distinction between autobiography and a theory of autobiography.

¹¹ R Thomas 1985, 1989, Kapur 1987, A Rajadhyaksha 1993, Vasudevan 1995, Prasad (1998) have considered the interventions of local dramaturgy and performance on melodrama in Hindi cinema.

¹² This includes insisting on the definitive importance of territory, favourable comparisons with Pakistan, cultural nationalism of Hindutva, delegitimizing and quelling self-definition movements within the nation etc.

¹³ See the instances of Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal, Jagatsinghpur of POSCO area, Kalinganagar and Kshipur of Orissa, Polavaram in Telangana, Bauxite mining in Vishakha agency in Andhra Pradesh or Navi Mumbai in Maharashtra or Noida or Gurgaon or Jajjar in Haryana which have become battle grounds in which the state and industry are ranged against the rural and agricultural poor.

¹⁴ See the following statements to this effect by eminent member of the film industry "My films are Swadeshi in the sense that the capital, ownership, employees and stories are Swadeshi' (Dadasaheb Phalke, cited in Rajadhyaksha, 1993: 61).

"The Hindi Film Industry has often been lauded as a great force in national integration and the propagation of Hindi as the national language. (Shyam Benegal, *FICCI Report*, 1998: 2),

"...cinema has always been a dependable friend of the nation and will continue to serve the country for all times to come" (J Om Prakash, *FICCI Report*, 1998: 15).

¹⁵ The recent acceptability that Hindi cinema has found in the First World along with its own increasing orientation to the markets of the global North and the diasporic populations there, make the images it markets all the more significant.

¹⁶ Other reasons for this avoidance include the influence of partition, the composition of the industry, state policy vis-à-vis the cinema industry, the principals of censorship, sources of finance etc. which are matters for a different paper altogether. The treatment of the subject is additionally determined by factors such as the star system.

¹⁷ Three of JP Dutta's films *Border* (1997), *Refugee* (2000) and *LOC: Kargil* (2003) are concerned with the subject of borders. For a detailed analysis of *Border*, see my 2005 article in *Deep Focus*.

¹⁸ To discourage migrancy, the 6th Dec 2006 Supreme Court judgement places the onus of proving citizenship on the suspect individual and not on the state.

¹⁹ See my discussion of Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* and Kamal Haasan's *Hey! Ram* (Gabriel K 2002 and 2003). See also Gabriel 2005 for a detailed analysis of this melodramatic tactic, its advantages and its failures.

²⁰ As in the instances of *Shakti* (Ramesh Sippy 1982), or *Deewar* (Yash Chopra 1975); *Shahenshah* Tinnu Anand 1988 and Manoj Kumar's nationalist films.

²¹ Even though she may eventually bow to the regimes of an orthodoxical sexual economy and kill her son. Films like *Anand Math* (Hemant Gupta 1951) also explicitly foregrounded the trope of the nation as mother, but it is with Mother India that the nation as a problem is troped.

²² In an important exception which I will discuss later on, this pattern is inverted in *Zakhm* where the elder brother teaches the virtues of accommodation. The paradigmatic shift is suggested precisely because he is Muslim.

²³ For recent discussions of this see Menon, N. (ed.) 2007 and Kapur, R. 2005.

²⁴ Earlier, aspects of caste were elided and evaded by either avoiding surnames or by bestowing the unelaborated Kumar. The religion of the family however was almost always taken for granted as Hindu.

²⁵ The family in the family drama, the Karan Johar film is highly extended, but interestingly, even though one would therefore expect that these films celebrate heterogeneity (by literally enlarging the family and more metaphorically widening the imagination of the family), they actually simply eliminate heterogeneity by offering a community that is Hindu, upper caste, upper class and Punjabi or Gujarati. In short they simply eliminate most of the rest of India except as supplementary clichés.

²⁶ Ajay's mother dies of burns that she sustains when torched by a Muslim man during the riots.

²⁷ The extent of the acceptance of this perception was evident in the news channel CNN-IBN's 2008 feature on the occasion of Id ul-Fitr, asking Muslims to introspect on their role and status in India.

²⁸ It is significant that the other important Muslim figures in the film – Ajay's friend and the murderer – are both men, and both flaunt their Muslim-ness, unlike his mother.

²⁹ It is particularly revealing that Mahesh Bhatt chose the Urdu 'zakhm' over the Hindi 'ghav', signalling – through the Islamic resonances of Urdu – the specific communal location of the wound. While on the title, it is also worth contrasting it briefly with Rajkumar Santoshi's *Ghayaal* (The Wounded: 1990), an explicitly vigilante film in which the protagonist Ajay Mehra (Sunny Deol), victimised (or wounded) by the villain and by the failure of the criminal justice system, seeks personal retribution.

³⁰ Significantly, the film also displays another kind of mother figure found in mainstream Bombay cinema, the wicked mother-in-law. Set in contrast to the mother, the mother-in-law can never achieve communal-iconic status – at best she can function as community-stereotype – precisely because she is the outsider to the consanguineal family/community/nation, in most mainstream Bombay cinema. Bhatt is able to problematise the discursive locations of mother and mother-in-law in this film, simply by setting the mother-in-law in relation to a female rather than a male protagonist.

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