The Context: Journal of English Studies
Volume 13, Issue 4, June 2026
ISSN: 2349-4948
www.thecontext.in

Research Article

The Construction of Motherhood in 19th-Century Bengal

Dr Lizy Thomas

Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Commerce, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India;
lizy.thomas-eng@msubaroda.ac.in

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26572/tc2613404

Accepted version first published on 5 June 2026

Abstract: This article discusses Bengali Motherhood. Bengal was the hub of the National Renaissance and played an important role in the social reform and struggle for Independence. Rabindranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Dwarkanath Tagore, Akshay Kumar Dutta, and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain were the leaders of the Bengal Renaissance. Bengali Hindus predominantly led the Bengal Renaissance. The socio-political awakening in arts, literature, science, and philosophy characterized the Bengal Renaissance. The movement questioned the existing customs and rituals in Indian society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a prominent Indian educator and social reformer of the 19th century. In this paper, the researcher focused on the image of India as a mother and how she should be freed from the shackles of the British. I have traced the origins of the Vande Mataram song and how the image was used to represent an imagined Mother India. In contrast, in reality, women still suffered in the spaces that were allotted and restricted to them. The present study discussed the autobiography of a Bengali woman, Rassundari Devi. The autobiography allows scope to study the concept of motherhood.

Keywords: Ideology of Motherhood, Nurture, Nurturing role, Mother India

ISSN 2349-4948

Introduction

Definitions and expectations of motherhood keep changing over time. The social, cultural, and religious factors define motherhood. Mothering identities are formed by society and cultural milieu. This article examines Bengali motherhood in light of the autobiographical texts I have chosen to analyze. I look at motherhood practices in the text. I analyze the text *"Amar Jiban" (1876) by Rasundari* Devi. She belonged to upper class/caste Bengali society. Rassundari wrote her first autobiography when she was fifty.

Bengal played an important role in the social reforms of the 19th century. English-educated Bengalis inspired by Western ideas and traditional Hindu values sought to reform women's education. Social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar championed the cause of widow remarriage. Another important figure in the Bengal Renaissance was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who contributed to social reform and the freedom struggle. He contributed to modernizing the education system. His novels depicted strong, complex female characters. His song 'Vande Mataram' idolises the country as a Goddess. I have discussed the autobiographies of two Bengali women, Rassundari Devi and Binodini Dasi, in detail. They are separated in time by fifty years, and their diverse backgrounds, the gher/baher concept, the space available to Rassundari Devi, and the space accessed by the well-known actress Binodini Dasi make the study interesting. The autobiographies allow scope to study the concept of motherhood. This chapter argues that women writing the self for public consumption is different from men's personal narrative and that women negotiating their self is a different enterprise. Following French feminist Helene Cixous, I argue that these women writers are caught in the process of writing themselves into history and creating a language of their own. Ecriture feminine is a French term meaning "feminine writing", often translated as women's writing. (Laugh of the Medusa essay by Helen Cixous originally written in French in 1975). A revised version was translated into English by Paulo Cohen and Keith Cohen in 1976. This theory, which unpacks the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text, is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the early 1970s through the work of theorists including Helene Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Ecriture feminine, as a theory, foregrounds the importance of language for the psychic understanding of the self. The theory draws on foundational work in psychoanalysis on how humans come to understand their social roles. In doing so, it explains how women, who may be positioned as 'other' within a masculine symbolic order, can reaffirm their understanding of the world by engaging with their own outsiderness. Helen Cixous first coined ecriture feminine in her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), where she asserts, "woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" because their sexual pleasures have been repressed and denied expression. The Laugh of the (Medusa 1975)

"Katha," which means story, narrative, and word, and "*Amar,*" which means "my," "mine," or "about myself", suggest an informal discourse which is both confession and assertion. A*tmakatha: My story and My Life as an actress, ed. & tr. by Rimli Bhattacharya (1998:25). (Atmakarit were favoured titles that signified autobiography in Bangla.)* Generally, women chose *katha* and the first-person possessive pronoun, *Amar*: Rassundari's *Amar Jiban* (My Life) and Binodini's titles *Amar Katha* (My Story) and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* (My Life as an Actress). An autobiography revolves around a writer's evolution. Rassundari's autobiography is written in the style of a bildungsroman in the sense that the autobiographical 'I' moves from being a child bride, illiterate and uneducated, to a lettered woman who scripts her own life and experience onto paper and receives accolades from some of the great writers of her time. Nineteenth-century India was not a favourable place for the girl child, as child marriages, female illiteracy, and female infanticide were rampant in society. It was a challenge to rise above the daily mundane of life and write an autobiography that had nothing much to narrate, rather than the ordinary things. Historical time is captured in the delineation of cyclical time in the narrative. Rassundari's writings were acceptable as she catered to the limits laid down by society: she was a homemaker, mother of twelve children, and on every page of her narration she asks for pardon and is apologetic, passive, and conforming to tradition. The colonial nationalists, writers like Jyotindrinath Tagore, the elder brother of Tagore, glorify her motherhood and comment in the preface that had he not read her, he would have missed the greatest woman author of his time (*Amar Jiban* Jyotindrinath Tagore 2013:161) from *Words to Win*: The Making of a (Modern Autobiography 2013)

Bhadralok newspapers and books regularly criticized women performers; other women who had greater access to the public sphere of the marketplace, the street, or festivals were excluded from the *bhadralok* home. The hierarchy of femininities between reputable and disreputable women was inscribed in the social spaces of the elite home and the street. In my reading of these texts, I show how the space of the *bhadralok* home was necessary for the creation of the bhadramahila's feminine elite identity. Side by side, the *bhadramahila* was defined in opposition to the public, professional woman who operated in the public sphere. Bhadralok means a gentleman or a well-mannered person in Bengali. It referred to the new class of gentlefolk who emerged during British rule in Bengal, in the eastern part of the [i]subcontinent. According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, the Bhadralok primarily, though not exclusively, belonged to "the three traditional upper castes of Bengal": the Brahmin and Baidya. The Bhadralok played a significant role in the cultural renaissance and social reform movement of 19th-century Bengal. These movements included taking up women's issues.

Construction of Woman as Mother in Nineteenth-Century Bengal

To give unity and strength to the youth of the nation, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote the song *Vande Mataram* (Hail Motherland) (Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay *Anandmath*, 1882), which became the slogan of the colonial times to free the mother from the shackles of the British. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, in his book Anandmath, urges Indians to love the motherland as their own mother. Bankim

ISSN 2349-4948

Chandra Chattopadhyay (Anandmath, 1882). He pleads for a patriotism that would free the motherland from the slavery of the British. The song he writes unites the Indian nation. The song evokes one's love for one's country personified as Mother India. The mother is equivalent to a Goddess. Hence, the Goddess should be worshipped by each citizen. The song Vande Mataram was meant to evoke worship and patriotism in every Indian's soul. The song was composed in 1875. It becomes the duty of the children to protect his/her mother. The masses eagerly adopted this ideology.

Translated by Aurobindo, the fourth stanza goes like this

Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct
Thou art heart, thou art soul,
For thou art the life in our body.
In the arm thou art might, O mother,
In the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,
It is thy image we raise in every temple
(https//www.sriaurobindoinstitute.org)

This gives insight into the formation of a Bengali motherhood. The nation is metaphorically imagined as a mother to be freed from British bondage; the nation's literal mothers are urged to produce non-disabled sons to do so. Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism, January 2002. This ideology befitted the agenda of the Bengali males. This was particularly pertinent in the case of Bengali men, as they were called effeminate and physically unfit to protect the motherland. The birth mothers lacked even basic education. The reality, hence, was quite different from what was propagated in ideological terms.

Tanika Sarkar, in her book *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, explores prevalent Hindu ideas and traditions in nineteenth-century Bengal. These traditions sought to mould women into the ideal Hindu woman. She suggests nation is an amalgamation of the ideal Hindu wife, ideal Hindu mother She says that North India today is shaped by the social and literary traditions, leading voices and popular cultures that shaped the Bengali culture (Tanika Sarkar *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* 2002) She analyses nationalist novels of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and scandal literature, gossips, women's memoirs and prevalent press of the colonial times for the subaltern ideas that have shaped contemporary India. She scrutinises the earlier Indian traditions of saintliness, sacrifice, heroism, and warfare that are now undermined by the militant and fundamentalist form of Hinduism. She has shown how the song written by Bankimchandra became the slogan of the anti-colonial social reformers to drive the British out of India. It was sung at all political gatherings. It kept the Indians united. The role of a woman in this construct was to produce non-disabled sons who would protect the mother. In this view of things, the role of daughters and mothers was to produce chivalrous sons, as explained in certain articles by Dayanand Saraswati on how and when to conceive.

This ideology was set in motion by the reformers. Women were getting married, looking after the home, and children. The idea of a strong masculine man can only be

ISSN 2349-4948

produced by training. This was not in the minds of women at all. What they wanted was to go to schools and colleges, to get educated, and to get jobs. They wanted to improve their social conditions by contributing to society. Nineteenth-century women's roles were restricted to the home.

The autobiography that I discuss in this chapter shows how this ideology operated and what was expected of a Bengali woman. She was expected to be a good mother, and she was. She was expected to be an intensive mother, which she was. The autobiographies that I have selected show that the role of a mother was to be an intensive caregiver. In this, they had no choice. Tanika Sarkar writes that in the beginning, nationalism was entwined with the question of gender. The "woman question" was unavoidable during the social reform stage, when Indian anti-colonial leaders were struggling for independence. However, the social reform movement did not bring any changes to women's lives.

Middle-class Bengali men were the leaders of this cultural rebellion. This obsession with motherhood allowed them to include Queen Victoria, the antithesis of all that nationalism stood for. The anti-colonial leaders strictly adhered to the gher/baher space for women. They had laid down boundaries where women could operate. Anyone who transgressed it was labelled as a rebel. They withdrew their support to Pandita Ramabai precisely for this reason. The reformers' leaders were Hindu reformists. Theirs was a traditional approach to their struggle for independence. The home was a sacred place for them, and they did not want interference from the British or the missionaries in their private lives. Queen Victoria was the exact opposite of their idea of womanhood. She was modern and educated, and she promoted girls' education. The Queen somehow did not fit into the idea and ideal of motherhood that they had envisioned. As the queen was included in the larger agenda of nationalism and motherhood, the illogical views within patriotism were easily understood. The three-faced mother figure, with two aspects of Bharat Mata and Victoria, reveals that the interface between colonial and indigenous notions was incorporated into middle-class self-perception. (Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Women

Jashodra Bagchi's *Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal* traces the investiture of motherhood in Bengal, rooted in popular religious practice. Here, three constructions of motherhood are dealt with. Bagchi writes that male anxiety was satisfied by glorifying the nation as a mother, chaste and in need of protection from the ref. This freedom was granted to the sons of the nation. It was not for the daughters—this empowered males in ideology. Bagchi dismisses loyalists' songs sung to mother Victoria as it is not marked by the interlocking crisis of power and resistance that marks the nationalist use of the icon Tanika Sarkar in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*: *Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* explains the evolution of the iconography of the Bharat Mata in terms of a shift which occurred when literature altered the language addressed to this remote foreign mother to mother India, a mother who was close, more giving and closer to the Indian childThe discourse on motherhood is very much centered around mother Victoria during the initial stage of Nationalist struggle against the British. (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*)

In the framing of the nationalist agenda, the Hindu mela is an example (Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation). It occupied a significant space in middle-class life in Bengal. The Tagores patronized it. The Tagores organised the Hindu mela to bring together the Hindus of the society and to give them opportunities to start small-scale industries, crafts, and national music. It was started in April 1867, and Nabgopal Mitra was its organiser. The Hindu mela was translated into English as 'The National gathering,' but in reality, it was a gathering for Hindus. (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*) This mela strove to give Hindus a new identity. It was gravely disturbed by the deteriorating mental and physical strength of the Hindu male. Ideas were projected as to what constituted a true Indian, a true Bengali, a true Indian, and an Aryan. It was meant to strengthen the Hindu male's confidence, which had been shattered during the colonial regime. Bengali youth's lack of physical strength was a grave concern, and heroic Hindu figures of the past were invoked to fill the youth with vigour and strength. This incessant emphasis on the need for heroism and physical courage thus enabled a masking of the colonially constructed anxiety of the weak and effete Bengali male (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*). This compensatory imaging of the valiant Hindu was a significant correlate of the image of the Bharat Mata, the brave and heroic mother of fearless sons. One of the earliest works of literature to address this nationalist image was Kiran Chandra Bandyopadhyay's play, Bharat Mata. First performed on 15 February 1873 at the Exhibition Grounds in Nainur and later at Calcutta's National Theatre, it had a great impact, as described by Bipin Chandra Pal in his reminiscences of the early phase of nationalism. Part of this play was performed at that year's Hindu Mela.

"The different versions of the title - Bharat Matar Bilap (The Lament of Mother India) and Bharat Bilap (India's Lament). The play opens with the figure of Bharat Lakshmi, the goddess of India's fortune, being addressed in a song composed for the Hindu. However, within the context of early nationalism, the relationship between the Bharat Mata image and the lived experiences of women is complexly layered. While this glorious motherhood with its latent heroism served to amend the assailed male image, it also signalled a specific pedagogy for women, for with the mothers-to-be rested the fate of the nation of the future. In practical terms, the rise of infant deaths in Bengal called for the education of girls as future mothers. However, within this was also implanted a concern for the moral welfare of the offspring. In this way, the middle-class articulators of this discourse expressed their anxiety about the heirs who would inherit what they hoped to achieve. The heroic pedagogy of mothering is sometimes reiterated by women writers of the period who seized upon it as a position of strength. The nineteenth-century Bengali preoccupation with heroism, however, was largely a male obsession, as women's writings on this theme around this period are few. (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*)

The ideals of motherhood were supposed to be self-sacrificing, involving intensive caregiving and nurturing. The demands made on women were unrealistic. In reality, things were very different. Many child brides died giving birth, and infant mortality was high because of a lack of medical facilities. This is one of the reasons why studying women 's autobiographies is so important. Tanika Sarkar writes about the ideals of a Hindu nation and a Hindu wife. The home was sacred and was well protected

ISSN 2349-4948

from outsiders. According to Mrinalini Sinha, "outsiders" here refers to white males. The Effeminate Bengali male, as he was called, protected the home from foreign pollution. The home was the place where he could lay down his own rules. Hence, the private and the public domains were the two dichotomies in which the nation's war against the British was fought.

In nineteenth-century Bengal, women rarely received help from their male partners in rearing children. Society was patriarchal, and women were supposed to handle everything at home. The reality of actual motherhood as an experience was totally different. Society was patriarchal, and women were supposed to handle everything at home. The ander/baher dichotomy operated strictly within families. All the outside work was supposed to be done by the males. They had to work and earn for the family. The women were the centre of the home. She was supposed to be cultured, schooled at home to some degree, and was expected to carry out all the household chores. Women were supposed to be strong, knowledgeable, kind, lovable, and able to nurture children. Mothering came naturally to them. The non-mothers or women who were barren or who were not able to give birth were considered a curse. A woman's prime duty was to bear and rear children. Women who were not able to bear children spent lots of money on various methods to bear a child. The woman who was not able to give birth to a child or a woman who was not a mother to a son was not treated well by society. Mothers who gave birth to daughters were also not treated well. It was said that sons carry the lineage forward, but isn't it the mother's daughters who give birth and share in the continuity of the lineage? Thus, women's roles are underrepresented in society.

The Bhadramahila was supposed to be knowledgeable, a good wife, and a good mother who would nurture her kids as was required by the state. The Bhadramahila looked after the family; she was well-versed in cooking and sewing, and she ran the home on a limited income. She also saved from the little that was given to her for the monthly expenditure of running the home. She would also buy from her own savings, sometimes even contribute her gold jewelry to buy land and property. They were compared to the Navin new bhadramahilas who attended schools and colleges but were inept at household chores. They did not know how to cook or arrange household things. A plea was made to incorporate cooking into the curriculum. Because girls rarely have time to acquire these skills. They went to school in the morning, came home for lunch, and then, after a nap and doing their homework, there was hardly any time left to learn cooking skills. (Newspapers)

Many books on housekeeping and cooking were published during the 19th century. Cookery books were available for one anna. All types of cookbooks were available, and the homemaker was supposed to hone cooking skills so that money could be saved because if family members went out to eateries, it would be double the expense. Indian homes were compared to British bungalows, and there was a general complaint that they lacked hygiene and cleanliness. Bathing towels were strewn here and there; there was no proper place allotted for keeping things. A lot more improvement was needed in keeping homes clean. Though the ladies were quite busy

ISSN 2349-4948

with housework and swept the houses twice, the walls still had beetle and pan marks. There was a lack of aesthetic appeal in the design of modern homes. Modern homes had too much furniture. The good housewife knew how to cook, managed the household on her husband's limited income, knew how to sew and knit, and did all types of work around the house. (Magazines, newspapers)

It was considered vital to "educate" women to be good housewives and mothers. Domestic manuals and women's journals sought to prescribe and circumscribe the women's domain. There was a long and bitterly fought debate on the proper content of women's education. Generally, they were allocated in terms of the desired and the appropriate social role ascribed to women. Not everyone agreed that midwifery, child rearing, hygiene and health, home, medicine, and adjuncts relevant to training good homemakers and mothers should supplant geography and grammar taught in schools. However, there was a consensus that the primary, if not the only, justification of women's education was to prevent the social ills inflicted by an ignorant housewife and mother. As a corollary, education should not be oriented towards imparting skills that would enable women to earn a living. Some even felt that formal education was inappropriate for women since colonial education, with its westernizing influence, would corrupt the pure tradition of true womanhood. Moreover, it would divert women from fulfilling their primary roles as wives and mothers. The perception of the colonial period as a moral crisis lent piquancy to the construction of the new ideology of domesticity. The ignorant and neglectful housewife became a variant of the immoral woman who held the stage in the drama of moral doom and chaos, the Kaliyuga. However, not only ignorant and uneducated women but also wrongly educated or overeducated women were perceived as a threat. By the late nineteenth century in Bengal, as elsewhere, the stereotype of the 'new' educated woman, disdainful of domestic skills and inept at housework, was contrasted with an idealized portrait of the woman of the past, the perfect housewife. If education, nationalism, and ideal housewife, helpmates were contentious issues in Bengal, the ideal mother was an equally challenging role. This idealization found support in the notion that children were crucial to nation-building. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, concerns about infant life as a future national resource had sometimes been articulated within the social reform debates, concentrating on social evils such as child marriage, the absence of widow remarriage, superstitions, and rituals surrounding childbirth. Even as the reformers lost ground to the preservers of tradition, the problems of infant and maternal mortality were appropriated within 'nationalist' discourse in different ways. The task of rearing healthy citizens fit for nation-building lay with individual mothers. However, it was too vital a project to be left to women unaided. If the ignorant and careless housewife was a threat to social order, the neglectful and indifferent mother spelt national disaster. As domestic manuals sought to train a new kind of housewife with a range of new skills, the new mother had to be inculcated with a self- conscious responsibility for the nation's future. Along with the sugrihini (good housewife), the Sumata (good mother) faced a barrage of advice.

Bhadralok newspapers and other women who had greater access to the public sphere of the marketplace, the street, or festivals were excluded from Bhadralok homes.

ISSN 2349-4948

The hierarchy of femininities between reputable and disreputable women was inscribed in the social spaces of the elite home and street. The space of the *bhadralok* home was necessary for the creation of the bhadramahila's feminine elite identity. The home was built on exclusions on types of femininity damaging to Indian elite respectability-those deemed sexually promiscuous and corrupting. The bhadralok construction of this space of the elite Indian home was centered on a claim to social territory within a British colony, a bhadralok space that co-opted British virtues to fend off British racist accusations of cultural inferiority. Partha Chatterjee has argued that with the growth of British education and new employment opportunities for men, the public-private dichotomy grew into an opposition between the world and the home. Under the colonial logic, instead of being a sanctuary, the home began to represent the dead weight of traditions that were scorned as bigoted or barbaric. (*The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*)According to Chatterjee, cultural identity was divided into the spiritual and the material world. Anti-colonial nationalism created its own space by operating along two dichotomies: the material and the spiritual (*The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*). The material world was defined by power in the outside domain, and the spiritual was the inner domain, which the nationalists very sacredly guarded. Nationalists began to define the nature through the binary of ghar/baher, inside/outside, male/female, and powerful/weak. With the rise of anti-colonial sentiment, the home came to be recognized as a pure spiritual domain untouched by colonial power—a newly constructed role for women that aligned with nationalist thinkers' ideas. Thus, in this scheme, women's domain was the home and their role was to be a mother, wife and daughter. Any woman who imitated Western women was parodied as the memsahib, characterized as lazy, uninterested in household chores, and interested in luxury. This model of a stereotyped woman mimicking the West was a counter to the ideal 'New woman' and was parodied in all forms of art.

Rassundari Devi

Even while a 'liberal' section of the *bhadralok* pushed for legal sanction from the colonial state to free women and invested these interventions with the logic of enlightenment, the more conservative among the Bengali Hindu middle class resisted these reforms because they were antitraditional and therefore anti-national. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the impetus for reform had slowed in the face of nationalist defence of tradition (Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation). The unprecedented presence of women within these debates invested gender with multiple layers of meaning, which were interpreted at different historical moments through the lens of class, race, and community.

From the beginning, it had been clear that the reforms were meant for upper-class Hindu women, while the lower-caste artisans and peasants were on the fringes of the debate, assumed to be participants in upholding the Hindu moral order. The dominant ideology emerging from these debates regarded women as the embodiment of that moral order. The good woman, the chaste married wife and mother, empowered by a spiritual strength, became the iconic representation of the nation. The transformation of women from an index of social malady in the colonial-missionary-

reformist discourse to the symbol of 'national' greatness pivoted around the mythical image of an empowered woman *(Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*). The 'modern' or 'emancipated' woman was designated corrupt and impure, accused of collusion with the values of an alien Western ruler. In contrast, the ethnicised image of the pure Hindu woman, the sati-Lakshmi, embodying the virtues of chastity, nurture, and prosperity, became the symbol of the health of the community and the nation. From serving as metaphors of actual social evil, women came to signify social and national superiority. This iconic stature rendered irrelevant any criticism of or enquiry into their actual social conditions. 'Tradition' severed from social reality, iconography of the heroic in mother-goddess. The deified woman, the mother, attained her greatest heights as the Motherland. and its fulfilment in an emotional and aesthetic notion.

The symbolisation of the nation as the mother placed responsibility for it on women's shoulders. Women became the site on which the nation's war was fought between the anti- colonial reformists and the colonial bureaucracy. She was the prisoner who was to be freed by her morally inspired children. She became the central figure of the home where her sons, who were the colonised intelligentsia, could take refuge. The home and the hearth had to be guarded and protected, as they became the sanctuary in this cleverly worked-out ideology, which suited the reformists. The home, the 'griha,' was a private space where the colonised subject retreated from the masters. Neither collaborations nor protests would work in the griha, the hearth and sanctuary. The protector was the woman of the hearth. She held together the sacredness and the traditional values of the home and upheld the moral subject race. This was the nationalist's resistance to the subordination and inferiority complex that the white male ruler made him feel at the workplace. To the civilising scrutiny of the colonial missionaries and bureaucrats and the transformative will of "modernity". The colonisers found it difficult to grasp this colonial discourse of the home and recognised that, without understanding it, their mission would be incomplete. "To facilitate colonial examination and control of the 'domestic', the life of the 'family' and the life of the 'nation' were strung together in the language of the colonial state, a language that colonialism inherited. Thus, the 'nationalist' debates, like the earlier reformist ones, subjected the 'domestic' to redefinitions according to invented categories of 'tradition'. In envisioning the family as the unit of the nation and the home as the cradle of its citizenry, nationalist discourse set up a series of connected binary operations between the 'home and the world', the nursery and the nation, the private and the public. The demarcation of the 'domestic as the arena of nationalist resistance to colonial intervention." *(Hindu Wife Hindu Nation*)

Many challenge it. The mother's subjective experience is ignored. She is treated as an object. She is expected to be a supermom managing her career, as efficient in the boardroom and equally efficient at home, looking after her home-grown tomatoes, she works both at home and in the office. These cultural icons overwhelm the mother. She is labelled as the good mother, the bad mother, even when she does not have the resources. She is put under a lot of intrapsychic conflict; her voice and her subjective experiences are lost in the ideological discourse.

ISSN 2349-4948

Rassundari's whole day is spent in the kitchen cooking for the entire joint family. She is married to a rich zamindar family, but servants were not allowed to touch anything in the kitchen. Rassundari nurtured her eleven children almost single-handedly. In that, she was an intensive mother. When she overhears at the natal home that she is to be given away, she becomes very terrified. She runs home to her mother and asks her why she is to be given away. Her mother tells her not to worry and that all girls are given away in marriage. She should, when in doubt, always pray to her God Daya Madhav (*Amar Jiban* Rassundari Devi,1876). This Rassundari does throughout her life. She says that had her God not protected her and kept her healthy and safe, she would never have been able to bring up her eleven children single-handedly. She was also lucky as her mother-in-law was a kind-hearted woman and looked after her lovingly. (*Amar Jiban* Rassundari Devi, 1876).

Works Cited

Devi, Rassundari. *Amar Jiban, My Life.* Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1876

Sarkar, Tanika. *Words to Win: The Making* of Amar Jiban: A Modern Autobiography, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999

Cohen Keith et al Cixous *Helene Laugh of the Medusa* trans Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen Signs, Vol-1 1976 875-893 (p224-230)

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press,2007.

Sangari, Kumkum, and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kalif for Women, 1989 (p 152 Sumanta Bannerjee)

Sri Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghosh. *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee Anandmath.* Trans. Basumati Sahitya Mandir, 1910, P. 35-37

Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*: *Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism.* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

[i] According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, the Bhadralok primarily, though not exclusively, belonged to "the three traditional upper castes of Bengal", the Brahmin, Baidya and Kayastha. Wealth, English Education, and high status in administrative service were the factors that led to the rise of this "new aristocracy", and since a large number of the three upper castes possessed administrative skills and economic advantages, they formed the majority of the Bhadralok in 19th-century Bengal. The Bhadralok was never a closed status group. In practice, it was an open social group. A majority of the Brahmins and Kayasthas, being poor and illiterate, were not regarded as Bhadralok. By the late 19th century, many of the middle-ranking peasant and trading castes, who had gained affluence, had entered the ranks of Bhadralok. The term bhadramahila refers to women of the Bhadralok, which is a Bengali term for the educated, cultured and respectable middle and upper classes