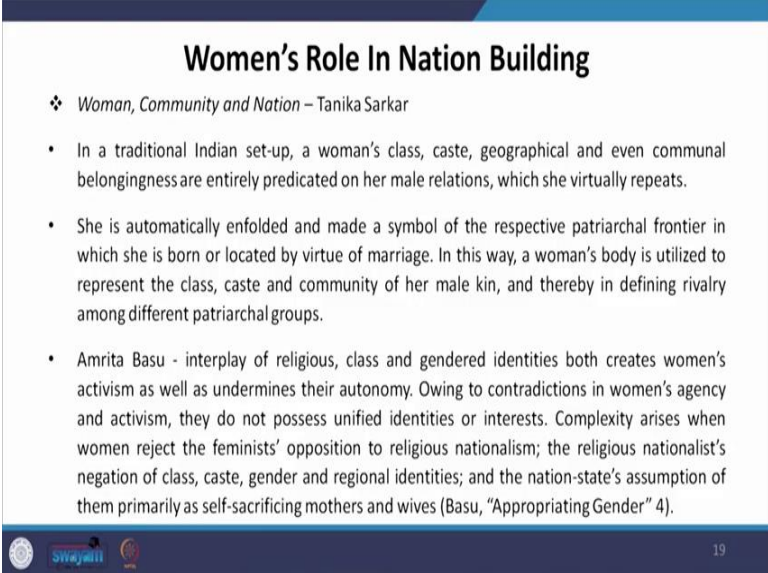


**Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

**Lecture - 20**  
**Womanhood and Motherhood - IV**

Good morning and welcome back to my course, Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema, and this is going to be a continuation of our previous discussion on Womanhood and Motherhood. In her essay, *Woman, Community and Nation*, Tanika Sarkar makes a very important observation. She notes that in a traditional Indian setup, regardless of the community that a woman belongs to, her class, caste, geographical and even communal belongings are entirely dependent on her male relations. (Refer Slide Time: 01:07)



**Women's Role In Nation Building**

❖ *Woman, Community and Nation* – Tanika Sarkar

- In a traditional Indian set-up, a woman's class, caste, geographical and even communal belongingness are entirely predicated on her male relations, which she virtually repeats.
- She is automatically enfolded and made a symbol of the respective patriarchal frontier in which she is born or located by virtue of marriage. In this way, a woman's body is utilized to represent the class, caste and community of her male kin, and thereby in defining rivalry among different patriarchal groups.
- Amrita Basu - interplay of religious, class and gendered identities both creates women's activism as well as undermines their autonomy. Owing to contradictions in women's agency and activism, they do not possess unified identities or interests. Complexity arises when women reject the feminists' opposition to religious nationalism; the religious nationalist's negation of class, caste, gender and regional identities; and the nation-state's assumption of them primarily as self-sacrificing mothers and wives (Basu, "Appropriating Gender" 4).

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These identities are automatically and by default transferred to her, and she virtually repeats this identity. Earlier I have spoken about the grand narrative and the personal narrative. [An] individual in a society shapes his or her existence through two dimensions of their identities - one is from without and then one from within, we could say.

Grand narrative is the collective story of a social or a communal belonging that is imposed on us through familial values, through community values and an individual is required to repeat them and that is a person being inscribed within the grand narrative; versus the personal belonging or the personal identity, where one gets to decide how

much they espouse the meaning of self that has been given to them, that is already pre-given.

The prefixed meaning of their self, by virtue of being born in a Sikh or a Muslim or a Hindu household; so, if one's personal identity completely overlaps [with the communal identity]... most of the cases it does not, it hardly does. It completely deviates... that is also a rarer instance. As it happens in most cases, [a person] is able to etch out a meaning of self in dialogue with as well as in opposition from the pre-given narrative [one belongs to].

In the case of women, I was trying to talk about the grand narrative and the personal narrative. In order to explain that in the case of women, the leeway has not been much. So, women by virtue of the fact that they have until a long time lived and represented the domicile space, (they) represent the purity of domesticity. And so, they are not required or expected to play around much with the grand narrative.

They are supposed to abide by the values that such a meta-narrative imposes on them, by virtue of their birth to a certain class, caste and so forth. They virtually repeat such meanings instead of deviating from them. So, a woman is automatically, like Tanika Sarkar would say, (she is automatically) enfolded and made a symbol of the respective patriarchal frontier in which she is born or in which she is located by virtue of marriage. She has to carry those meanings on herself, basically.

In this way, a woman's body is utilized in fact, by the larger scheme of things, which is patriarchal...the woman's body is utilized and engulfed...subsumed by the patriarchal machinations, to represent the class, caste and community of her male kin.

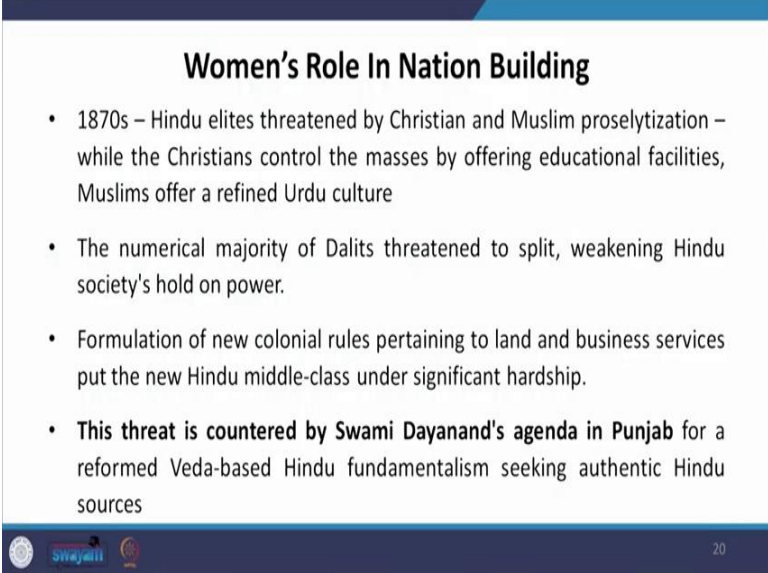
Her body becomes the symbol of the border and it defines the rivalry among different patriarchal groups. The woman becomes the line of demarcation. Similarly, Amrita Basu would say that the interplay of religious, class and gendered identities have different significances.

We see that they make as well as unmake a woman's autonomy owing to several interplay of these categories. So, owing to contradictions in women's agency and activism, they do not possess unified identities or interests, rights. Woman as a category

(we have already talked about this) cannot be homogenized outside her class, caste, communal belonging, her skin colour and so forth.

We see that complexity arises, when women reject the feminist's opposition to religious nationalism. For example, when women identify themselves more as a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh than a woman, that is when complexity arises. Similarly, the religious nationalist's negation of class, caste, gender and regional identities imperils one's right to difference, right to being a distinct identity. Such conflation also leads to complexity, as Basu says.

And finally, when the nation-state assumes the women primarily as self-sacrificing mothers and wives and nothing more or less than that. (Refer Slide Time: 07:52)



**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- 1870s – Hindu elites threatened by Christian and Muslim proselytization – while the Christians control the masses by offering educational facilities, Muslims offer a refined Urdu culture
- The numerical majority of Dalits threatened to split, weakening Hindu society's hold on power.
- Formulation of new colonial rules pertaining to land and business services put the new Hindu middle-class under significant hardship.
- **This threat is countered by Swami Dayanand's agenda in Punjab** for a reformed Veda-based Hindu fundamentalism seeking authentic Hindu sources

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1870s onward, the Hindu community is threatened. The Christians and the Muslims pose a serious threat to the Hindu communities and the process of proselytization is quite rampant. Proselytization is significantly present and it is something that the masses, especially the Dalit Hindus, take advantage of. They get converted either to Christianity or to Islam.

The Hindu elites are threatened by Christian and Islamic proselytization. So, the question of number arises. The number from the Hindu community is categorically, methodically depleted. While the Christians offer the masses educational facilities, the Muslims offer a refined Urdu culture. So, the numerical majority of the Dalits threaten to split.

And we have already talked about the Puna Pact and B. R. Ambedkar, so there is the question of the Hindu sect getting weakened and they are losing their grips on social power. So, weakening of Hindu society's hold on power is something that the Hindu elites start thinking of. So, consequently we see formulation of new colonial rules pertaining to land and business services that further puts the Hindu middle-class under significant hardship.

This threat is recognized by the Hindu elites and countered by figures, such as Swami Dayanand and his agenda in Punjab for a reformation of Hinduism. There were certain evils within the Hindu society - the caste system being one and then child marriage and an extremely austere life being imposed on the widows, a lot of hardship that the Hindu widow has to undergo (being another).

All these things made Hinduism as not a great option for people. It was not favouring the masses. So, figures like Swami Dayanand seek Veda-based reformation, Veda-based Hindu fundamentalism and try to find out authentic Hindu sources. (Refer Slide Time: 11:01)

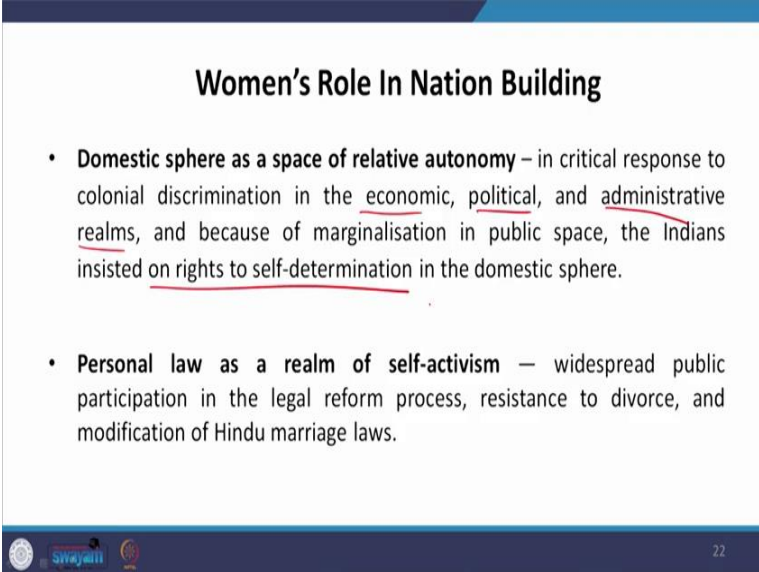
## Women's Role In Nation Building

- Since the 19th century in Bengal, Punjab, and Maharashtra, Hindu women have been a political resource for militant Hindu nationalism.
- Representing women as willing members of the community by reimagining them.
- Representing Hindus as persecuted, besieged, and naturally superior to non-Hindus gives the community a moral claim to political power.
- Hindu militant reformist programmes emerge, which blame the Muslims instead of Hindu caste hierarchies.

19th century on in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra - we see in these three places Hindu women becoming a political source for militant Hindu nationalism.

Women are imaged and imagined, they are in fact re-imagined as a willing member that serves the community for its betterment. So, representing the Hindus as persecuted, as besieged and at the same time naturally, morally superior to the non-Hindus give the community a kind of claim... these images of the jeopardized Hindu gives the community a moral claim to political power. Hindu militant reformist programs emerge that blame the Muslims instead of Hindu caste hierarchies.

The reformists actually blame the Muslims for the depletion in the number within the community. In the depletion of Hindus, other communities are (supposedly) taking away the Hindus, luring them with some favours - that is what the militant reformists have to say and that is what they want to arrest/stop. The domestic sphere becomes a space of relative autonomy. As a response to the colonial discrimination (Refer Slide Time: 12:48)



**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- **Domestic sphere as a space of relative autonomy** – in critical response to colonial discrimination in the economic, political, and administrative realms, and because of marginalisation in public space, the Indians insisted on rights to self-determination in the domestic sphere.
- **Personal law as a realm of self-activism** – widespread public participation in the legal reform process, resistance to divorce, and modification of Hindu marriage laws.

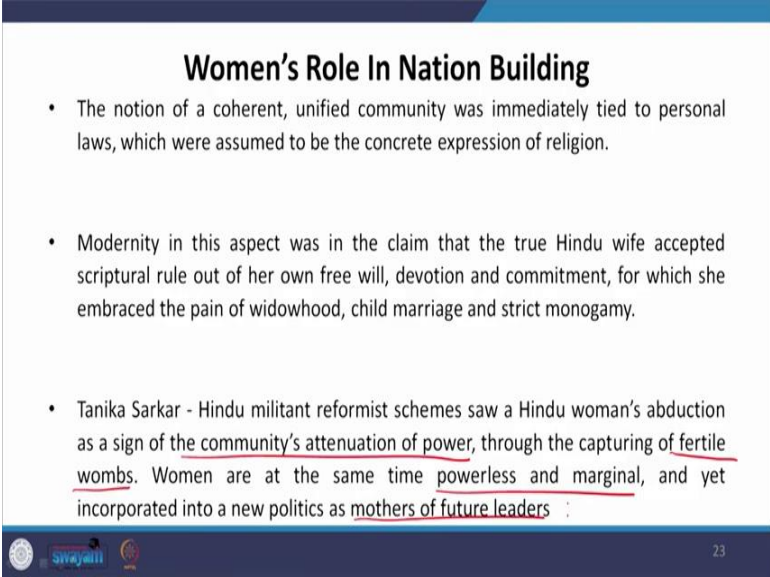
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interference in the economic arena, in the political arena and in the administrative realms (due to the marginalization that the Indian male faces in the public space), they insist and cling on to the rights to self-determination at the domestic level within the domicile. Personal law becomes a realm of self-activism.

And the onus and the target is suddenly the woman. There is a fixation around the image of the woman. There is a kind of an ideal that she needs to subscribe to and live up to.



There is a widespread public participation in the legal reform processes, and initially we see that (in) the Hindu society...like any other religion the rules are formulated (that are) deeply rooted in patriarchy.

There is a widespread resistance to divorce and to modification of Hindu marriage laws. The notion of a coherent, unified community would be immediately tied to one's personal laws. (Refer Slide Time: 14:17)



**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- The notion of a coherent, unified community was immediately tied to personal laws, which were assumed to be the concrete expression of religion.
- Modernity in this aspect was in the claim that the true Hindu wife accepted scriptural rule out of her own free will, devotion and commitment, for which she embraced the pain of widowhood, child marriage and strict monogamy.
- Tanika Sarkar - Hindu militant reformist schemes saw a Hindu woman's abduction as a sign of the community's attenuation of power, through the capturing of fertile wombs. Women are at the same time powerless and marginal, and yet incorporated into a new politics as mothers of future leaders :

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If the women deviate from these ideals that are expected of them, then a community cannot maintain its coherence, and so, the domicile (was considered) an expression of the spirit of purity, chastity that women embodied.

Domicile was woman and vice versa, and they were the expression of purity - something that was not violated by western values, a space where western values had not yet infringed, where the western values had not encroached yet. So, how does a Hindu revivalist look at modernity?

Modernity was the claim that the true Hindu wife accepted out of their own will, and they were devoted and committed towards these dictates. They were happily following the austerity prescribed to the Hindu widow and to the child-bride or the kinds of hardship that the child widow has to follow, embracing the concept of child marriage and strict monogamy.

These were prescriptions coming from above, as a way of reviving the society, and so the Hindus emerge in all their glory. Women had to bear the onus and the burden of such a glorified community. Tanika Sarkar says that Hindu militant reformist scheme saw a Hindu woman's abduction as a sign of the community's attenuation of power.

It was not an individual loss; it was the loss and humiliation of an entire community. So, the body does not belong to the person, but to the meta-narrative, to the larger group and through the capturing of fertile wombs...a woman is reduced to her womb. The woman becomes a complex figure who is at the same time powerless and marginal, and yet incorporated into new politics as mothers of future leaders.

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## Women's Role In Nation Building

- The Hindu woman's moral ascendancy made her a non-transformative pre-fixed identity, yet her passivity indicated a complete transformation for the community (Sarkar).
- The Congress's strategy for **universal adult suffrage** and social justice is focused on ensuring that **women are adequately represented in the democratic system.**

The Hindu woman's moral ascendancy makes her a prefixed identity. Like I said, women can hardly play around, much less tarnish or tamper the pre-fixed identity, almost a hallowed, sanctified identity that is for her to safeguard or emulate. Her passivity indicates a complete transformation of the community.

Through her passive service to the community, the Hindu community can emerge as glorious and powerful. The congress's strategy for universal adult suffrage and social justice focused on ensuring that women are adequately represented within the democratic system. So, we see women are being brought within the purview of the nationalist programs and the nationalist schema, but in a very controlled fashion. Their roles are already pre-defined. (Refer Slide Time: 18:42)

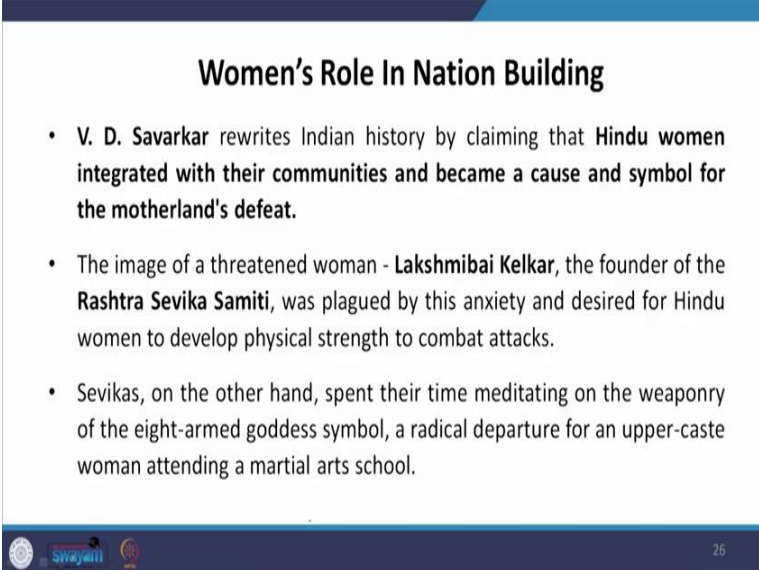
## Women's Role In Nation Building

- Nationalist sensitivity (originating with the elite) was linked to a sensitivity to subjection of women, lower castes, and lower social classes - a reaction to the nationalists' own submission to colonisers.
- Gandhian rhetoric – associating the socially dispossessed within the nationalist organization, which bestowed an iconic status on the peasant, the untouchable and the women as ideal patriotic subjects.
- The figure of the threatened woman became fundamental to these outbursts of aggression, and violence became a necessary condition for the Hindu male honour to be preserved.

Nationalist sensitivity, which originated with and among the elites, was linked to a sensitivity, to subjection of women of lower-castes and lower social classes. These subjects that traditionally belong to the fringes - the Dalits and the women - were suddenly in the process of making of the nation. So, Gandhian rhetoric - if we see, was associating the socially dispossessed within the nationalist organization, which bestowed an iconic status on the peasant, the Untouchable called as Harrijan by Gandhi, and the women who were projected as ideal patriotic subjects.

The figure of the threatened woman becomes fundamental, it almost justifies a kind of aggression. A woman that is forever threatened and exposed to violence by the opposite community justifies war and aggression and antipathy. So, violence becomes a necessary condition for the Hindu male, to preserve the honour of the community.

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**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- **V. D. Savarkar** rewrites Indian history by claiming that **Hindu women integrated with their communities and became a cause and symbol for the motherland's defeat.**
- The image of a threatened woman - **Lakshmibai Kelkar**, the founder of the **Rashtra Sevika Samiti**, was plagued by this anxiety and desired for Hindu women to develop physical strength to combat attacks.
- Sevikas, on the other hand, spent their time meditating on the weaponry of the eight-armed goddess symbol, a radical departure for an upper-caste woman attending a martial arts school.

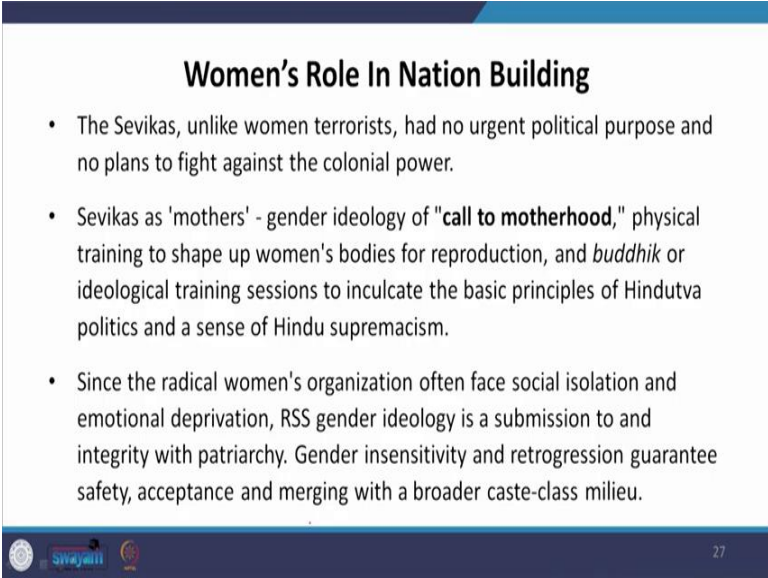
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In this regard V. D. Savarkar rewrites Indian history through claiming that Hindu women integrated with their communities and became a cause and symbol for the motherland's defeat. So, the sorrowful, pitiable figure of Bharat Mata is actually transcribed on to the body of each and every Hindu woman in other words, and vice versa.

So, we get a faction that is shaped by Lakshmibai Kelkar, the founder of Rashtra Sevika Samiti, after this image of the threatened woman. This anxiety is at the heart of Rashtra Sevika Samiti and thereby the desire for the Hindu woman to develop physical strength in order to combat attacks.

So, we see that Sevikas actually discipline themselves through... they are spending a lot of time meditating on the weapons of the eight-armed goddess symbol. And, so, it is a radical departure for an upper-caste woman who started attending a martial arts school. However, what is the irony is that the Sevikas would in no way fight against the colonial power.

Unlike the female terrorists that were closer to the heart of the anti-colonial operations, the Sevikas had no urgent political purpose. (Refer Slide Time: 21:52)



**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- The Sevikas, unlike women terrorists, had no urgent political purpose and no plans to fight against the colonial power.
- Sevikas as 'mothers' - gender ideology of "**call to motherhood**," physical training to shape up women's bodies for reproduction, and *buddhik* or ideological training sessions to inculcate the basic principles of Hindutva politics and a sense of Hindu supremacism.
- Since the radical women's organization often face social isolation and emotional deprivation, RSS gender ideology is a submission to and integrity with patriarchy. Gender insensitivity and retrogression guarantee safety, acceptance and merging with a broader caste-class milieu.

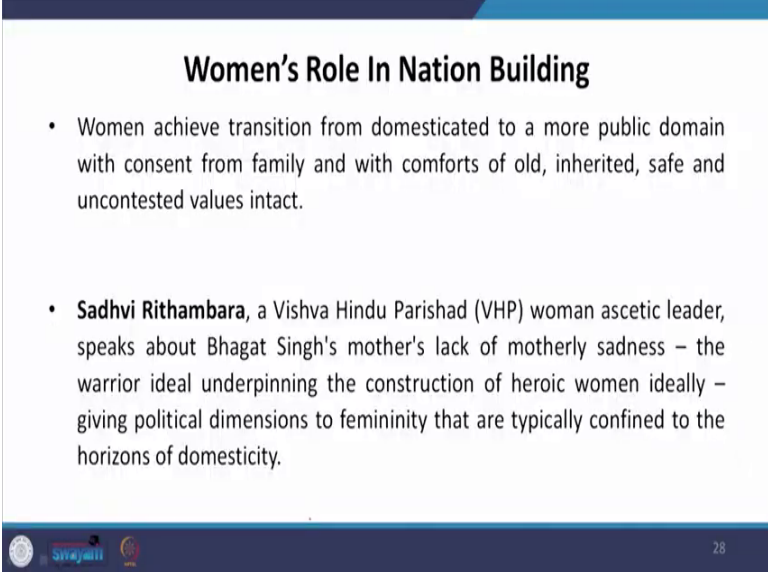
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They were seen as mothers and they were propagating the gender ideology of call to motherhood and physical training were offered to women, as a way of shaping up women's bodies, preparing them for the reproductive purpose and at the same time their buddhik or ideological training sessions in order to inculcate the basic principles of Hindutva politics and a sense of Hindu supremacism.

So, the radical women's organization would often face social isolation and emotional deprivation. So, RSS gender ideology was submission to an integrity with patriarchy. So, because women's factions have traditionally faced isolation, social isolation and emotional deprivation, lack of motivation from the mainstream society, we see that the Sevika Samiti is submitting to and willing to integrate with patriarchal values.

Gender insensitivity and retrogression is a way of guaranteeing them safety, acceptance and a greater legitimacy within the broader caste-class milieu. They are not essentially anti-patriarchal values, they actually propagate and second those values.

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**Women's Role In Nation Building**

- Women achieve transition from domesticated to a more public domain with consent from family and with comforts of old, inherited, safe and uncontested values intact.
- **Sadhvi Rithambara**, a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) woman ascetic leader, speaks about Bhagat Singh's mother's lack of motherly sadness – the warrior ideal underpinning the construction of heroic women ideally – giving political dimensions to femininity that are typically confined to the horizons of domesticity.

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So, women achieve transition from domesticated to a more public domain with consent from family and with comforts of old inherited and uncontested values intact.

So, they are actually carrying out the same traditional roles, but within a different space in the public domain. A figure like Sadhvi Rithambara, who is a member of Vishva

Hindu Parishad and an aesthetic leader, talks about Bhagat Singh's mother's lack of motherly sadness. So, the figure of the hero's mother that does not mourn her son's death.

She is the mother of the martyr and in relational terms, she is also a martyr. She has given a son to the nation and that is actually glorified. So underpinning the construction of the warrior ideal, underpinning the construction of heroic women, gives political dimensions to femininity.

The hero's mother is shaped after the virile qualities that form a part of, that are central to a masculinist discourse. So, women that do not... (like we say traditionally that men do not cry in public and they they can tolerate, they can endure more physical torture and so on).

The woman, the heroes' mother is built after certain masculinist ideas. The political dimensions of femininity are typically confined to the horizons of domesticity, however. On this note, I think I will stop here and I will meet you for another round of discussions.

Thank you.