

HINDUISM RE-VISITED

THE RELEVANCE OF GANDHI TODAY

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Sati and the Chaste Wife Syndrome

Religions are based on the construction of ideal types which lead to the wide acceptance of what a 'good' man or 'good' woman should aspire to be. This primordial concern with what contemporary discourse views as understandings of masculinity and femininity has resulted in desirable role models as well as in views on what men and women should not be. Political thinkers and social reformers have been quick to seize upon these images in their search for legitimacy and influence. There have, however, been notable exceptions : in the present century, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi gave a new interpretation to accepted Hindu notions of femininity and masculinity. In the process, women became active political and social agents in a vital phase of India's history. That today revivalist forces are aggressively demanding a return to well-established models is due in large part to a decline in the socio-political climate, and the inability of traditional religion to accept innovation which questions the dominance of a male godhead. Gandhi exploited brilliantly Hinduism's ambivalence towards the female principle and in the process re-defined the parameters of political action. The Gandhian trend of self-questioning and analysis is now being picked up by the women's movement which denies the universality of incarcerating stereotypes. At the same time, religious revivalism finds easy acceptance among a much larger section of the population; using myth, folklore and tradition it is able to break fresh ground and threaten attempts at the projection of a counter-ideology. The recent incident of Roop Kanwar's death in Deorala illustrates the efficacy of a successful propaganda campaign which is a skillful mix of the old and the new.

Around 1352, somewhere in Rajasthan, Rani Sati Narayani Devi was said to have immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, Tandhan Das. As will be discussed later in this paper, the notion of sacrifice is vital for an appreciation of femininity in the Indian context. In time, in the district of Jhunjhunu, the local trading community, with help from its kin in other parts of the country, built a large opulent edifice, the Rani Sati temple. The temple is an ode to the ideals of sacrifice, dedication - and subordination. *Sati* exemplifies the feminine virtues of sacrifice and self-abnegation. Each year, in September, the temple and its environs wear a festive look during the annual *mela* (fair) of Rani Sati. Families from all parts of the country (and abroad) come to Jhunjhunu to pray and celebrate a re-commitment to traditional values, symbolised by a woman's unnatural death. Generations internalised what

was - and is - told to them presumably unquestioningly, only to enforce these norms in their homes when the time and occasion arose.

Then, on September 4, 1987, in Deorala, also in Rajasthan (not far from Jhunjhunu), Roop Kanwar, a young college-educated Rajput woman, was burnt on her husband's funeral pyre. This time there was a nation-wide uproar; women's groups, political activists, academics, journalists, religious leaders and others feverishly argued for and against *sati*, its essential meaning, present-day implications and so on. Roop Kanwar has now passed into the realm of mythology, of legend, of interpretation and deconstruction¹ yet the incident led to action and controversy. A body of opinion argued that she had been dragged and forced on to the pyre; she had been murdered, they pointed out, and the heinous act was now being legitimised in an aura of martyrdom. Forced to take some steps, the Government passed a legislation entitled the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987. While it penalises the glorification of *sati*, at the same time this legislation treats the event itself as suicide. Thus the onus of responsibility is placed on the individual woman, thereby minimising the role of force and intervention by other agents and interested individuals.

Though full of loopholes, the Act helped the district authorities in laying down some restrictions for the *sati* fair at Jhunjhunu. In addition, schools run by the same trust which established the temple have stopped the hitherto standard practice of young girl students ritually worshipping Rani Sati. On September 21, 1988, the Supreme Court, responding to a petition by 6 women's organisations stayed the *Gita* recital readings from the Bhagavad Gita to commemorate the first *barsi* (death anniversary) of Roop Kanwar and Mall Singh, at Deorala. The petitioners pointed out that the Dharam Raksha Samiti (Organisation to Protect Religion) which was formed after Roop Kanwar's immolation had been distributing a variety of literature in support of *sati*².

Nonetheless, the next day, thousands of villagers participated in the *Gita path* (recital) including several women, and a few politicians; the district administration's inability to enforce anti-*sati* legislation as well as the Supreme Court ruling has been explained by some as a "tactical understanding" to avoid confrontation and violence. After the *Gita path*, glorification of *sati* began "as those attending the *path* including the parents and in-laws of Roop Kanwar started raising pro-*sati* slogans"³. Women are reported to have raised slogans such as "*jo sati ko satayga, zindaqi bhar pachitayega*" (he or she who troubles *sati* will regret it all his or her life). While on the following day 45 arrests were made, the incidents only highlight the strength of deep-seated social attitudes towards femininity. Of particular relevance is the participation of women in the glorification of *sati*; at the same time, the documentary film on *sati*, "From the Burning Embers"⁴, provides us with accounts of articulate village women who felt that Roop Kanwar had been forced on to the funeral pyre. They also questioned why men were not expected to various indignities and forms of anguish. It would be simplistic to attempt an analysis of the variance in these women's attitudes as clearly different situations evoke different responses; of importance nonetheless is the fact that in parts of rural Rajasthan, the woman's essential role became a matter for some debate.

A few months later, in January 1988, Shakuntala Devi, a twenty four year old woman, was reported to have killed herself on her husband's pyre in Uttar Pradesh. There was, however, a vital difference between this event and the incident at Deorala: as Shakuntala Devi's husband had been cremated 48 hours earlier, had she committed *sati* or suicide? A woman is regarded as a *sati* if she immolates herself simultaneously with the burning body of her husband. While the government authorities argued that it was suicide by an estranged wife, the local community treated Shakuntala Devi as a *sati*. Though clearly not on the scale of Deorala, for a few days worship at the cremation spot followed.⁵ Once again, a woman's death - in this case clearly voluntary - became a symbol of purity and virtue. Accordingly, she was temporarily deified as her soul was regarded as worthy of propitiation.

The Sanskrit noun *sati* means good, virtuous and devout. It does not include the practice of widow immolation, though, by implication, a woman who *chose* to die with her husband could be nothing but pure and chaste. The fact that in the last century several women were forced on to their husband's funeral pyres for reasons which had nothing to do with their innate qualities have been discussed at length elsewhere.⁶ What is important here is the strength of a religious tradition which, even in the late twentieth century, needs - or uses - extreme acts of violence to reinforce its validity. The ideal of sacrifice is not unique only to Hindu constructions of femininity. However, it is here that, through a peculiar mix of religiosity and *realpolitik*, it has acquired in the present century, a particular intensity and legitimacy. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's ability to reach out to women by using the ideal of sacrifice has brought into focus the political uses of tradition in a manner unknown before; advocating a counter-ideology, this frail man involved thousands of men and women in the political mainstream. In doing so, he made judicious use of established views on feminine roles, reflected in religion and mythology.

When western education came to India at the beginning of the last century, early recipients were boys and men. Particularly in the urban areas, school and college-going became increasingly popular and white-collar jobs the preferred goal. Introduction to an entire literary tradition encouraged the growth of a reading population which also soon took to writing and public speaking. As learning for girls involved a completely different set of responses and necessitated special arrangements and a separate curriculum, the issue became an area for considerable debate in the print media, discussion groups and in homes.¹¹ Consequently, while supposedly liberating women from unshackling customs and ways of life, education was nonetheless limiting in a number of respects. It stressed the importance of a learning geared to the creation of intelligent wives and good mothers. In certain senses, the idea of sacrifice was implied in a system where a woman's primary duty was to be more effective in socially constructed roles and obligations. Individual aspirations were to be contained within this framework of a male-ordered society. It is easy then, to see a connecting thread between this point of view and the ideal of feminine obedience and docility; that women occasionally questioned - if not resisted - comes through in a reading of their writings. At another level, they were involved in a number of militant peasant struggles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹²

Several decades later, though in a very different manner, Gandhi encouraged and inspired women to seek an identity and sense of self.

A Youth of Desire and Dedication

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi remains a subject of intense fascination to a wide cross-section of people; activists, philosophers, psychologists as well as politicians have sought to understand the man and what he stood for. It is not an easy task, for Gandhi means different things to different people. His life and work have inspired a body of writing ranging from somewhat hagiographical biographies to searching analyses and psycho-analytical studies.¹³ Expectedly, his views on femininity have been of some interest, not only because of what these imply for women but also because they underlay his political philosophy as well as his activism.

In this paper, I shall briefly examine Gandhi's attitude to Putlibai, his mother, and the assumption of a maternal role towards his ailing father and later his grandniece, Manu, as these were important in shaping his attitude towards women and their roles. His early marriage, confessions of "carnal desires" towards his child bride, Kasturbai, and commitment to celibacy at the age of 37 were all vital influences in the evolution of an unconventional male person. Some facets of this man and his unusual views will be analysed. Non-violence (I shall look at relevant Sanskrit terms a little later), sacrifice, dignity of labour through spinning and communal living were all essential elements in his philosophical-cum-action plan; these were - and continue to be - qualities associated with femininity in the Indian situation. Thus, I shall argue that, in the contemporary context, any comprehensive analysis of Gandhian thought and action must include an understanding of his views on women and their roles. For instance, in present day revivalist Hinduism, sacrifice of the *sati*, of self, of self-effacing denial is glorified. Mahatma Gandhi too lauded the chastity of women; yet for him sacrifice and denial were sources of empowerment and not instruments of oppression in an unequal social order. He was, in the sense described by Eric Hobsbawm,¹⁴ "inventing tradition", in this case a tradition of a new femininity; while establishing "continuity with a suitable historic past", M.K. Gandhi visualised a contemporary role for women. Thus the Gandhian woman was to use her traditional qualities to build a new positive image of action, resistance and change.

Karamchand (Kaba) Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's father, was a Prime Minister of the princely state of Porbander in the Kathiwar peninsula of Gujarat. He married four times, and Mohandas was the youngest son of his last wife, and on the first page of his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* (published in 1927), Mohandas writes that "to a certain extent he (his father) might have been given to carnal pleasure". On the other hand, his mother was the embodiment of Hindu womanhood. He commented:

The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers.... She would take the hardest vows and keep them

without flinching... To keep two or three consecutive ... fasts was nothing to her.¹⁵

As is well known, the fast and, in the political context, the hunger strike became important in Gandhian methodology: involving denial, suffering and even pain for the protester, ideally they made her or him stronger. The opponent was often at a loss on how to cope with these aspects of non-violent protest. There is of course a substantial difference between the fast as a religious observance and the hunger strike and fast as political tools. In the former case it is more a short-term purificatory act and a sign of devotion; in the latter while self-purification is important, it is not the chief aim. Nonetheless, in both the notion of sacrifice is implied. Whatever the reason, a fast is unlikely not to have an effect on others as well, even when it is not politically motivated. For instance, though this is not expressed in his autobiography, clearly the sensitive young Mohandas felt guilty and anxious as his mother went without food on several days. While fasting is not unusual for certain categories of both Hindu women and men, the range and occasions of women's fasts and rituals are far more frequent. These are regarded as socially valued activities of the women's domain.¹⁶

Putlibai, who used to spin and wore coarse home-made cloth, was apparently a strong and respected woman. Well-versed in "all matters of state", the "ladies of the court thought highly of her intelligence". In 1887, when it was time for Mohandas to go to England, Putlibai was clearly uneasy. Her "minute enquires" had led her to conclude that there was every danger of her son taking to drink and meat-eating. The Gandhis were Modh Baniyas brought up in the strict tradition of Vaishnavism, and were abstemious in their food habits. It was only after Mohandas had taken vows "not to touch wine, women and meat" before a Jain monk that his mother gave her "permission and blessings".¹⁷ That Putlibai was a strong influence on her son's future life is apparent from a close reading of Gandhi's writings. His respect for women and a belief in their ability and tenacity arose from an early exposure to another strong woman: married at thirteen to Kasturbai, a strong-willed young girl, who "maid it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked", Mohandas had tried to educate her. But Kasturbai was resistant. In the early pages of his autobiography, Mohandas makes several references to his "lustful love" and "carnal desire" for his wife.

The incident of Kaba's death and his son's self-confessed guilt at having left his dying father to be with his wife has been a subject of considerable analysis.¹⁸ Of relevance here is the easy and willing assumption of the role of nurse and attendant by the youthful Mohandas. At the same time, "every night whilst my hands were busy massing my father's legs, my mind was hovering about the bed-room".¹⁹ The young man's sense of duty and obligation vied with a desire for his wife. The influence of these early experiences are evident in the adult Gandhi's repeated stress on the need to be caring, gentle and self-sacrificing. His adoption of celibacy was perhaps not unrelated to his remorse at having treated his wife as an object of lust.²⁰ Regretting

that he had not persisted with his plans to educate an obdurate Kasturbai, Gandhi wrote

I am sure that, had my love for her been untainted with lust, she would be a learned lady today; for I could have conquered her dislike for studies. *I know that nothing is impossible for pure love.*²¹ (emphasis mine).

To him nurturance, purity of heart and body, and forbearance were constitutive of a strength essential for the development of purposeful opposition to colonialism. Putlibai and Kasturbai had convinced him that women as much as men were capable of assertiveness, determination and goal-oriented behaviour. At the same time, he felt that their feminine natures and inclinations made them especially suited to non-violence and sacrifice.

Gandhian Methods: Femininity, Non-violence and Empowerment

Accordingly, in his early writings and speeches Mahatma Gandhi emphasised that while both men and women were equal, “women’s education should differ from men’s as their nature and functions do”. Home management and the care of children were of vital importance, and while women were not to be kept in ignorance, “it is tyrannical to burden them with work which is ordinarily done by men”.²² Ideally girls were to be trained to be good wives and nurturant mothers; “gradually”, wrote Gandhi in 1917, “it should be possible to introduce women to the subjects of politics and social reform”.²³ It was thus not long before Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was asking women who had gathered to hear him speak to give up wearing foreign material and dedicate themselves to the principles of *swadesh* (of one’s country). Spinning yarn on the *charkha* or indigenous spinning wheel was an effective way of doing one’s duty or *dharma*. Speaking at a women’s meeting at Nadiad (Gujarat) in 1919, Mahatma Gandhi told those assembled that “to spin for the good of India sitting in the home, and that too not for money - this is the highest *dharma*.”

At a time when Indian politicians were busy devising strategies and debating British policy and methods among themselves, Gandhi took his message of mass participation to the country’s women. His approach for the goal of large-scale involvement was simple and straight-forward. Using an idiom with which his audience was familiar, Gandhi asked women to develop talents they were best suited to : they were to spin, rear their children in the spirit of *swadesh*, non-violence and *dharma*, and be fitting companions to their husbands who may or may not be actively involved in politics. His commitment to celibacy and stress on a non-confrontationist denial appealed to women who were familiar with the cultural language he adhered to. However, Gandhi’s emphasis on sacrifice and denial were not merely a reaffirmation of stereotypical notions of a woman’s nature. For him, sacrifice was a powerful instrument, requiring a particular state of mind which not many could attain. That it was, and continues to be, regarded as a symbol of a woman’s subordinate position within the home and in the public sphere is hardly a position

Mahatma Gandhi would subscribe to. if anything, by stating that women were best suited to bring about his kind of society that women were best suited to bring about his kind of society Gandhi was according them the dominant position in his political scheme. The current swing towards violence against women is in part a reflection of a change in socio-political and religious ideologies. To understand the present context better however, it is essential to try and see how the Gandhian past was different.

In his introduction to *My Days with Gandhi* anthropologist N.K. Bose points out that "it was by *becoming* a woman that he tried to circumvent one of the most powerful and disturbing elements which belong to our biological existence".²⁵ Bose was referring to Mahatma Gandhi's celibacy and the feminisation of his personality through the adoption of the maternal, nurturer role. Though Gandhi took the vow of celibacy in 1906 (with the consent of his wife), he had been trying to achieve this state from 1900 onwards. An analysis of the implications of celibacy in general, and more specifically the Mahatma's commitment to it, fall outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it clearly was of great importance to his philosophy of non-violence and respect for femininity. For him, celibacy was only a part of the concept of *brahmacharya*. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography "*brahmacharya*" means control of the senses in thought, word and deed. Every day I have been realising more and more the necessity for restraints of the kind I have detailed above".²⁶

It was with the taking of the vow that the ground for *satyagraha* was laid. In her detailed study of the Gandhian philosophy of conflict, Joan Bondurant²⁷ discusses reservations over the use and definitions of this term. From the day that he began using the word during his South African experience to the last months in Delhi, Gandhi was apparently deeply involved in an understanding of this term. In his own words "*satyagraha*" is the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence".²⁸ It was thus, he concluded, much more than passive resistance, a phrase which he had used in the early years. Using effectively non-cooperation, boycott and the strike, *satyagrahis* (or those committed to *satyagraha*) were successful on a number of occasions; between 1917, when Gandhi used *satyagraha* for the first time on a large-scale during the agitation of the indigo workers of Champaran and his death in 1948, there were hundreds of mass *satyagrahas* throughout the country. Thus a decision in a highly private area of the Mahatma's life²⁹ was an essential influence in the evolution of his political philosophy of non-violence. For if Indians were to work effectively against British rule, direct negotiations and protests by politicians had to be backed up by mass action. Violence against the might of the British Empire could have only a limited impact, as was evident from the experience of terrorism. Nor did it have wide public support. On the other hand, a plan of action with roots in an easily comprehensible philosophy had a far greater appeal.

As already pointed out, the Gandhian vision of sacrifice and non-violence - operationalised by the effective tools of the strike, fast and boycott - represented a particular view of the Indian personality. In many senses, it was the feminine personality which was the archetypal Gandhian personality. His 'mothering' of the orphaned Manu, was indicative of his belief that nurturance was not only a feminine

characteristic. Clearly, his days of nursing his father had given him a certain deep-rooted satisfaction. He enjoyed the company of children and on his return from England in 1891, took charge of all the children in the family and greatly enjoyed his walks and interaction with them. He felt that after his vow of celibacy he was liberated in his attitude towards women : a woman was “the mother of man. She became too sacred for sexual love. And so every woman at once became sister or daughter to me”.³⁰ In his psycho-analytical study of Gandhi, Erik Erikson³¹ points out that the Mahatma probably saw a running thread in male violence, be it against the Blacks in South Africa or men against women. This led to “a deeper identification with the maltreated, and a stronger aversion against all male sadism”.³² A recurrent theme in Gandhi’s autobiography is his regret at having used Kasturbai as an object of lust and how after he became a celibate his attitude towards her changed.

The self-control which the life of a *brahmachari* implied involved the practice of *ahimsa*, literally translated to mean non-violence. Yet, for Gandhi, *ahimsa* was much more; it was “a comprehensive principle” where compassion and self-restraint were of paramount importance. Recognising that it was not always easy to attain this state, he nonetheless urged his supporters to strive towards the life and philosophy of a *brahmachari* or *brahmacharini*. For him, women were ideally suited to his kind of mobilisation and public activity. On the other hand, “*dharma* has always been preserved through women. Nations have won their independence because women have brave men as sons”.³³ On the other, women themselves, as embodiments of the ideas of *ahimsa* and sacrifice, were to participate in *satyagrahas*. They were, however, not to become “aggressive civil resisters” as their strength lay in “dignified suffering”.³⁴

The Gandhian emphasis on purity of the soul and body, essential if *ahimsa* was to succeed, had specific implications for the movement as well as for a sexual division of functions within it. Based on various experiments, both in his personal life as well as in the *ashrams*³⁵ where he often lived with his followers, had convinced Gandhi of the value of self-control, cooperative effort, and the ability for men and women to live harmoniously in a collectivity. Mahatma Gandhi was particularly sensitive to the position of women and hoped that their sense of self would be strengthened through participation in a movement which accorded them a vital place. He was opposed to child marriage and felt that “the rights or latitude allowed to widowers should also be allowed to widows enforced widowhood is to be condemned” as it “leads to promiscuity”.³⁶ As far as rights to property were concerned, he was “uncompromising in the matter of women’s rights”³⁷ and sons and daughters were to be treated equally.

That Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi spent considerable time thinking about the position of Indian women, their existing situation and potential role is evident from his speeches and writings. Though he wrote only two full length books, he was a voracious writer of articles and letters. As already pointed out, his personal history was in part responsible for an early commitment to a belief in women’s competence and superiority as well as for his efforts at developing some ‘feminine’ qualities. It was not surprising then that women from a range of class, caste, religious and ethnic

backgrounds flocked to the Mahatma. The brief descriptions of the Dandi salt march and sustained campaign for prohibition show how important areas of the movement depended on women's participation. In addition, spinning *khadi* yarn on the *charkha*, which involved a far larger number of women than men, was a major component of a movement committed to self-reliance and discipline.

The Dandi Salt March and Prohibition

In February 1931, Viceroy Irwin admitted to the Mahatma "you planned a fine strategy round the issue of salt".³⁸ He was referring to the Dandi march or salt *satyagraha* of the earlier year, when together with 71 *ashram* members from all over the country, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi asked Indians to manufacture and auction salt after he had picked the first handful. This was on March 11, before he began his 385 kilometer march to Dandi on the Gujarat sea coast. J.B. Kriplani, one of Gandhi's trusted lieutenants, described the historic event as follows:

From March 12 to April 5, Gandhiji and his band of Satyagrahis tramped from village to village. Wherever they went, they received an adoring welcome by the people with flags and garlands. Gandhiji addressed meetings everywhere and spoke to the crowds at his prayer gatherings, morning and evening. As he marched on, the crowds of marchers swelled. Thousands joined him. The local administration started crumbling. Nearly 400 village headmen resigned.³⁹

Historian Sumit Sarkar has pointed out that like the sustained campaign for involving the masses in *khadi* production, the manufacture of salt had an enormous mobilising effect. For the poor, it meant extra income based on the principle of self-help; for the urban participant it offered "the possibility of a symbolic identification with mass suffering".⁴⁰ Extrapolating from this I would add that more specifically it gave women, traditionally denied access to political processes and decision-making, a sense of personal commitment to the country's freedom. When the Mahatma was arrested on May 4, 1930, wide-spread unrest and strikes followed; peaceful though strong non-violent protest characterised the leader's incarceration in Yeravada jail. The Dandi salt march received much publicity and attention; the might of the British empire was challenged by those seeking *purna Swaraj* or total independence. Widespread support for the march which took entire families to the sea shore, soon involved women in more than only spinning within their homes.

though mobilisation for prohibition (against liquor) did not always hit the headlines it was sustained for a longer period and women had an important role to play in local-level organisation and planning. Writing in April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi justified his choice of deciding on an important role for women in this activity. He wrote,

But why should I involve women in this tangle? At this juncture I merely offer to women the field of prohibition without entering into discussion of any other field of activity..... Countless women should prepare themselves and the

activity should increase a hundred fold....All men should step aside. They should only do such work as is allotted to them. But the principal work of picketing, of persuading people, of pleading with them and of taking deputations to liquor-booths should be done by women alone.⁴¹

While women were free to work out the details, Mahatma Gandhi provided certain guidelines such as ensuring that trained women started *satyagraha* units at various places, picketing liquor booths as well as going to the homes of addicts. Interestingly, in the same article, Gandhi felt that while he understood “the impatience of women to take part in civil disobedience”, he felt that there should be an “exclusive field” for them.⁴² Opposition to the salt law was not fitting as it was dominated by men; on the other hand, prohibition, which was aimed *at* men, was far more apt. Once again, feminine capacities to persuade, cajole and gently pressurise were viewed as appropriate. In fact, in 1921, picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops by men had failed because “violence crept in”.⁴³

A few days later in a speech at Dandi, the Mahatma reiterated that picketing of liquor and cloth shops was to be “the special field of women”, as they could easily practice non-violence and renunciation.⁴⁴ He asserted on more than one occasion that women were to resist interference by men. Responding positively to Gandhi’s suggestion a group of upper middle class, urban Gujarati women decided to write to the Viceroy, informing him of their intention as well as pointing out that it was the duty of the state “to prohibit traffic in intoxicating drink”.⁴⁵ The letter was drafted by the Mahatma, though the women followed it up with a covering letter to their Gujarati sisters asking them to sign the letter and work with the Committee so formed. The new recruits were also given the option to form their own committees and of deciding where they were to picket. That the Mahatma’s belief in the ability of women to overcome the obduracy of men was naive became evident in a few days. In Surat and Jabalpur women picketers were abused in foul language and clods of earth were hurled at them. While admiring the endurance of the women, Gandhi was appalled at the indifference of men. Those incidents of violence brought to light the proverbial Achilles heel of women - their physical and sexual vulnerability. Fearing for his *satyagrahis*, Gandhi rebuked the very men whom he had earlier asked to stay away from this area of women’s activism. In doing so he was indirectly admitting that meaningful participation was possible only in the hot-house environment of the *ashram*, or where women cooperated with men. At that point of time, an all-women’s initiative was fraught with inherent dangers.

Gandhi had believed that purity of heart and body would prove a perfect foil to male aggression. His individual capacity to feminise himself combined with the rigours of celibacy and denial had led him to develop a somewhat myopic notion of male and female natures. Even if his idealised myopia was politically convenient in an environment where conventional options and strategies were being questioned and rejected, expediency was certainly not a primary goal. Few would question his belief in the ability of Indians to utilise effectively methods which would first strengthen them personally and then help them to organise collectively. Ironically, in the ultimate analysis it was also a commitment to non-violence which brought great

anguish to the Mahatma in his last years. The violent events leading to the partition of the country in 1947 negated much of what Gandhi has spent a life-time working for; at a more fundamental level, it meant a rejection of his assumptions regarding human nature and the capacity of women to be self-reliant in an increasingly hostile world.

The Last Years and Beyond

While the education conference in Wardha (Gujarat) in October 1937 endorsed Mahatma Gandhi's proposal for basic education through emphasis on productive labour, it was clear that an increasing number of politicians were growing somewhat impatient with Gandhian methods and policies. Over the next couple of years his role in the internal politics of the Congress Party was also the subject of some unease. By 1940, Muslim separatism had gathered momentum, though partition was not explicitly mentioned. Though World War II placed Gandhi in a peculiar position, as it went against his commitment to *ahimsa*, the Congress Working Committee decided to go ahead and support Britain. The expectation was that the British would be prepared to discuss a post-war independence pledge.⁴⁶ However, as the situation did not seem to augur any talks on *purna swaraj*, the congress passed its 'Quit India' resolution on August 8, 1942. This asked for "a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale".⁴⁷ Apprehending widespread trouble, the Government arrested important leaders in the early hours of August 9. What followed was hardly non-violent protest: as country-wide militance was matched by police oppression, it became increasingly clear that commitment to non-violence had to be reviewed in the light of a fast-changing environment.

With the war, communal unease and increasing incidents of aggression, the Mahatma's continued emphasis on the woman's purity of spirit seemed increasingly anachronistic. He had realised this as well. In response to a letter written by "a sister" in March 1942, which asked specific questions on a woman's situation at being assaulted by a soldier, he wrote,

It is my firm conviction that a fearless woman who knows that her purity is her best shield can never be dishonoured. However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity. There are examples even in modern times of women who have thus defended themselves. I can, as I write, recall two such instances. I therefore recommend women who read this article to try to cultivate this courage. They will become wholly fearless, if they can, and cease to tremble as they do today at the mere thought of assaults. It is not, however, necessary for a woman to go through a bitter experience for the sake of passing a test of courage. These experiences mercifully do not come in the way of lakhs or even thousands. Every soldier is not a beast. It is a minority that loses all sense of decency....Parents and husbands should, therefore, instruct women in the art of becoming fearless.

Interestingly, he added, her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that come to her mind in order to defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength, and if need be, die in the effort.....If old, decrepit and toothless as I am, I were to plead non-violence and be a helpless witness of assault on the honour of a sister, my so-called Mahatmaship would be ridiculed.⁴⁸

Even as Gandhi asked women to use violence in self-defence, he continued to hope for the resurgence of the “courageous spirit” which would protect the country from disaster.

It was this hope which took him to the religiously divided villages of Bengal and Bihar. From August 1946 onwards, Calcutta, Noakhali in East Bengal and later, in Bihar, Hindus and Muslims killed each other, raped women and looted and destroyed property worth millions. From October 1946, the old man of 77 “with undiminished courage decided to stake his all in a bid to vindicate his life long principles of change of heart and non-violence”.⁴⁹ Nirmal Bose reported that his presence often acted like “a magic spell”; families who had left their homes, in panic returned as “suspicion and a feeling of insecurity” were gradually dispelled.⁵⁰ Infinite patience and sensitive cajoling combined with a well-thought out understanding of what was needed helped to restore confidence. Bose’s meticulous and detailed account of the Mahatma’s stay in Bengal and Bihar during those disastrous months of 1946 and 1947 helps us to re-create the last years of a man who had rejected conventional forms of political participation. Once again, as he lived surrounded by his followers, women were involved in planning and action. Denial and sacrifice were as important as speeches and individual talks, and communal tension in Calcutta was dispelled in September by Mahatma Gandhi’s fast unto death. Once again, shortly before his assassination in January 1948, he had gone on a fast as Hindus massacred Muslims in Delhi in retaliation for the carnage in Punjab. During his stay in Bengal and Bihar, Nirmal Bose reported that the Mahatma kept indifferent health and was also mentally greatly troubled. Bose often heard him saying under his breath, “*main kya karoo*” or “what am I to do”.⁵¹

When Nathuram Vinayak Godse shot Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on January 30, 1948, this was not the isolated act of a lone, demented man. Godse represented that important section of Hindu India which rejected Gandhi, his ideals and methods, and above all his interpretations of Hinduism and Hindu malehood. Further, as psychoanalyst Ashis Nandy has pointed out, there was increasing resentment against the Mahatma’s “attempt to change the definition of centre and periphery in Indian society”.⁵² His involvement of the untouchables, women and Muslims in his movement was viewed as threatening by Hindus reared in the tradition of upper caste hegemony. It was not inconsequential then that Godse was a Chitpavan Brahmin from Maharashtra; known for their valour, the Chitpavans “combine the traditional prerogatives of the priestly Brahmans and the kindly Kshatriyas”.⁵³ The Gandhian movement threatened those with a stake in preserving the established order. Specifically, this meant Hindu superiority the caste system and male domination.

In many senses then , the murder of the Mahatma symbolised the death of a very specific world view and programme of action. There are enough history books and historians to tell us that by the beginning of the forties mainstream congress leaders were a little tired by Gandhi's at times idiosyncratic views. Clearly he was not unaware of this disenchantment, and in fact he too had gradually distanced himself from much that was happening. Partition of the country into India and Pakistan and the communal holocaust had pained him deeply; nor was he really at home with the gradual bureaucratisation and impersonalisation of a country on the make. His violent death symbolised the end of a well-defined yet short-lived tradition of non-violence as a way of life for scores of Indians.

In India, forty years after his death, a re-assessment of the Mahatma's essential beliefs is relevant particularly as violence appears to be acquiring the political and social status that non-violence did in the early decades of this century. Gandhi 'invented' a tradition of non-violence and mass participation using an idiom with which the people were familiar. In large part, his philosophy, depended on an eclectic religiosity and mythology. Today, the never absent tradition of violence and domination has taken over using another set of social, religious and mythological images. Rape and sexual assaults are a case in point and clearly require for greater analysis and understanding.⁵⁴ Clearly, essential for the present day power brokers is a reassertion of an aggressive, self-if not community and religious-centred, individualism. In this the political system is encouraged by religion and religious revivalism for which Nathuram Vinayak Godse must remain an abiding symbol.

Mahatma Gandhi's use of religious icons and images particularly in the context of femininity, was ingenious and convincing: the successful Gandhian woman was not only pure in body and spirit but also strong and determined. Often, her convictions took her into the public sphere. Combining both aspects of desirable and accepted femininity, she was *sati* as well as *shakti*. Those aspects of *shakti* which threatened men were taken care of by the emphasis on chastity, and whenever possible, the spirit (if not the actual practice) of *brahmacharya*. Gandhi was helped by a short-lived political environment which was somewhat sceptical of aggression. Soon sporadic events of violence culminating in the horrors of the forties had considerable implications not only for the Gandhian way of life but also for women's roles. The tensions inherent in encouraging women to participate and organise socio-political action came to the fore during the campaign against prohibition; more generally, during the communal riots, sexual assaults on women became symbolic of an assault on the self-respect of the rival community. As women became pawns in this terrible scenario, a heart-broken Gandhi had to re-think his position on human nature. It could not have been easy for him, particularly as his entire life had been devoted to the encouragement and growth of the androgynous personality. Having achieved a great measure of personal success in this sphere, he had hoped that his own life could serve as an example to others. That in the long run he was not successful was more a reflection of the resurgence of factors beyond his control than of his own failure.

The Constitution of post-Independence India is committed to a secular democracy; indeed in the early Nehruvian years, policies and programmes were geared to the development of a modernising economy based on state initiative. The centre was in control, displacing the Gandhian periphery. Despite a simmering resentment towards Pakistan, religion was not a focus of mobilisation or activism. The rule of Indira Gandhi saw the early beginnings of distinct communal, ethnic and caste tensions; her death-again a violent assassination - brought to the fore religious sentiments. This time it was a hatred unleashed against the Sikhs of the Punjab. Women once again became victims of a drama being played out mainly by men. Since 1984, there has been no going back; India is today riven by caste, religious and ethnic divisions. Central to the claims of most contending groups is a militant masculinity and the demand for an acquiescent femininity. Muslim women in the troubled state of Kashmir are forced behind the veil and in 1987, Roop Kanwar, temporarily acquired the status of a minor goddess.

As the original tradition of a Hindu India reasserts itself, feminine power or *shakti* is once again seen as essential for male supremacy and success, and not as vital for a meaningful feminine identity. It is the *sati* who cares, nurtures and subordinates herself in countless homes who is to be deified. The Gandhian woman who spun within the home yet was prepared to face police brutality is not the ideal anymore. While feminine sacrifice remains a coveted virtue, it has lost much of the moral authority it enjoyed in the Mahatma's scheme of things. It is now viewed much more as legitimate denial for the benefit of the family collectivity. It may be argued that the Gandhian emphasis on a woman's capacity for sacrifice did in fact cast her in a mould, where she was expected to tolerate pain and welcome denial. The validity of this point of view has to be juxtaposed with the Mahatma's belief in the moral and spiritual superiority of women and the empowering nature of sacrifice. That for him women and not men were the more honourable, and admirable sex is clear from his own efforts at becoming as much like a woman as he possible could.

Though the dominant male world view has little place for feminine self-expression, evidence from the post - 1975 women's movement indicates that the Gandhian experience was not in vain. Mobilising themselves on a range of ecological, quasi-political and social issues Indian women are looking once more to Gandhian alternatives and to his view of religious and social tolerance. Significantly, unlike the Mahatma, activists do not ascribe to religio-mythological prototypes. Instead, using effectively proven tools of social and political protest women are becoming an influential force in specific areas. In doing so, they are re-establishing their links with not only Gandhianism but also with early peasant and tribal struggles. The success of the women's movement is not only to be gauged in terms of goals attained: It has also to be viewed in a perspective which questions the increasing consolidation of stereotypes and restricting role models. It hopes to legitimise a trend which Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi spent considerable effort on; in the process it also denies the validity of a religious fundamentalism which espouses a strict dichotomisation of sexual roles and functions, based on male domination and authority.

Conclusion

In 1932, reacting to male aggression against women, Gandhi wrote

the man who allows the modesty of a woman to be outraged will be regarded as a coward. He will be a partner in violence because violence is implicit in cowardice.⁵⁵

He was writing of course before violence overtook the Indian scene, when the spirit of non-violence and amity still prevailed in public life as well as in overt religious discourse. Within a few years, the Second World War, large-scale disturbances following the Quit India Resolution in 1942, and finally the communal violence of the mid-forties re-opened questions of political method, human nature, as well as, at a more personal level, relationships between men and women. The ascendance of religion and religious symbols soon acquired tremendous significance in a country which was to be violently divided on the basis of differing faiths.

The events in the years before the Mahatma's death led inexorably to a dilemma as many of his beliefs were challenged. They also marked a shift in Indian socio-political life towards a never absent tradition of aggression and dominance. I have argued in this paper that such a tradition - which, for a few decades was displaced by the power of a new creed - asserted itself firmly and irrevocably by the forties. In the heady early years of Independence, politicians and the intelligentsia strove to create a secular, democratic country; by the mid-seventies, however other trends were clearly visible. Today, as religious and ethnic fundamentalism threatens the unity of the country, it is quite clear that essential to these divisive forces is not only a militant aggression but also a belief in male strength, power and authority. There is little or no place for Gandhi's androgynous personality and for his belief in a woman's superior "moral power and greater courage".⁵⁶ Instead as the women's movement struggles to make itself heard, retrogressive forces assert the legitimacy of feminine docility and subordination, and masculine dominance. Nonetheless Roop Kanwar's death was after all not in vain: while it may have enraged many women, the event has continued to mobilise fundamentalists as well as those opposed to religious revivalism. For despite a somewhat ambivalent environment, movements inspired by the Gandhian counter-ideology of gender equality and fairplay are growing in strength and influence.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Ashis Nandy, "Sati: A Nineteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest" in his *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980; Nandy has also written "Sati Kaliyuga", *Economic and Political Weekly*, No. 38, September 17, 1988, "The Sociology of Sati", *Indian Express*, October 5, 1987; and "The Humamn Factor", *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, January 17, 1988. See also Imrana Quadeer and Zoya Hasan, "Deadly Politics of the State and Its Apologists", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 14, 1987; and Sujata Patel and Krishna Kumar, "Defenders of Sati", *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 23, 1988.
2. Report in the *Times of India*, New Delhi, September 22, 1988.
3. From the *Times of India* New Delhi, September 23, 1988.
4. This is a 40 minutes documentary made by Mediastorm, a group of five young women trained in video technology. It deals with the aftermath of the Roop Kanwar incident as well as with the response of activists and politicians.
5. Report in the *Indian Express*, New Delhi, January 12, 1988.
6. See Elizabeth Leigh Stutchbury, "Blood, Fire and Mediation: Human Sacrifice and Widow Burning in Nineteenth Century India", and S.N. Mukherjee, "Raja Rammohan Roy and the Debate on the Status of Women in Bengal" in Michael Allen and S.N. Mukherjee (eds.), *Women in India and Nepal*, Canberra: UNU Monographs in South Asia, No. 8, 1982, and Nandy, 1980.
7. C. Dimmit and J.A.B. Van Buitenen's *Classical Hindu Mythology*, New Delhi: Rupa, 1983 discusses characteristics of various divine beings while N.N. Bhattacharya's *The Indian Mother Goddess*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1977 deals specifically with the female godhead.
8. Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature; Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper and sons, 1980 is an insightful study of medieval Christianity based on literary texts, pointing and graphics. For *pardah* and Islam see Nawal el Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (eds.), *Separate Worlds*, New Delhi: Chanakya, 1982, Hossain's *Sultana's Dream and Selections from the Secluded ones* (edited and translated by Roushan Jahan), New York: The Feminist Press, 1988. Based on her anthropological field work in North India, Ursula Sharma wrote on the institution of *pardah per se*. See "Women and their Affines: The Veil as a Symbol of Separation", *MAN* n.s. 13(2), 1978 and "Purdah and Public Space" in Alfred de Souza (ed.), *Women in Contemporary India and South Asia*, Manohar: New Delhi, 1980.

9. See Leela Dube, "The Seed and the Field: symbolism of Human Reproduction in India" (mimeo) 1978, Lina Fruzzetti, *The Gift of a Virgin, Women, Marriage and Ritual in a Bengali Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990 (earlier US edition, 1982), Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organisation in India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1953; and Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar", *Journal of the royal Anthropological Institute*, 93 (pt. 1), 1963 for detailed discussions on the notion of female sexuality, its role in the perpetuation of the lineage and the consequent need to control it.
10. Hanna Papanek has characterised this as a woman's role in family status production. See her, "Family Status - Production Work: Women's Contributions to Social Mobility and Class Differentiation", mimeo, 1986.
11. This is the underlying theme of my recent book, *Voices from Within - Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. The Bangladeshi historian Ghulam Murshid's most informative *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernisation 1849-1905*, Rajshahi; Rajshahi University Press 1982, and Meredith Borthwick's *The Changing role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1985* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984 provide considerable material on attitudes to and of women during this period.
12. In her "An Unfulfilled or a Blurred Vision? Jawaharlal Nehru and Indian Women" (mimeo, 1989), Vina Mazumdar draws attention to the fact that "chroniclers of peasant and labour movements...have paid so little and sometimes no attention to women in these struggles" (p. 5). In an attempt to put the records straight feminist scholars, and others have been looking at women's participation in a range of movements, political and otherwise. See for instance Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986 and the issue of *Samya Shakti*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1989 on women's movements. More specifically, Neera Desai "Women and the Bhakti Movement" (mimeo), Ishanee Mukherjee's "Women and Armed Revolution in late Colonial Bengal: An Integrated Study of Changing role Patterns (mimeo), and Manoshi Mitra's "Women and Class Struggle in Bihar, India: Tribal and Worker Movements and Women's Participation" in S. Muntemba (ed.) *rural Development and Women: Lessons from the Field* vol. II, Geneva: ILO, 1985 deal with case studies from different movements and regions. Kumud Sharma's "Shared Aspirations, Fragmented Realities - Contemporary Women's Movement in India: Its Dialectics and Dilemmas", CWDS Occasional Paper No. 12, 1989, gives an overview of contemporary trends.
13. In the former category I have in mind books like D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Karamchand Gandhi*, Bombay, 1962, and J.B. Kripalani, *Gandhi : His Life and Thought*, New Delhi; Publications Division, 1970. His niece Manuben (*Bapu - My Mother*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan 1962) wrote poignantly of her relationship with a man who had undertaken to be her mother. See also her

Last Glimpses of Bapu, Delhi: S.L. Agarwal, 1962. In the genre of biographies, N.K. Bose's *My Days with Gandhi* Calcutta: Bose Press, 1953, is perhaps one of the best detailed studies of Gandhi's last years. Minute details of Gandhi's daily routine are documented together with a searching analysis of some of his beliefs and ideas. Lloyd I Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph's "The Traditional Roots of Charisma: Gandhi" in their *The Modernity of Tradition - Political Development in India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1967 is a well-researched and sensitive analysis of the childhood of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, his family background and early politics in the context of British notions of the non-masculine, weak Indian.

Shahid Amin's "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P., 1921--22" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies III*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, analyses in great detail Gandhi's visit to Gorakhpur and his deification by the local peasantry. Locating "the Mahatma image within existing patterns of popular belief" Amin uses fifty stories reproduced in *Swadesh*, a local paper, as the basis for his study. In the same volume see also Partha Chatterjee's "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society". Apart from Erik Erikson's *Gandhi's Truth - on the Origins of Militant Non-violence*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969, Ashis Nandy's "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi" in his *At the Edge of Psychology*, New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1980 are fine examples of psycho-analytical discourse. See also Sudhir Kakar's "Gandhi and Women" in his *Intimate Relations*" New Delhi: Viking, 1989.

Apart from Pushpa Joshi's recent and exhaustive *Gandhi on Women*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House and CWDS, 1988, Madhu Kishwar's *Gandhi and Women*, New Delhi: Manushi Prakashan, 1986 and Amrit Srinivasan's "Women and Reform of Indian Tradition - Gandhian Alternative to Liberalism" *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 19, 1987 deal specifically with Gandhian views on women and femininity. Also see papers presented at a seminar on "Gandhi, Constructive Programme and Women's Emancipation", Gandhian Institute of Studies, Rajghat, Varanasi, March 10-12, 1988. Aparna Basu's "Gujarati Women's Response to Gandhi, 1940-1942", *Samya Shakti*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984, and Gail Pearson's "The Female Intelligentsia in Segregated Society: Early Twentieth Century Bombay" in Allen and Mukherjee's edited *Women in India and Nepal* look at women's participation in the Gandhian movement in Western India.

14. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 1.
15. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (original in Gujarati), Ahmedabad, Navajivan, 1966 (1927), p. 2.

16. I have dealt with feminine rituals and Vratas in Bengal in *Voices from Within*. See also Leela Dube "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India" and Veena Das, "Femininity and Orientation to the Body" in Karuna Chanana (ed.) *Socialisation, Education and Women - Explorations in Gender Identity*, New Delhi : Orient Longman, 1988, for a discussion of popularly held notions of the female body.
17. *My Experiments*, pp. 22-23. Vaishnavs are followers of Lord Krishna and believe in *bhakti* or overt devotion as well as austerity in food and daily habits.
18. See Rudolph and Rudolph, Nandy, 1980 and Erikson.
19. *My Experiments*, p. 20.
20. N.K. Bose makes this point in *My Days with Gandhi*.
21. *My Experiments*, p. 9.
22. Joshi, *Gandhi on Women*, p. 14 and 22.

Prior to his active involvement in Indian politics. I refer to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by his name. Subsequently, with his emergence as a national figure he came to be known as "the Mahatma" or great soul or Mahatma Gandhi. Accordingly, I refer to him as the Mahatma or as Gandhi in the active phase of his life. He was also called Bapu or father (and indeed referred to as father of the nation) and it was usual to use the honorific suffix "ji" after his name.

23. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 16.
24. *Ibid*, p. 30.
25. Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, p. 1.
26. *My Experiments*, p. 158.
27. Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of violence - the Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1965.
28. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 8.
29. See A.C. Guha's *First Spark of Revolution*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1971, as well as Amal Tripathi's *The Extremist Challenge*, Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1971, for analyses of so-called terrorist violence, particularly in Bengal.
30. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 276.

31. Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*.
32. *Ibid*, p. 194.
33. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 89.
34. *Ibid*, p. 93.
35. *Ibid*, p. 202
36. An *ashram* is a physical unit consisting of dwelling areas occupied by those committed to a guru or spiritual leader. In the Gandhian *ashram*, the emphasis was on collective prayer, spinning and sharing of various duties. Both men and women lived in these *ashrams* in a spirit of amity and cooperation.
37. *Ibid*, p. 215
38. Quoted on p. 286 of Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India:1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983.
39. Kripalani, *Gandhi - His Life and Thought*, p. 129.
40. Sarkar, p. 286.
41. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 219.
42. *Ibid*, p. 228.
43. *Ibid*, p. 222.
44. *Ibid*, p. 228.
45. *Ibid*, p. 236.
46. See Sarkar, *Modern India* for a concise history of some of these events.
47. Quoted on p. 388 of Sarkar
48. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 325.
49. Sarkar, p. 437.
50. Bose, *My Days with Gandhi*, p. 56.
51. *Ibid*, p. 80.

52. Nandy, "The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi", p. 71.
53. *Ibid*, p.77.
54. Tanika Sarkar's "Reflections on Birati Rape Cases - Gender Ideology in Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 2, 1991 discusses how rape becomes an instrument of oppression when the social context and traditional moorings are under threat. In the same issue of EPW see also Biswamoy Patil, "Women, Rape and the Left". While there are not too many analyses of religious texts and notions of femininity see for instance Ish Mishra's "The 'Women's Question' in Communal Ideologies: A study in the Ideologies of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and jamaat-e-Islami" unpublished paper, Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, 1987; and Gyanandra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial Northern India*; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.
55. *Gandhi on Women*, p. 278.
56. *Ibid*, p. 222.