may not have been a radicalizing force, but they did provide a valuable arena in which women writers and readers could explore ways of negotiating contradictory desires, and enjoy their fictional resolution.

Diana Holmes

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En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives

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In *Engendering India*, Sangeeta Ray examines the multiple and shifting articulations of gender in British colonial, Indian national, and postcolonial discourses. Concentrating on the period between the 1857 Mutiny and the subcontinental partition in 1947, she traces the construction of the 'authentic woman' of India in four separate chapters through texts that she finds equally preoccupied with the production of a 'national space called 'India'.' Most of the writers she examines (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Anita Desai and Bapsi Sidhwa) have already received much attention in critical analysis. Yet Ray's refreshing perspectives that analyze the nationalist and imperialist nexus of the domestic and the political in the works of these authors further reinforce their centrality to her own argument, which is that 'after 1857 the figure of the Hindu woman begins to function as a crucial semiotic site in and around which the discourses of imperialism, nationalism, and Indian postcolonialism, and feminism are complexly inscribed.' (p.8). She devotes the first chapter to Bankim Chandra's novels *Anandamath* (1882) and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884) to illustrate the production of a Hindu identity that draws on a glorious (imagined) Hindu past in the initial moments of the empire's consolidation in India, and, in so doing, builds itself around a discourse that simultaneously celebrates and limits the power of women. Chapter 2 examines texts by non-Indian writers such as Harriet Martineau, Meadow Taylor and Flora Annie Steele to show how, in their fictions about the 1857 Mutiny, these writers recast India as Hindu and feminine and deploy this rhetoric to impose a false unity on an otherwise diverse nation. She devotes Chapters 3 and 4 to the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the 1947 subcontinental division to examine the interplay of women and nationalism in male discourse through Tagore's writings, and to render visible, through an analysis of Desai and Sidhwa's novels, female critiques of the rather problematic male nationalist agenda.

Since Ray's focus throughout the book is largely political, her historical grounding of the texts is very productive and enables her to avoid reading the literary texts in the void. She simultaneously places these texts within a sound theoretical

framework that is attentive to the 'differentially positioned' and contradictory imperialist and nationalist narratives that engage in the inter-related constructions of a singular Hindu India and a fixed female Hindu identity. Her theoretical method thus enables her to expose the contradictions fraught in nationalist discourse and the limits of nationalist and imperialist liberalism when it comes to the question of Indian women. At the same time, what makes her reading of the texts particularly compelling is that it allows her readers to see the ways in which women exercised agency in making their own entry into the public domain of nationalist politics.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the book is that while locating her analysis in the specific context of India, Ray makes her argument relevant to the present era of global relations and migration. Hence, all the chapters build towards the epilogue, where she considers the implications of the role that gender plays in defining the nation state in the present. Moving beyond literary texts, Ray examines, in the epilogue, contemporary popular culture, newspaper advertisements and other everyday fragments, to evaluate the ways in which multiculturalist and multinational economies continue to engender the Indian nation in gendered terms, reproducing and repackaging it through the age-old rhetoric of 'mother India' for Western and diasporic consumption. As she strongly claims in the epilogue, Ray's own goal in undertaking this study is to interrupt such representations:

My analysis...returns us to the issue of gendering the nation not only by nationalists and British colonialists but also by multinational corporations seeking to promote the putative borderless economy of the future. And such en-genderings continue to persist even as in the academy and elsewhere the demise of the category of the nation-state is celebrated, rather prematurely I would argue, in the wake of transnational capital and the global flows of culture and peoples. (Ray, 2000: 152)

For this reason, she positions her work as personal, locating herself as an Indian academic in the United States with a responsibility to critique the ahistorical nature of scholarly and popular representations of Indian women, for whom such configurations constitute everyday live experience. Such linkages between past constructions of the nation as gendered and its contemporary manifestations in Hindu nationalist discourse make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the continual recasting of Indian women through the lens of a particular Hindu nationalism that sanctions and upholds regressive codes of feminine behavior through the evocation of a culturalist vocabulary. Undoubtedly, Ray's book is a very important contribution to studies on gender and colonialism, South Asian and British literatures, and diasporic discourses. As well, it is a much-needed intervention in contemporary Hindu nationalist discourse on gender and sexuality.

Nandi Bhatia

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