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Nation, Gender and Representations of (In)Securities in Indian Politics

Secular-Modernity and *Hindutva* Ideology

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ABSTRACT This article examines the relationship between gender, nations and nationalisms vis-a-vis the Indian state's nationalist identity and perceptions of (in)security. It explores how the postcolonial Indian state's project of nation-building – reflective of a western secular-modern identity (under the Congress Party) and a *Hindutva*-dominated identity (under the BJP) – incorporates gender, with continuities and discontinuities, to articulate divergent forms of nationalist/communist identities, 'cartographic anxieties' and nuclear (in)securities. The article contends that with the recent rise of the Hindu-Right BJP, guided by *Hindutva* ideology, the nature of representing the Indian nation, its women and (in)securities has changed from a geopolitical to a cultural perception – thereby necessitating a rereading of the Indian nation, nationalism, gender and its perceptions of (in)security.

KEY WORDS gender ♦ *Hindutva* ♦ identity ♦ India ♦ insecurity ♦ nation ♦ nationalism ♦ security ♦ state

INTRODUCTION

It is apparent that religion and politics are intimately related and that religion or religious ideologies play a crucial role in negotiating identities of gender,

nations and nationalisms. Feminists have questioned the relationship between gender, nation and nationalism, exploring particularly how 'underlying both notions of nations and the politics of nation-building is a gendered power politics' (Einhorn, 2006: 196). Cognizant of rare non-feminist scholarship that has unravelled the fragmented nature of traditional understandings of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Chatterjee, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1983), the feminist challenges to nationalism, pioneered by Enloe (1993), have analysed the gendered nature of nations and nationalisms along three lines: first, exposing how nationalisms based on public/private dichotomies have used women as symbols and victims in 'bounding' the nation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; Jayawardena, 1986; Yuval-Davis, 1997); second, showing how 'militarized' masculinities of national identities embedded in states' military policies legitimize sexual violence in the name of conflict resolution (Enloe, 1993, 2000; see also Chenoy, 2002; Cohn, 1989); and third, examining how anti-colonial/nationalist struggles – as male-dominated agendas – have secured women's participation in such struggles only to push women to the margins during later periods of state consolidation (Jayawardena, 1986; Sharoni, 1998).

While early feminist scholarship on gender, nation and nationalisms has treated these aspects as arbitrary constructs, recent feminist work has highlighted discursive/representational aspects underpinning the connections between gender, nation and nationalisms. These discursive aspects highlight how male-centric nationalisms or nationalist ideologies 'construct and functionalize women through discourses of appropriate *femininity* [and masculinity]' to forge nations/nationalisms (Peterson and Runyan, 1998: 8); how nationalist discourses use 'images and practices of sexuality [as] the malleable means of reproducing homogeneous and bounded [nations]' (Dwyer, 2000: 27); and, how nationalist ideologies deploy women's sexuality in 'us' vs 'them' frames to project 'dangerous sexuality . . . emanating from either "enemies" within, or the "Other" nation's men' (Einhorn, 2006: 202; Mayer, 2000). Significant in this context is Einhorn's (2006: 202) observation that the interweaving of sexuality with discourses of nation and nationalism is used to justify a 'moral imperative requiring women both to "represent" the nation through moral virtue and social norms, and to reproduce the national/ethnic groups in biological and cultural terms'. This gendered nationalist process, which Einhorn (2006: 202) calls the 'politics of national reproduction', furthermore implies that 'nationalist ideologies rely on constructions of masculinity and femininity to "naturalize" power struggles over who gets to define what the nation stands for' (Einhorn, 2006: 199). Nations are thus not just 'systems of cultural representation', but also 'constitutive of people's identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered' (McClintock, 1997: 89).

In this article, I draw from the feminist literature on gender, nations and nationalisms to highlight the gender question in India's nationalist (in)security politics. I interrogate this gender *problematique* by locating the question vis-a-vis the Indian state's nationalist identity, where the state's identity – fraught between secular-modernity and *Hindutva* ideology – has enabled the state to utilize gender to remap the nation, nationalism and its political (in)securities. The central research question is thus posed: whether and how the postcolonial Indian state's project of nation-building – reflective of a western secular-modern identity (under the Congress Party) and a *Hindutva* ideology (under the BJP)¹ – incorporates gender, with continuities and discontinuities, to articulate divergent forms of nationalist identities, 'cartographic anxieties' and nuclear (in)securities.²

In initiating this analysis, as an international security/feminist scholar, I begin with the assumption that the central attributes of nation formation in international politics require the mapping of a sovereign territorial space, or a 'geopolitical' vision, which accompanies certain 'cartographic anxieties' reflective of the nation's boundary-making compulsions (Krishna, 1996). (I define the terms geopolitical vision and cartographic anxieties in the following section.) Accordingly, postcolonial nations, including India, have tried to configure their geopolitical visions by consolidating their territories; investing them with national sovereignty; and securing them from Others, often by recourse to complex gender representations. Thus, representations of gender in the task of nation-making are nothing new and have even been evidenced in Indian politics. Accepting this premise, what I explore in this article is how, with the rise of the recent Hindu-Right BJP government in India, guided by the *Hindutva* ideology, the nature of representing the Indian nation, its women and national (in)securities has changed from a geopolitical to a cultural perception. This represents a shift from a 'political' to a 'cultural' reconstruction of identities and political (in)securities by the BJP necessitating a rereading of the Indian nation, nationalism, gender and national (in)securities. In this sense, my study of the Indian nation, constructions of gender and representations of national (in)securities – albeit in a local/cultural context – also initiates an intellectual engagement to connect the literature on gender and nationalism in interdisciplinary ways to the discourses and practices of international security/relations.

In this article, I explore the discursive links between gender, nationalism and national (in)securities by following a critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis provides a researcher with the interpretative or intersubjective framework to explore how specific 'discourse' structures (such as power and ideological hegemony) embedded in the organization and implication of language may reproduce and legitimize dominance in political, social and cultural contexts (Stubbs, 1983). I have collected my data for this article by consulting primary documents such as Indian parliamentary

debates, election manifestos, journals, newspapers, magazines and pamphlets of both the Congress Party and the BJP; as well as by listening to speeches of Congress and BJP politicians on television, radio and at public gatherings. These have been supplemented by semi-structured open-ended interviews with politicians and activists of the Congress Party and BJP – male and female – which I conducted during my field trips to New Delhi (India) in the summers of 2002–4. Through a critical discursive analysis of the contents and implications of these texts and interviews, I have tried to analyse the intersubjective links between the Indian political leaders' ideologies, articulation of India's nationalist and gender identities, and political (in)securities.

The article is divided into the following sections: the first part introduces the terms geopolitical visions, cartographic anxieties and (in)security imaginaries since I draw significantly from these terms to delineate the links between gender, nationalism and the articulation of political (in)securities in the Indian context. The second part examines nationalism and nationalist identity in postcolonial India under the Congress Party as an outcome of secular-modernity. It demonstrates how gender remained at that time integral to the Indian state's masculinity as a means by which to articulate the nation's cartographic anxieties and (in)securities. The third part explores the rearticulation of India's nationalist discourse by the BJP and shows how the BJP's Hindu masculinity – different from the Congress Party's traditional/Indian masculinity – has enabled the party to use feminism in both militant and traditional ways to service cultural nationalism, the location of danger and perceptions of nuclear (in)security. I conclude by analysing the connections between colonial legacies, secular-modernity and *Hindutva* identity that continue to implicate postcolonial India's nationalist identities, configurations of masculinities, gender and national (in)securities.

GEOPOLITICAL VISIONS, CARTOGRAPHIC ANXIETIES AND (IN)SECURITY IMAGINARIES

A geopolitical vision includes 'any idea concerning the relation between one's own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security and/or invoking ideas about a collective mission or foreign policy strategy' (Dijkink, 1996: 11). In this sense, a geopolitical vision also reflects boundary-making practices, or what Krishna (1996) calls 'cartographic anxieties' centring around questions concerning one's nationalist identity and survival and requiring a them–us distinction; an emotional or political attachment to one's place; and close feelings of nationalism and identification with one's own territory. However, as Krishna also explains, cartographic anxieties go much beyond mere 'technical and scientific' mapping of a country's boundaries. They also include 'representational

practices' that in various ways have attempted to inscribe 'something called India [and for that matter any nation] with a content, history, meaning, and trajectory' (Krishna, 1996: 82). This is because the central attribute of nation formation and nationalist identity in international politics requires the production of a particular 'configuration' of territorial space – that is 'territorially disjointed, mutually exclusive, and [yet] functionally similar to other sovereign states' (Ruggie, 1993: 144). Accordingly, postcolonial nations including India have tried to configure their territorial boundaries and also invest them with national political sovereignty. Reconfiguring territorial boundaries, however, also means that territories need to be constantly 'guarded, re-made, and re-secured' and it is the 'production' of an Other that secures the process of nation-making (Ruggie, 1993: 144).

In understanding the 'production' of an Other in international politics, the concept of security 'imaginary' becomes useful. In studying the Indo-US (in)security dynamic, Muppidi defines security 'imaginary' as a representation of danger that is the product of certain 'field[s] of meanings and social [ideological] power' (Muppidi, 1999: 123). Operating within frameworks of meanings, assumptions and distinctive social identities, representations of danger and what constitutes (in)security imaginaries are left open to the dynamics of interpretation, whereby relations of identity, Otherness and (in)securities may be produced, enforced and reified in a conflictual manner. Thus, (in)security imaginaries are created through certain 'codes of intelligibility', often involving state leaders, and become key in understanding the state's (or its leaders') divergent perceptions of statist identity, the location of the Other vis-a-vis that identity and (in)security (Muppidi, 1999: 124; Weldes et al., 1999: 1–2).

The importance of these perspectives for this article is that they allow us to understand that states – as paradoxical entities – do not possess pre-existing stable identities. As a consequence, all states are marked by a tension to adjust to the many axes of their nationalist identity in order to represent an 'imagined' community (Anderson, 1983). Central to this process of constituting a state's identity is the state's security/foreign policy and its construction of danger, both of which serve to consolidate the state's identity. This is because if a state faces no dangers then this would imply an absence of movement via stasis as a result of which it would wither away. Accordingly, a state's security/foreign policy by inscribing certain 'codes of danger' helps to contain and reproduce the state's boundaries, and, ironically, guarantees for the state an impelling identity (Campbell, 1992: 11). How the drive to 'fix' the Indian state's identity reflective of a secular-modern and a *Hindutva* identity has enabled the state (or its leaders) to incorporate gender to articulate divergent nationalist identities, cartographic anxieties and (in)securities is undertaken in the rest of my analysis.

CONGRESS AND THE MAKING OF A MODERN INDIA

The concept of India's geopolitical vision has an implicit connection with the project of modernity. On the one hand, national movements in India were reacting to the subjugation inherent in colonization and thus indicative of politically 'counterhegemonic' projects. Yet, the reigning models of nation-building in postcolonial India were derivative of the western experiences of modernity. Influenced by the emergence of the liberal state in Europe in the late 18th century, India's political leaders like Nehru attempted to conjure into existence the postcolonial state of India in terms of a territorial/political integrity. This is because given India's colonial history its leaders recognized that a nation's unity was essential to its formation and survival. Since an important aspect of a modern state in terms of 'producing' nationalism is that the rulers and the ruled share a common nationality, the concept of a territorial/political nationalism along with the secular ideology of *Sarvadharmā Swamabhava* (all religions are equal) provided the foundations of India as a modern state. In articulating a secular nationalism, Nehru was particularly aware that 'bringing religion into politics meant the ruin of both' and claimed that 'it was for the Hindus to make the larger number of Muslims . . . feel at home in India' (Nehru, cited in Parthasarathy, 1989: 9). However, the secular nationalism of Nehru did not preclude some majoritarian nationalists, such as Sardar Patel, from making their presence felt during the debates over constitution-making (Balachandran, 1996). In fact, one can argue that such Hindu sentiments, although subdued from dominating India's formal politics, did exist underground and resurfaced on a national scale in 1998, facilitating the resurgence of the BJP (a point to which I return later).

For now, I proceed to build on Krishna's concept of cartographic anxieties to show how nationalist representational strategies used by the immediate post-independence secular Congress Party leaders – centring on abducted Indian women's repatriation policies – have drawn on women's bodies and images to articulate India's geopolitical visions and national (in)securities. My aim is to highlight how the Indian state's discourses interweaving India's nationalist identity, gender and perceptions of (in)securities have remained political in nature, the discursive representation of which becomes overtly cultural/communal under the BJP.

Territorial Nationalism, Geopolitical (In)Securities and Gender in Modern/Secular India

Like any other postcolonial nation, India's 'boundary-making' exercise, the very condition of its territorial nationalism, has defined India's postcolonial (in)security imaginary. In this context, as Muppidi (1999: 124–5) points out, the boundaries of this imaginary are reached when particular

representations of the Other seem 'unintelligible, irrational, or ungraspable' in and through the lenses of the articulators of this (in)security imaginary. The conception of a sovereign, autonomous (Indian) state to be formed after independence from its colonizer had first legitimized the (in)security imaginary of the then colonial India. In the postcolonial era, this imaginary was rearticulated vis-a-vis an Other/Pakistan that was carved out of the violent partition of the country. Thus, the postcolonial Indian state's efforts to produce external dangers not only emerged from its drive to secure its identity but also from an (in)security pegged to India's partition history. Accordingly, 'cartographic anxieties', understood as 'physical preservation of [India's] borders [to be] metonymous with the state of the Union', justified postcolonial Indian political actors' discourses of (in)security (Muppidi, 1999: 121). Gender became integral to the Indian state's nationalist discourses to inscribe its boundaries, anxieties and (in)securities.

As Nehru himself had once argued, 'nothing adds to popular passions more than stories of abduction of women, and as long as these . . . women are not rescued, trouble will simmer and might blaze out' (Jenkins, 1974: 52). The connection implied in this statement between Indian women's 'abducted' bodies (as violated by abduction, enforced conversion and impermissible cohabitation) and securing India's nationalist boundaries vis-a-vis this abductor/Pakistan has thus fuelled the major debates surrounding India's (in)security. For example, in the aftermath of partition the Indian government was swamped with complaints by relatives of abducted women seeking to recover them either through government, military or voluntary efforts. In this act of recovery, carried out by the government through the Central Recovery Operation (1947–52), the 'material, symbolic, and political significance' of the abducted women was not lost either on the women themselves or on the leaders of the state (Menon and Bhasin, 1996: 5). Leaders of the Indian state, guided by certain masculinist notions – which I term a traditional/Indian masculinity – repeatedly used instances of rape and abduction of their 'innocent' Indian mothers and sisters to articulate India's nationalist identity (as a territorial space) vis-a-vis Pakistan. They expressed their concern and anger at the 'moral depravity' that characterized the 'shameful chapter' in the history of both countries. That, 'our [India's] innocent sisters' had been dishonoured was an issue that could not be looked upon with equanimity (Constituent Assembly of India, 1947: 122). The All India Congress Committee passed a Resolution (November 1947) that stated that:

The Congress views with pain, horror, and anxiety the tragedies of Calcutta, East Bengal, Bihar. . . . These new developments in communal strife . . . have involved . . . mass conversion, abduction, and violation of women and forcible marriages. . . . Women who have been abducted and forcibly married must be restored to their homes. (Constituent Assembly of India, 1947: 122)

Further, members of the Indian government also drew from cultural/religious icons (of Ram and Sita) to underscore their protectionist stance vis-a-vis Indian women. Said one member of the Indian parliament:

If there is any sore point or distressful fact to which we cannot be reconciled under any circumstances, it is the question of abduction and non-restoration of Hindu women. We all know our history . . . of what happened in the name of Shri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this. As descendants of Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive. (Constituent Assembly of India, 1949: 137)³

The issue of abduction was also analysed by the Indian leaders in terms of India/Pakistan's 'civilised/uncivilised' identities. This is because, as Anderson (1983) observes, passionate human loyalty reaches unprecedented heights when the nation imagined as a monolithic community faces an (Other) differentiated community. This sentiment was reflected in a Resolution passed by the All India Congress Committee in November 1949, which also drew upon Indian women to configure the Indian/Self and Pakistani/Other:

During these disorders, large numbers of women have been abducted . . . and there have been forcible conversions on a large scale. No civilised people can recognise such conversions and there is nothing more heinous than the abduction of women. Every effort must be made to restore women to their original homes. (Constituent Assembly of India, 1949: 138)

Interestingly, as Menon and Bhasin (1996) note, nowhere was the Government of India's condemnation of 'rape' anxious to take action against the abduction of Muslim women by Hindu men (instances of which were many) because here no offences had been committed against the Hindu community or religion.

Furthermore, at the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) Session held in December 1951, considerable dissatisfaction was expressed at the slow pace of recovery of Indian women from Pakistan. There was extreme disquiet at the mention of 2000 Indian women being held by government servants in Pakistan and at a ceasefire being agreed to by the Indian government with Pakistan over Kashmir without negotiating the return of Hindu women abducted there. Some members of the Indian parliament even went so far as to call for 'an open war to recover our sisters and daughters lying helpless in Pakistan' (Constituent Assembly of India, 1951: 138).

It is not my intention to suggest here that the predicament of these abducted women taken to the Pakistani side was not traumatic, nor that the Government of India's repatriation programme was not humanitarian in seeking to return these abducted women to their 'rightful' places. Yet, I also share Menon and Bhasin's (1996) view that one cannot argue that the lots of all these abducted women were uniformly grim and that all their abductors

on the Pakistani side were 'bestial'. Menon and Bhasin, as well as a Hindi movie from India *Pinjar* (*Skeleton*), provide examples of Indian women who despite being abducted by Muslim males to Pakistan were unwilling to return to India during the repatriation and resettlement programmes conducted by the Indian state because, although originally abducted, they had by marriage settled with their new families in Pakistan where they were accepted and respected. Such examples that contradict the 'negative' image of Pakistan were undocumented or ignored in India's statist accounts that sought to secure the nation and its women. In this context, one may argue that the Indian government's Recovery Programme enabled the government to draw upon the 'identification needs' of the Indian state (as caring, secular and modern, which the Other was not) to construct itself vis-a-vis Pakistan; articulate a (statist) vision of what constituted the 'legitimate' place of Indian women in their families, communities and the nation; and also use victimized images of women (while denying autonomy to their lived experiences) to define a threatening Pakistani nation. Moreover, the Other was identified at the most 'crucial' site of patriarchal control, i.e. over the issue of Indian/Hindu women's sexuality that by implication belonged to the paternal realm of the Indian state.

While some may argue that for India the urgency of securing both its borders and (women's) bodies is understandable – an urgency rooted in the making of a postcolonial nation – I argue that this had a political implication for women, since abducted women became symbolic of demarcating territories, crossing borders and articulating (in)securities associated with violating or consolidating the social, cultural and political boundaries of the Indian and Pakistani states.

Indeed, India's nationalist discourse sheds light on the fact that India's political nationalism was not homogeneous and despite its modernist-secular identity, was no less silent in drawing on women's bodies to articulate (in)security imaginaries vis-a-vis an Other/Pakistan. I am also cognizant of the fact that the Indian state's masculinity has also drawn from Hindu religious/cultural metaphors of Ram and Sita to justify India's boundaries vis-a-vis the other nation. I also accept that the Congress Party's nationalism was implicitly Hindu-centric – an aspect further evidenced in the contradictions that emerged in post-Nehru Indian prime ministers' theory and practice of secularism – which, some argue, created a 'space' for the emergence of the BJP. Yet I argue that the discursive interpellation of Indian nationalism with women's bodies to define the nation's identity, (in)security and the location of Pakistan in it constituted a political/nationalist (and not a communal/nationalist) activity for the Indian state's leaders under the Congress Party. This means that, reflective of the newly born Indian state's 'geopolitical' vision (that sought to conjure a strong political/territorial integrity), its leaders' perception and articulation of statist identity, the Other (Pakistan) and

India's (in)securities were reflective of certain 'cartographic' (boundary-making) anxieties that were rooted in the realist/political logic of international relations. The Indian state's identity and (in)securities were thus perceived in political terms; in other words, the politicization of gender served the political/nationalist project for the Indian state under the Congress Party.

In contrast, I describe in the following section how the boundary-making exercise of India and its definition of a Pakistani/Islamic danger assume a qualitatively different turn under the BJP. Gender and the nation's (in)securities also get rearticulated to support the BJP's ideological construct of India as a Hindu nation.

THE BJP AND REMAKING OF A HINDU INDIA

Several factors explain the resurgence of the BJP's cultural/religious nationalism and masculinity in contemporary India. It can be seen as a legacy of the colonial construction of racial/religious identities, which over the years has fanned the early and later Hindu nationalists' militancy in countering colonial projections of Hindu 'virility'⁴ as representing dilemmas of the secular Indian nation, which having become too modern, secular and global had lost its indigenous cultural space thereby necessitating its revival; and, that the pro-Hindu practices of Congress Party leaders for electoral purposes created the space for the resurgence of the BJP's nationalism. Without entering into these debates, I proceed in the remainder of this article to explore how the BJP, guided by *Hindutva* ideology, has linked the nation's internal and external anti-Muslim anxieties to the reconstruction of the nation through gender, and its (in)security imaginaries through cultural/religious perspectives.

Cultural Nationalism, the Rashtra, Gender and (In)Securities

Like the Hindu RSS leader, Savarkar (1971), the BJP has sought to make *Hindutva* its ideological mascot, which, rooted in the 'one nation, one people, one culture' concept, redefines India as a Hindu *rashtra* (nation). *Pitrabhoomi* (fatherland), *jati* (bloodline) and *sanskriti* (culture) were identified by the BJP as the three principles of *Hindutva*. According to the BJP, the first principle *pitrabhoomi* (fatherland), implies that to be a Hindu one should be born within the territorial boundaries of India; the second, *jati* (bloodline), claims that to be a Hindu one should establish lineage from Hindu parents (who are Hindu by birth and not converted); and the third, *sanskriti* (culture), implies that only those whose sacred land (sacred to their religion) lies within their fatherland (India)

actually have the moral basis for claiming citizenship of India (thereby privileging a cultural/religious rather than a territorial concept of citizenship in India) (Deshpande, 1995). The BJP also finds a linkage between *Hindutva*, the Hindu *rashtra* and a cultural/Hindu nationalism in India. A suggested underpinning of this cultural/Hindu nationalism in building a nationalist India becomes particularly visible in the BJP's 1998 election manifesto. In the introduction, which spelt out the 'vision, faith, and commitment' of the BJP, the manifesto declared that 'the present millennium began with the subjugation of our ancient land. Let a re-invigorated, proud, and prosperous India herald the next millennium' (BJP, 1998: 6). It ended with an 'appeal' to all 'patriotic Indians' to assist the BJP in the task of reconstructing a nationalist India representative of a composite culture (BJP, 1998: 80). However, the definition of this 'composite culture' underpinning Indian nationalism echoes rather a communal/Hindu-centric fervour. As expressed in the words of the then BJP president:

... despite the composite nature of Indian culture, Hinduism remains by far the most powerful and pervasive element in that culture. Those who lay great stress on the composite nature of Indian culture, minimise this basic fact. (BJP, 2000: 160)

Deemed essential by the BJP for the development of the nation, the concept of 'one nation, one people, one culture' makes Hinduism the common denominator of India's national identity, and forces one to use the terms *Hindutva*, Hinduism and the Hindu nation synonymously (Chowdhry, 2000).

The BJP's commitment to *Hindutva*, underpinned by the assumption that the land of the Christians and Muslims lay outside India, has enabled the party to utilize this aspect of *Hindutva* to depict the Hindu nation's enemies through religious lenses. Thus, a part of the BJP's nationalist agenda has been to construct the Indian Muslims as a locus of 'internal' threat to the nation and use Indian women (redefined by the BJP as Hindu women) to justify this threat. Following are some illustrations to suggest how in the party's nationalist discourse 'patriots' and 'traitors' are defined in terms of their religious affiliations and how gender remains integral to establishing this image: a BJP woman member Rithambara supports the Hindus in the 1992 Ram Janmbhoomi riots⁵ as a 'fight for the preservation of a civilisation, for Indianness, for national consciousness' (Kakar, 1996: 157); BJP spokeswoman Sushma Swaraj suspects an alleged treachery on the part of the Muslims against India because 'the former rooted for Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistan war' (Chowdhry, 2000: 117); and another informant of the BJP, projecting rape as a communal discourse, claims that 'the rape of Hindu women by Muslims becomes a strategy for the community to express their *jehadi* mentality, by inflicting such harms on a Hindu woman's right to

bodily honour and integrity' (Uma Suresht, BJP member [women's faction], interview, New Delhi, 2003).

Indeed, some might argue that if the BJP's nationalist discourse, like that of the Congress Party, also draws upon Hindu women's right to bodily 'honour and integrity', then what makes the BJP's nationalist discourse any different from the Congress Party? I argue here that the masculinist assumptions underpinning the BJP's nationalist discourse, which Banerjee (2005: 15) defines as an 'armed masculinity', assume a much more militant, aggressive and communal tone that enables the party to manipulate Hindu women's images in 'newer' ways to rearticulate the Hindu nation's 'cartographic' anxieties and (in)securities, and to justify a nuclear policy for the nation. I explain in the next section the concept of 'armed masculinity', and then relate it to gender and to the nuclear (in)securities of the BJP.

*Cultural (In)Securities, Gender, and Nuclearization of the Hindu
Rashtra*

Banerjee (2005: 14–15) contends that a particular interpretation of Hindu manhood, 'armed and communal', informs the BJP's nationalist/communalist agenda. In this model, the Hindu male, which is an ideological construct, is both a 'Hindu soldier and warrior monk'. The Hindu male as a 'Hindu soldier' incorporates ideas of Hindu spiritual strength and moral fortitude and as a 'warrior monk' represents certain virtues that enable him to oppose an enemy that is 'evil' and 'communal'. The Hindu male, representing a 'Hindu soldier and warrior monk', is 'defined by attributes of decisiveness, aggression, muscular strength, and a willingness to engage in battle [against an enemy defined along religious lines], and is opposed to notions of femininity that is defined by traits such as weakness, non-violence, compassion, and a willingness to compromise' (Banerjee, 2005: 14). When these two attributes of Hindu masculinity intersect, nationalist discourses of the Hindu Right rearticulate the nation's enemy, its women and political (in)securities vis-a-vis this enemy along cultural lines. I suggest that Islamic phobias perceived by the Hindu leaders vis-a-vis Indian Muslims (internally), as illustrated before, get discursively transposed to phobias that the nation perceives vis-a-vis Pakistan (externally). This is borne out in the following comment from a BJP leader:

In the history of all violence against our women either the Indian Muslims or their extended hand Pakistan has been the abductor community/country that has revealed a lustful behaviour of its males towards our women. If there is any reprehensible past which we cannot forget and forgive, it is the abduction and torture of Hindu women by Pakistan during partition. (Ram Kumar, BJP member, interview, New Delhi, 2002)

Likewise another BJP leader informant says:

Recall our history: Hindu women from the Indian side had been kidnapped to the other side of the border to the Northwest Frontiers and Rawalpindi, and were stripped and paraded in Kabul; they were sold at the *bazaars* (marketplaces); if India should remember this history of its sisters, then it should retaliate against Pakistan . . . and retaliate on the grounds of its sisters whom our country has a tradition of protecting. (Madan Gupta, BJP member, interview, New Delhi, 2003)

In perceiving their role as the ‘protectors’ of Hindu women, the BJP leaders also situate their notions of (a Hindu) India ‘as a *Ram Rajya* [land of the Hindu deity Ram], where the Sitas need to be protected against Pakistan’ (Rakhal Saha, BJP member, interview, New Delhi, 2004). While the same analogy of Indian women as Sitas was also used by the Congress Party leaders, in the case of the BJP the whole discourse of women’s protection from an ‘enemy’ is rearticulated vis-a-vis a cultural context (unlike the Congress Party, where the discourse was rooted in terms of a political context). This cultural tone is evidenced from the rest of Saha’s quote that ‘some of our misguided brothers [meaning Hindu men] also have committed similar crimes [of abduction] to a certain extent, but greater fault lies with the Pakistani community and its men’. I argue that this aspect of the BJP’s cultural/Hindu masculinity (in comparison with that deployed by the Congress Party) appears disturbing in two respects: first, in bringing to light a relation between Hinduism and the Indian state; and second, in using bodies of Hindu women in overtly communal ways in redefining India as a Hindu nation. In such communal discourses, the collectivity of Indian women is substituted by the term Hindu women. Additionally, ‘preparedness’ against this enemy, even if through a nuclear policy, becomes imperative. A BJP informant states:

India should do something commensurate with the gravity of the situation to retaliate. . . . One should understand that with the Islamic bomb in their [Pakistan’s] hand, India needs to be prepared. . . . Not only because it is the right thing to protect our *bharatmata* [motherland] and our sisters but also because it is our tradition. (Madan Gupta, BJP member, interview, New Delhi, 2003)

The aforementioned sentiments reveal the extent to which the BJP’s discourses on Hindu women as ‘bounded collectivities’ vis-a-vis Pakistan infuse the BJP’s nuclear policies. While much of this glorification of traditional representations of Hindu women is seen by the party as a necessary corrective so that a Hindu Golden Age can be brought back to contemporary India, a deeper analysis of these sentiments reveals that the depiction of Hindu women in their ‘traditionally threatened’ capacities vis-a-vis Pakistan/Islam constitutes an effort by the

party to justify a nuclear trajectory in Indo–Pakistan relations. In other words, what I argue here is that the BJP's concern for Hindu women (reflective of the Sitas of the Hindu *rashtra*) is ultimately tempered by the production of a communal/patriarchal visual-self, where the vulnerable nature of Hindu women thus portrayed and the specific protective norms envisaged for their protection, justify an anti-Pakistani (in)security imaginary for the nation.

It would also be interesting to note that the image of Hindu women envisaged as passive and traditional does not always remain so for the Hindu leaders. In a sharp disjuncture from the traditional/Indian masculinity of the Congress Party, which drew mainly upon women's imaginaries as domesticated/passive entities, the BJP's masculinity – armed and aggressive – also calls women to rise above their traditional roles and images. In this militant form, women become visible in the women's faction of the BJP (called the Mohila Morcha) and become powerful orators of the party's 'armed and communal' masculinity. The *Sadhvis* (women ideologues of the BJP) have erased outer markers of their womanhood – jewellery, make-up and feminine dress – and have become aggressive, powerful and masculinist to enter the realm of this nationalist discourse. Expressed in their 'chilling tones' is a jingoistic fervour by which they articulate a Pakistani nuclear danger that faces the Hindu nation and its women that even justifies a Hindu bomb. Evidenced is the tone of militancy in the following extract from a woman BJP ideologue, who interweaves religious overtones with militant images of Hindu goddesses like Durga and Kali to characterize India's Islamic adversary and to legitimize the (Hindu) bomb:

Look at the Hindu goddesses. They all bear weapons in their hands. Kali had a *brahmastra* [a weapon that goddess Kali carries]; Durga had a *chakra* [another weapon carried by goddess Durga]. We need our *ashtra* [nuclear weapon] too to fight the *rakshas* [demon] threatening our nation. (Kamla Neogi, BJP member, interview, West Bengal, 2002)

According to Menon (2003), the presence of a few virulently anti-Muslim women in the BJP does not imply that most of the Hindu women attracted to the party are also anti-Islamic or militant. While this point is well taken, one must also accept that the discursive 'reinvention' of Hindu women in their militant form to support the party's nationalist/communist and (in)security agenda represents the rise of a 'new' sexism in postcolonial Indian politics; one not so overtly manipulated by the Congress Party. While the militancy of these female ideologues is projected by the BJP as empowering women – by enabling them as sovereign embodiments of the state to speak before a strategic Islamic threat – I argue that the apparent spatial mobility allowed to these women becomes contested, since their token liberalization is ultimately rooted in

the party's communalist/patriarchal image.⁶ In this sense, the BJP's articulation of Indian–Pakistani identities, based on 'unfathomable' Hindu–Muslim differences, is not only reflective of British colonial constructions of Hindu–Muslim racial/religious identities, but appears more disturbing given that the party uses its *Hindutva*-dominated masculinity to utilize women to link the nation's (cultural) identity, enemy and (in)security perceptions. This rearticulation of India's (or the Hindu *rashtra*'s) identity, gender and (in)security (unlike the Congress Party's symbolic representations) represents a nationalist/communist project by the BJP and justifies a new trajectory of interstate nuclear politics.

CONCLUSION: COLONIAL LEGACIES, MODERNITY AND *HINDUTVA* IDEOLOGY – IMPLICATIONS FOR NATION, GENDER AND (IN)SECURITIES

As Samaddara (2000: 31) argues, 'we live in partitioned times . . . it is within our post-colonial being, in our agony, pessimism and strivings'. In this sense, the partition's history is an incomplete one. It is an event of the past and simultaneously a sign of the present. As the postcolonial Indian state continues to grapple with its task of nation-building, forms of cartographic anxieties have subsumed the state's identity (as a Self) and have enabled the state's leaders to use various configurations of sexist ideologies to manipulate women as 'markers' of hostile interstate identities, Islamic (in)securities and nuclear trajectories. In making this linkage between nationalist identity, (in)security and gender, I am cognizant that nationalist/fundamentalist regimes all over the world have essentialized gender to serve their nation-building projects. Postcolonial India is no exception in this, and both the Congress Party's traditional/Indian and the BJP's Hindu masculinity have drawn on gendered representational strategies to define India's nationalist imaginations and cartographic anxieties vis-a-vis the Pakistani state. Despite this commonality between the Congress Party's and the BJP's masculinity (whereby both have represented a gendered nationalism of the Indian state), this article has found it compelling to revisit the issues of nationalism, gender and national (in)securities by linking the continuation and transformation of these issues under two distinct historical phases of postcolonial Indian politics – under the Congress Party and the BJP.

To this extent, I argue that whether it was the secular-modernist identity of the Congress Party leaders (grounded in the logic of western Enlightenment) or the Hindu nationalist identity of the BJP (rooted in the aura of a Hindu Golden Age), both nationalist visions have selectively reappropriated colonialist modes of communal representations in post-colonial Indian politics. In this context, one may claim that despite the

Congress Party's apparent rootedness in a secular-modernity, the Indian state under the party was patriarchal (revealed through its discourses of repatriation); militarist (evidenced in its 'muscle-flexing' vis-a-vis Pakistan through such discourses); and also drew from the metaphors of Hindu culture/religion to define the identity and (in)securities of the Indian state. Despite this discursive interpellation of Indian nationalism with women's bodies – which was masculinist and militant – I argue that this interpellation constituted a political and not a communal/cultural activity of the Indian state under the Congress Party that was reflective of the newly born nation's 'cartographic' anxieties and political (in)securities.

In contrast, my article has drawn attention to a more problematic aspect underpinning the Indian state's masculinity – defined as a Hindu cultural masculinity – that has become particularly interesting in the country's post-1998 politics. This is because the symbolic evocation of Hindu masculinity, although in some ways a continuation of the Congress Party's traditional/Indian masculinity, in so far as both have represented a gendered nationalism of the Indian state, is more complex than the latter. Hindu masculinity, representing the ideological construct of a 'Hindu soldier and warrior monk', is more militant and communal and has interwoven religion, culture and gender to construct the Hindu *rashtra* and its Islamic (in)securities. In this context, the BJP replays more overtly the colonialist pursuits of 'mapping a (Hindu) empire' based on essentialization of Hindu-Muslim communal identities. While for the British colonial project such essentialization of Hindu-Muslim communal identities was a pragmatic step to make the world (Oriental India) knowable to the (western) empire, for the BJP (some 60 years later) such a replay of communalism may be argued to represent a form of *realpolitik* – one of state craft – that incorporates the cultural/religious biases of *Hindutva* to link nationalism, gender and Islamic (in)securities to rebuild a Hindu nation. This well reflects Ruggie's (1993: 144) claim that in international politics (re)configuring territorial boundaries also means that territories need to be constantly 'guarded, re-made, and re-secured' and it is the production of an Other that precisely maintains that process. To that extent, gender identity, namely a form of women's militant identity or a new sexism, has been utilized by the BJP to serve its nationalism/communalism and (in)securities.

NOTES

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1. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the Hindu-Right government of India that headed a national coalition from May 1998 through April 2004. It

- maintains ties with its parent organization the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS) and upholds the ideology of *Hindutva*. *Hindutva* is rooted in the concept of 'one nation, one people, and one culture' and depicts India as a Hindu nation (I later elaborate in the text the three elements of *Hindutva*).
2. I undertake this analysis with reference to the Congress Party and the BJP because these governmental phases represent two different visions of India's nationalist identities and (in)securities. Under the BJP, India tested three nuclear bombs in May 1998 – followed by those of Pakistan.
 3. In the Indian epic *Ramayana*, the story of Sita's abduction goes as follows: Sita (the princess-queen of Ayodhya and wife of Lord Ram), while in exile with her husband, was abducted by the demon-king Ravana. Following this abduction, a war ensued between Ram and Ravana, as a result of which Sita was rescued. What becomes glorified in this legend by the Hindu nationalists is the focus on Sita's chastity, to prove which (since imprisoned by another male) she had to go through fire (fire represents the Hindu god of purity).
 4. Banerjee (2005) explains how colonial practices rooted in an Anglo-Protestant interpretation of manhood have projected Indian males as 'cowardly'; showed preference for the 'martial' (Muslim) races over the 'non-martial' Bengalis/Hindus; and, unrealistically, depicted the Hindu-Muslim communities in colonial India as representing 'unfathomable' differences. Although this antagonistic depiction of Hindus and Muslims in some ways coincided with the indigenous Hindu view then prevalent in India of a staged deterioration of the Hindu civilization, this overlap should by no means ignore the politics of (communalist) identity construction espoused by the colonizers – which ironically has re-emerged in recent postcolonial India.
 5. The Ram Janmbhoomi-Babri mosque riots occurred in December 1992 in a town called Ayodhya (India). It was the result of a religious dispute centring on the Hindu fundamentalist claim that the Babri mosque built in 1528 for the Mughal King Babur was constructed on the site of a Hindu temple. Following communal instigation by the Hindu Right, thousands of Hindu fundamentalist agitators destroyed the mosque.
 6. Exploring such links between Hindu women's militant agency and (a Hindu) patriarchy, Sen (2007), in a recent study conducted in the slums of Bombay, explores how the Shiv Sena women's efforts at fomenting communal violence against their neighbouring Muslim communities may, in fact, represent a rational survival strategy of these women to protect themselves from the male violence that they encounter within their own families and communities. (The Shiv Sena is a Hindu nationalist party that has been very active in Indian national politics, especially in western India, since the 1990s.)

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