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The Closet in the Colony:
British Colonialism, Indian Nationalism and (Re)Definitions of Gender
and Sexuality

by

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ABSTRACT

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My thesis challenges the influential theory that the formation of a nation is conditional on its ability to marshal normative sexual/gendered citizens: I argue that nation-formation (and the end of the British rule) in India was contingent to a large degree upon mobilizing and resignifying non-normative sexual/gender subjectivity.

I begin by suggesting that accusations of “going native” and of having interracial homoerotic intimacies were related concerns, both seen as perversions of upright British masculinity. Further, I suggest that the anxiety about racial purity and miscegenation that fed into the heterosexual narrative of rape is also attendant upon the unease surrounding same-sex intimacy between an English and a native male. With this critical lens in mind, I provide a new reading of two canonical texts, A Passage to India and Burmese Days.

Next, I navigate the link between Indian independence and queerness, rereading key colonial moments (like the incorporation of the anti-sodomy statute in the Indian penal code, the bowdlerization of native literature, the Hindu reformist movement), texts (such as Anandamath and Gora) and personages (M. K. Gandhi) within this new interpretive schema. I seek to fill a critical interstice in the work on Gandhi: there is, I suggest, an enormous potential for a new queer perspective in understanding Gandhi, and—because his politics and life informed each other—also Gandhian nationalism.
In arguing the importance of homoerotic narratives as sites where powerful directing influences on native social reform movements, political mobilizations, and nationalist ideologies are located, I also emphasize the need to understand India’s colonial history in order to fully comprehend literary, political, and religious discourses in contemporary India. I thus demonstrate how negotiations staged around definitions of gender and sexuality continue to inform current socio-political practices (such as the rise of masculine Hindu nationalism) and literary (con)texts (I examine *Nine Hours to Rama* and *Midnight’s Children*) in India.
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INTRODUCTION

The Closet in the Colony: British Colonialism, Indian Nationalism and (Re)Definitions of Gender and Sexuality

In a critically important scene from the controversial 1998 film Fire, one of the two female protagonists of the film, Sita, tells her sister-in-law Radha, with whom she develops an emotional and sexual intimacy following their husbands' oppression and rejection of them, that "there is no word in our language to say what we are to each other." The irony of her complaint, Ruth Vanita points out in the introduction to her anthology Queering India, is that though the film is in English, the reference to "our language" in the conversation of the two Hindu wives is to Hindi, and Sita, says Vanita, is mistaken, because there are several names in the Hindi language to designate lesbianism in particular, and homosexuality in general. Vanita's argument rejects the implication of the Canadian-Indian writer and director of the film, Deepa Mehta, that homosexuality is not part of the Indian past; quite on the contrary, as Vanita argues also in a previous anthology, homosexuality has had a rich and unreviled existence in India.

In a contrary response to the film, the Hindu right in India called for a ban of Fire because they claimed that its depiction of homosexuality was corruptive to the Hindu nation where this western practice was not even known, leave alone performed. The controversy, then, soon metamorphosed into discussions of nationalism: some critics claimed that homosexuality was a colonial import, and that India could become a fully independent nation only if it rejected all the noxious vestiges of colonialism, including homosexuality; others labeled the director one of "Macaulay's Children" who was
“English in tastes and morals, though brown in skin color”; yet others declared Fire an attack on patriarchy both in its presentation of same-sex desire between women and because it depicts all men as unflatteringly effeminized: one of the two aforementioned husbands meekly accepts racial abuse from the father of the Chinese woman who uses him sexually, the other is Gandhian in his celibacy, impotently unwilling/unable to provide sexual satisfaction to his wife.¹

I am interested in this dispute because it represents a moment in the present where a discussion of homosexuality is couched in a nationalist rhetoric that makes frequent references to India’s disparately interpreted pre/colonial past. But why is there this manifest eagerness to either validate homosexuality by tracing its roots to pre-colonial Indian tradition, and why on the other hand the need to expunge it by calling for a return to a pristine pre-colonial past? I see this simultaneous impulse to rework and rediscover the history of Indian homosexuality as not only an instance of what Stuart Hall calls being positioned by, and positioning ourselves within the narratives of the past, but also a polemic that participates in a Benjaminian contemporary (postcolonial) renovation of (pre/colonial) history.² In its preoccupation with the colonial memory of a postcolonial queer moment, then, my project aims to both discover traces of the empire in contemporary discussions of postcolonial queerness and to make interpretations of that colonial past contingent upon current postcolonial queer debates. In other words, my project attempts to push wider the door of the racial memory that the Fire controversy tapped. I suggest that contemporary debates in India about masculinity, homosexuality and nationalism are haunted by the recollection of a time when the British ruled over the native male by effeminizing him, when the idea of masculinity was an uncompromisingly
defined construct within which the native could find no part, when M. K. Gandhi
resignified the idea of native effeminism into emphatic nationalism, when the gendered
economy of racial difference frowned upon any inclination to cross racial barriers by
either "going native" or "becoming English": when, in other words, the anxiety of
preserving the empire as well as the desire of contesting it was positioned by negotiations
staged around gender and sexuality. I begin, therefore, with an examination of mid-
nineteenth century literary and cultural productions where colonial narratives map gender
difference over racial difference; my project then traces both the responses to and
refractions of this discourse through the period of the rise of Indian nationalism, and I
conclude by repositioning postcolonial constructions of queerness within the trajectory of
their long colonial history.

In interfusing postcolonial with queer, I aim to provide a reading of how British
narratives deployed gendered and (homo)sexualized tropes to foreclose race; at stake in
my dissertation is the idea that events which culminated in the end of colonial rule in
India are characterized not only by a rejection of imperial power, but a resignification
also of imperial ideas about masculinity, its corollary effeminacy and the specter of
homoeroticism³ that looms over both. I argue that it is in the imbricated continuation and
contestation of these charged tropes that anticolonial movements, and subsequently
Indian nationalism emerged. For instance, if the colonial policy of effeminizing the native
was implicated in the logic of imperial domination, incipient anti-colonial movements
contested the ascription of effeminacy, while the later Gandhian nationalism accepted it
and built a structure of passive resistance and non-cooperation upon the discourse of un-
masculine native passiveness. Similarly, although interracial homosocial relations during
the colonial period elicited powerful anxieties from the British about maintaining imperial dominance, the responsibility for the loss of the Indian empire was ultimately laid at the door of the British woman who was charged with interrupting the intimacy between colonized and colonizing men. This intimacy was, simultaneously, also seen as a tool used by nationalists to further demands for an independent India: the Indian non-cooperation movement, as Ashis Nandi suggests, was a sexual as well as a political statement of disaffection. My attempt, therefore, is to show how discursive constructions of non-normative gender and/or sexual behavior were implicated in furthering as well as fracturing the colonial system of meaning. In doing so, I underline the importance of understanding this history in order to fully comprehend contemporary debates about Indian masculinity, homosexuality and nationalism. Further, my argument that non-normative gender and sexuality were vital elements in the life-cycles of both colonialism and nationalism constitutes a counter-narrative to the frequently reiterated idea that nation building is contingent upon the formation of normative sexual subjectivity.

Thus, the two main objectives of my dissertation are: a) to investigate the relationship between Indian independence and non-normative gender/sexual identities and expressions, and thereby to argue that contrary to the prevalent hypothesis, queer subjectivity was vital to the constitution of a national identity in India; and b) to demonstrate how negotiations staged around queer identities continue to inform current political practices and socio-cultural (con)texts in the country. My research therefore has a historical and a contemporary dimension. The former involves reconstructing key colonial events and individuals within a new, queer analytic framework, in the process challenging traditional interpretations that have hitherto colored our understanding of
these; the latter involves paying attention to the ways in which contemporary Indian politics and culture mediate the memory of a queer national beginning, alternately invoking and exorcising it.

**Critical Debates:**

Relationships between Europe and its "Other" have been the focus of much scholarly work, particularly following the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a seminal work on the relations between the east and the west, posited frequently as the discursive origin of the field of postcolonial studies. Following increased academic investment in studies of gender and sexuality, recent years have seen a substantial growth in studies that revisit colonial terrains with disinterring tools and interpretative lenses provided by theories of sexuality and gender. As a result, there has been a lot of new research on colonialism and sexuality, empire and gender, and (neo)imperial crossings with and constructions of sex and gender. Thus, while methodologically diverse scholars have theorized the collisions and collusions between European and Eastern conceptions and practices of gender and sexuality, a lot of critical work in this area tends to either completely ignore, or mention only in passing, non-normative conceptions and/or practices of gender and sexuality. Critics like Rana Kabbani, Nancy Paxton and Anne McClintock, for example, analyze British social attitudes and official policies on sexuality in the metropole as well as in the colonies comprehensively, and agree that British overseas expansion was motivated by the need of Britain to export both goods produced in excess of the local economy and any superfluous sexuality, but elide the non-normativity lurking behind this superfluity. Similarly, critics like Joseph Bristow and
Inderpal Grewal profitably examine how and why a particular type of masculinity emerged under the British empire, and the ways in which the imperial encounter impacted both metropolitan and colonial constructions of gender, but do so without dwelling on anxieties about and constructions of gendered hybrids – effeminized men and masculinized women. These dissident gender constructs or behaviors, however, are particularly important because they allow an interrogation of the very concept of normative masculinity or femininity. I argue therefore not only that gender and sexuality were central to the shaping, consolidation and subsequent dismantling of the British empire, but also that ambiguous gender behavior and sexual practices were definitive factors in the careers of colonialism and nationalism.

My project, in this respect, is part of a growing body of work that puts postcolonial theory in dialogue with queer theory, a conversation that provides a particularly important analytical framework within which imperial discourse can reveal valuable and new meanings. One of the earliest examples of such a text is Christopher Lane’s *The Ruling Passion*, which argues that British desire to attain political and economic hegemony intensified and therefore also sexualized bonds between men, in the process creating a space that allowed for the emergence of antagonism between national and sexual identifications – an irreconcilability that could and frequently did shatter the British national allegory. Essays included in anthologies like *Imperial Desire* and *Postcolonial Queer* similarly examine how homoeroticism (or even homosociality) between men from opposite sides of the race barrier affected the process of the subjectification of the races, concluding that homosexual desires both impelled and impeded the British business of the empire. However, these monographs and anthologies
have created and determinedly overlooked a peculiar imbalance: although pretending to be located squarely at the crossroads between queer and postcolonial theories, a disturbing majority of work in this area has tended to valorize the imperialist viewpoint by persistently focusing upon it. Thus while these texts explore a variety of writings, including the compulsory Daniel Defoe, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster and Rudyard Kipling, the decision of the scholars/editors not to include the study of a single text from the other side of the colonial divide reveals a significant lacuna. This blind-spot may, in part, be a function of the linguistic or material inaccessibility of primary “native” texts and accounts, but it has significant consequences, in that it skews an entire corpus of work that claims to be “postcolonial” to again marginalize the (ex)colony and centralize the preoccupations of the colonizer and the metropole. My research signifies an attempt to balance the beam; I propose, in this dissertation, to study the anxieties and attitudes of the colonizers about sex and gender in conjunction with those of the colonized.

In its narrower focus upon homosexual discourse in the context of India, my research is part of an important corpus of work that has significantly altered the terrain of queer studies by expanding it to provide a platform for gay and lesbian voices in socio-textual contexts other than the EuroAmerican. Since the political movements for gay and lesbian rights originated in the west, and since theoretical paradigms tend to incline toward a EuroAmerican perspective, there is legitimate apprehension about queer concerns in non-western societies getting conflated with the mainstream, and losing their perhaps differing political agenda. Saleem Kidwai and Ruth Vanita’s collaboratively edited Same Sex Love in India therefore represents groundbreaking research; a collection of queer readings from Indian history and literature from 1500 B.C. to the 20th century,
this anthology challenged previous critical tendencies to either pretend that non-western homosexuality did not exist, or to consider it significant only as a subsidiary product of western debates about queerness. However, one of the most immediately obvious problems with this collection is its almost complete disassociation with postcolonial debates. The experience of colonization comes up in its due periodical space, and is shown up as instrumental in heterosexualizing the Urdu ghazal, erasing the Rekhti tradition, and in general initiating a homophobia non-existent in earlier times, but the book does not complicate these discussions with issues of gender or nationalism that are central to postcolonial studies in general, and to my research in particular. I propose to study in greater detail the transformations in Indian literary homoerotic traditions and to reveal these responses as incipient versions or vocalizations of Indian nationalism.

The isolation of *Same Sex Love* from postcolonial issues is righted in publications like Suparna Bhaskaran’s *Made in India* and Vanita’s second anthology, *Queering India*. However, both these texts study instances of homosexuality in pre/post/colonial India without drawing the necessary trajectory between the three historical moments. For example, Geeta Patel’s essay in *Queering India* discusses how debates that followed *Fire* often hovered around the fear that lesbian desire had the potential to undermine patriarchy, and mentions also that the dispute was a contestation of nationalist definitions, but does not discuss the colonial memory of this quarrel: the call to expunge lesbianism as a noxious remnant of Western corruption that infiltrated India in the body of the decadent, perverted imperialist was a call also to return to a pristine pre-colonial past. Similarly, Bhaskaran examines significant events in independent India that exemplify the desire of current Indian nationalism to enforce strict sexual, religious, class and caste
boundaries, without complicating her discussion with the any gesture toward the tremendous baggage of colonial strictures and reactions to them that these events also represent. I attempt, in my dissertation, to trace the colonial contours of postcolonial contestations of nationalism.

Scholars who have theorized the idea of the nation and the ideology of nationalism in conjunction with colonial desire, gender and sexuality are in maximum discursive proximity with my project. One of the most important works in this fairly small cluster is Mrinalini Sinha’s Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century. Sinha examines four controversial episodes in the political history of India through the lens of colonial constructions of masculinity, and argues forcefully that the native elite, constructed by the British as effeminate, staked a claim simultaneously for masculinity and for greater political participation by protesting the emasculation inherent in colonial policies that thwarted the involvement of natives in “manly” activities – like being allowed to mobilize native enrollment when the British army called for volunteers. While my project is certainly indebted to Sinha’s discussion of masculinity and effeminism, I differ from her in my argument that it was not only a reclamation but also a long-drawn resignification of masculinity that cleared political space for native participation.

Revathi Krishnaswamy makes a related argument about the British deployment of the rhetoric of effeminacy to defuse the potential of native political challenge in Effeminism: The Economy of Colonial Desire, arguing that the narrative of rape, which has served as the most paradigmatic trope for colonial relations, is evoked mainly in order to emasculate the native male. Even more important is her subsequent claim that
the effeminate Indian male is not a false stereotype, but the misrecognition of an alternative model of masculinity that was a real option in pre-colonial India. Having made this very promising suggestion, however, Krishnaswamy does not venture into an exploration of Indian historical/literary contexts of alternative masculinities, choosing instead to concentrate upon British canonical figures to ground her claim about the use of rape as an instrument to stigmatize native masculinity. Significantly more central to my concerns is Sara Suleri's analogous suggestion in The Rhetoric of English India that the overworked trope of interracial rape of the white woman needs to be put aside so that we may examine the unmistakable homoeroticism of the Anglo-Indian narrative. Suleri's proposition initiates my project; her work is particularly compelling to me also because she does not privilege imperial accounts, balancing her study of Forster and Kipling with a proportionate focus on V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. However, while Suleri is clearly aware of the overt idiom of rape and the covert one of homoeroticism, her critical focus excludes the obvious and intimately related trope of effeminacy, of masculine anxieties that erupted discursively in the garb of heterosexual rape as well as the coded discourse of homoeroticism.

An early discussion of this apprehensive masculinity is present in Ashis Nandy's The Intimate Enemy. Although his text is an examination of the psychological morphology and cultural architecture of resistance to or compliance with colonialism, a few claims that Nandy makes are particularly vital to my argument. The first is his argument that an unconscious homo-eroticized bond linked British and Indian men, and that this bond facilitated Indian strategies of resistance to colonialism. The second is his claim that M.K. Gandhi's primary tool for fighting colonialism was his privileging of
androgyny above either masculinity or femininity. Nandy’s contentions, however, remain merely hypotheses, unsubstantiated by any historical evidence. My research will supplement his psychological tools for excavation with historical ones; my claim will also embrace Gandhi as a participant too in the “unconscious homo-eroticized bonding” between the colonizing and the colonized male that Nandy theorizes.

Critical work on Gandhi constitutes yet another body of texts that my project is in dialogue with. A majority of this corpus is biographical and psychological⁹: scholars seek to recount the various oddities of Gandhi – his obsessive strictures on appropriate diet regimes, his complete preoccupation with the idea of celibacy, his views on marriage – but seldom relate his idiosyncratic views either to his uneasy sexuality or to his choice of non-violent non-cooperation as an apposite model of Indian nationalist resistance. While some aforementioned scholars like Krishnaswamy and Nandy have briefly studied Gandhian opposition to the empire as related to his androgyny, there is arguably no critical work that disinters the latent homoeroticism that always lurks behind autobiographical, biographical, and fictional accounts of Gandhi. My research attempts to argue for the significance of this homoeroticism in excavating the history of Gandhian nationalism, a nationalism that profitably privileged the homosociality inherent in being a freedom fighter over the heterosexuality of normal family life.

In this regard—and despite the fact that our human subjects as well as fields of enquiry (history of religion versus postcolonial theory and discourse analysis) are very different—my project is proximate to Jeffrey Kripal’s *Kali’s Child*, a brilliant and convincing exploration of the homoerotics underlying the life and teachings of the 19th century mystic, Ramakrishna Paramhamsa. Kripal’s revelation of Ramakrishna’s
homoerotic secret through a translation, interpretation, and restoration of several
bowdlerized aspects of the mystic’s teachings in the English translation of the central text
of the tradition, Kathamrita, is attended by the idea that Ramakrishna was not fully
cognizant of the erotic subtext of his trance states and visionary experiences. This idea is
important to my work on Gandhi: in examining Gandhi’s self-identification with
femininity, his rejection of sexuality, and his very charged relationships with his male
followers and friends, or in claiming a relationship between Gandhian nationalism and
sexuality, I am not suggesting that Gandhi consciously used the nationalist movement to
work out his sexual/gender dilemmas, but that his ambiguous gender and sexuality served
to make respectable and acceptable a legitimate native identity that had been relentlessly
undermined and tarnished by imperial codes. Similarly, I am not suggesting anything as
deterministic as the idea that Gandhi was homosexual.10 My attempt is to provide
evidence of the homoerotic subtext of his desires, and to suggest that contemporary
theories of homosexuality do provide a new hermeneutic of Gandhi’s life and
philosophies.

Finally, there is little critical work that focuses upon the idea of “going native” or
“becoming English,” a concern that inaugurates my project. Critics like Robert Young
have mentioned in passing the heterosexual desires that impelled a British male to go
native, and scholars working on such fascinating colonial figures as T.E. Lawrence,
Roger Casement and Richard Burton have comprehensively studied the mimicry of
nativeness by these fascinating men, as well as their homosexual orientations, but not in
conjunction. My project differs significantly from these existing works in its suggestion
that the almost hysterical imperial reaction to the idea of going native as well as to that of
becoming English may perhaps be partly explained by contemporary queer theories about homosexual panic (which I will elaborate shortly) and the cognate terror of metaphorically miscegenated brown white men and white brown men. The aim of my dissertation is, in part, to excavate these elided narratives, and to thereby provide a more balanced history of Indian nationalism and British colonialism, the contours of both defined by ambiguous constructions of gender and sexuality.

**Methodology:**

My dissertation is divided into three parts: the first studies imperial anxieties and policies in late-nineteenth century India, the second concentrates upon the Indian side of the British-Indian interaction in the transitory decades when British colonialism rendezvoused with Indian nationalism, and the third concludes my project with an examination of postcolonial India for vestigial fragments of colonial contentions about non-normative sexual and gender behaviors. I commence my project in the post-mutiny era, when, having put down the 1857 challenge to the colonial authority of the British in India, the empire felt understandably well-ensconced in the colony, but also simultaneously vulnerable because an awareness of the repeatability of the mutiny had cracked the hitherto unimpaired imperial carapace. I chose this initial point because it is at moments of imperial uncertainty about its perpetuity that one can most clearly detect the scramble to shore up colonial hegemony as well as the particular chinks in the English armor that the imperialists sought to repair and the nationalists sought to exploit. It is at this time too that the perceived imperforateness of the imperial paradigm is visibly interrupted, and the breach opens up a space for redefined frameworks and terms.
I examine a range of discourses and genres in the course of this dissertation, beginning routinely with some canonical colonial fiction, but moving quickly toward lesser (or not) known native texts. For instance, although I examine the works of Forster and Orwell, I also incorporate in my project a discussion of the Urdu ghazal and Rekhti poetry as a way of addressing the silencing of native narratives in much contemporary queer theory. My inclusion of native texts, some of them in Indian languages, requires me to work with translations as well as to translate portions of my primary sources, and my endeavor here is to be attentive to the way in which things start to be coded differently, to the words substituted and borrowed, to the significance of the fact that non-normative desires continue to be discursively present, even as codes.

This project therefore runs against one another a variety of texts and genres in order to discover through the ensuing friction, jagged edges that speak of unfamiliar interpretations of familiar historical events. For example, I examine debates that raged around fictional representations of homosexual desires such as the collection of short stories intriguingly titled *Chocolate*, as fallouts of the incorporation of anti-sodomy laws in the Indian penal code. Similarly, I study the autobiography of Gandhi in addition to nationalist literature on him to take account of the fact that fiction was not a popular mode of self-expression for nationalists at the turn of the century. My approach, therefore, is literary, historical and biographical: it is important, I think, to examine the more formal and public chronicles of lives, attitudes and events present in memoirs or auto/biographies, the relatively private musings of letters/diaries, as well as the private-yet-public manifestations of ambivalent desires, ambiguous relationships, national episodes and nationalist interpretations cloaked in fiction.
My dissertation owes much to Eve Sedgwick’s formulation of “the homosexual continuum” and of “homosexual panic” as elaborated in her influential texts *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*. I utilize Sedgwick’s theorization of homosociality and homoeroticism as moments capable of forming an unbroken continuum with homosexuality at any unpredictable instant, as also her related idea that a possibility (and fear) of sexualization attends every homosocial relation or moment. These terms are critical to my project because I am occasionally faced with cases where there is no clear evidence of homosexual acts, only a suspicion of the erotic potential of same-sex intimacies. Sedgwick’s theorizations enable me to argue further that this fear, or “homosexual panic”, experienced by the British was not only an individual response to a threatened masculinity, but also a communal reaction to their decidedly menaced racial hegemony. I also use the idea that identity can be/is performed to explicate my discussion of colonial fabrication and native resignification of ideas of masculinity, femininity and effeminacy. This concept provides my project with the essential flexibility and complexity of the idea that all identities are not necessarily performed, and conversely, that all performances do not necessarily verify identities.

The idea of performativity is a particularly urgent concern in my dissertation also because I attempt to unravel the mechanics of the English “going native” and the native “becoming English”. To do this, I employ Homi Bhabha’s theorizations of the act of mimicry and the idea of hybridity and ambivalence that have become so influential in postcolonial studies. Bhabha makes a gesture toward the fragility lurking at the heart of colonial power when he emphasizes the simultaneous necessity for and threat presented by native mimicry of Englishness. By their very position as authorized versions of the
ruling race, as “part-objects of a metonymy of desire,” the mimic men disrupt the authoritative singularity of the colonizing power, and introduce disturbing ambivalence into its discursive certainty. I argue that this mimicry and the attendant specter of hybridity that it suggests is as much a sexual and gender as it is a racial anxiety; and further that this anxiety and ambivalence is compounded because mimicry takes place on both sides: if native mimic men are disturbing, Englishmen mimicking the native are similarly—if not more—offensive and incommodious. In arguing that this imitation relates to an ideal (of “Englishness” or “nativeness”) that is never really there, I also utilize Judith Butler’s conception of the abortive nature of the imitative process, but its simultaneous rich potentiality in exposing the putative original as a “panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization.”

I also employ Benedict Anderson’s notion of “pilgrimages” to describe the transformation into nationalists of Indians who desired to become English. Anderson describes the visits of the colonized elite to the metropole during the colonial period as a pilgrimage that engenders embryonic notions of nationhood. This theory is useful for my argument because I find that Indian visitors to Britain were intensely aware of one another and of their desire to gain access to imperial cultural capital. I therefore argue that this awareness, coupled with a consciousness of being caricatured and rejected by the British, induced a species of bonding among the native elite. I will further suggest that Gandhi himself was one such pilgrim.

Finally, I use the Althusserian notion of interpellation to show how name-calling leads to subject formation in my examination of the resignification by Gandhi and others of the British ascription of effeminacy. My discussion of the transformation of effeminate
passivity into the passive resistance movement also owes a critical debt to Butler’s argument that a speech performance that seems injurious or emasculating may also be enabling, in that it may elicit a response that it never anticipated, thus losing its power in the face of a resistance it inadvertently helped to produce. In recognizing the address that means to disallow action by freezing the recipient in a subordinate stratum of power hierarchies, the addressee can use the social position that has been thrust upon him/her to exercise an agency that the injurious name-calling had meant to refuse. Interpellation, then, may be enabling because it initiates the subject into a temporal and linguistic existence, and thereby provides a platform from which the subject can perform. With this critical idiom in mind, I argue that the offensive call of effeminacy inaugurated a nationalist subject who countered the ascription paradoxically by claiming it.

**Chapters:**

**Part I: Imperial Anxieties**

**Chapter One: “The smell of pukka sahibdom”: The Racial Contours of Imperial Homosexual Panic.** I begin this chapter by tracing the crisis in colonial masculine identity following the Indian mutiny of 1857, a crisis that resulted in a reinforcement of the logic of masculine ascendancy, discursively emphasized post-mutiny by showing up the unmanliness of the native male in attacking and raping white women and the manliness of the white man in seeking retribution and in defending the powerless women and children. It is during this time that race-segregation became more imperforate, and British definition of masculinity became particularly rigid and fragile, its conceit
shattering if one departed from it in the smallest instance. While natives could never realize an exact congruence with this paradigm of masculinity, their racial difference always straying crookedly outside the standard pattern, British colonials had to stick very close to the English masculine ideal: the idea of the pukka sahib,\textsuperscript{18} the thoroughly British colonial, was after all, also the idea of the perfect representative of English manliness. One was a British gentleman only so far as he toed the line of this particularly defined British masculinity, a line that also described absolute division between the ruler and the ruled, both of whom were supposed to orbit their separate worlds, crossing business paths that were defined by and further defined power hierarchies.

However, I argue that implicit in this idea of pukka sahibdom is also the idea of non-pukkaness; the Derridean difference of the term itself points to spillovers of individuals wandering across racial boundaries, sponging lines that delineated the quintessential colonial in the same stroke as they sketched the exemplary male. Sometimes, for example, an Englishman would develop/betray a non-official intimacy with one or more natives, immediately exposing himself to severe disapproval or even social ostracism, losing both respect within the English community and also the usually indelible marker of his nationality. No longer completely British, such a man would be perceived as someone who had “gone native.” The idea of “going native” always carried with it some connotation of sexual impropriety. Although this sexual misconduct is frequently depicted in historical and literary accounts as heterosexual—where the Englishman is intimate with a native woman—I argue in this chapter that this heterosexuality screens an underlying anxiety about the disruptive power of homoerotic exchanges between men on opposite sides of the race barrier: that, in other words,
accusations of “going native” and of having interracial homoerotic intimacies were related concerns, both seen as perversions of upright British masculinity. In making this argument, I am, in part, addressing Sara Suleri’s concern that the enduring trope of rape has for too long been a “subterfuge to avoid the striking homoeroticism of Anglo-Indian narrative.”19 Further, I am suggesting that the anxiety about racial purity and miscegenation that fed into the heterosexual narrative of rape is also attendant upon the unease surrounding same-sex intimacy between an English and a native male. A person who is perceived as “going native”, I argue, triggers a powerful variant of homosexual panic, a panic that compounds the terror of sexual perversion and contagion with the anxiety of maintaining racial superiority.

Chapter Two: The Homoerotics of “Going Native” in A Passage to India and Burmese Days. In my second chapter I will provide a new reading of two canonical texts, George Orwell’s Burmese Days20 and E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India, with the above critical lens in mind. In my study, I suggest not that homoeroticizing the connotations of “going native” was a deliberate imperial policy that used fiction as its discursive instrument, but that contemporary theories of homosexual panic can explain the hysterical colonial admonitions against going native – injunctions that were vocalized in some of the fiction of the time.

I argue further that Flory in Burmese Days and Fielding in A Passage to India, both referred to as “non-pukka” in the novels, are two representations of English men whose intimacy with native elite men, Dr. Aziz and Dr. Veeraswamy respectively, called forth a frenzied homosexual panic from the English community. In doing so, I hope to substantiate my claim that the homosexual panic attendant upon interracial male
friendships, while mobilized in part by Englishmen who were going native, was also impelled by the numbers of natives (perhaps in an echo of Macaulay's stated desire\(^{21}\)) aspiring to "become English." And since the native who desired to be "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" was often also the colored intimate of the Englishman who had gone native, racial and sexual anxiety collided head on.\(^ {22} \)

I also use these two texts to demonstrate how palpable (homo)sexual anxieties about male friendships straddling the racial divide were encoded within wider (and safer) social concerns regarding racial allegiance, patriotism, (hetero)sexual purity, and gentlemanliness. My reading of the two texts provides evidence of my argument that the attribution of effeminacy signified not only the expulsion of the native from the British masculine ideal, but also sought to shift the responsibility for "going native" away from the Englishman and on to the native, the wellspring of homoerotic intimacies also already implicit in this assigned effeminacy.

Part II: Native Responses

Chapter Three: Bande Mataram and Celebrating the Masculine Principle In this chapter I examine the question of what was accepted gender and sexual behavior before it began to metamorphose under the discursive potency of the British lens, as also the ways in which indigenous gendered-identity formation reflected and refracted its colonial analogue. Colonization brought about significant changes in the Indian conception of masculinity and of male homoeroticism, which, in pre-colonial India, was more a license associated with class than an index of sexual identity. The British, however, replaced the idiom of sexual privilege with the idiom of sexual perversion, and attempted to enforce
heteronormative sexuality through legal measures like the incorporation of anti-sodomy statutes in the Indian Penal Code.

The native response to the British charge of effeminacy and its attendant specter of (criminal) non-normative sexuality was, I suggest, dual and chronologically overlapping. One reaction was an internalization of the imperial contempt of ambiguous sexual or gender behavior. There was, for example, a call to reconfigure the Indian male as overtly masculine: wrestling, a sport that had fallen into disfavor, was revitalized, literary traditions like the Urdu ghazal and the *Rekhti* poetry that smacked of homoerotic love were bowdlerized, the portrayal of love between men if/when still extant, lost its serenity, the militant nationalist leader S.C. Bose even revised the Oedipal complex to have the son castrate the father rather than submit to his authority. There was on the other hand the idea that same-sex bonds had patriotic political potential, certainly when they were on the same side of the racial divide, but even when they bridged national separations. I attempt to read the distinct colonial responses to imperially induced anxieties by examining two proto-nationalist texts, Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora* and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Anandamath* in the light of debates surrounding re-masculinization of the Indian male, focusing particularly on the controversy about sexuality and masculinity generated by Indian literature and poetry. In doing so, I also make an argument for the importance of homoerotic narratives as sites where powerful directing influences on native social reform movements, political mobilizations, and nationalist ideologies are located.
Chapter Four: "I can suppress the enemy but I have not been able to expel him altogether"\textsuperscript{23}: Gandhian Sexuality, Gandhian Nationalism. This chapter furthers my argument that Indian nationalism was both refracted by and resignified inter-racial desire and the gendered rhetoric that was employed to manage it, by pointing at the figure of "the father of the [Indian] nation," M.K. Gandhi. I suggest here that if Gandhi countered the British successfully, he did so (in a typical satyagrahi move) in part by not resisting the charges (of effeminacy/homoeroticism) that the British placed at the native door, and by resignifying the imputation into ardent nationalism. He was very well suited for this resignification for two reasons. First, Gandhi was one of the natives who had once desired to become English, who had gone to England to study, adopted English dress, manners and language, but realizing the impossibility of the transformation, gone native again with a thoroughness that characterized all his actions. Second, as the "eunuch for the nation"\textsuperscript{24} Gandhi, with his ambiguous sexuality, his vocal rejection of companionate marriage, and his open declarations of love for (English and native) men trimmed homosexual panic away from male bonds. He made the idea of nationalism into a choice for a man between a heterosexual family life and a homosocial existence as a freedom fighter, and made the choice of the latter seem more respectable. I intend to look at a range of texts—Gandhi's collected works (letters, speeches, assorted writings), his autobiography \textit{The Story of my Experiments with Truth}, Stanley Wolpert's biography of Gandhi, as well as fictional representations of Gandhi in Chaman Nahal's \textit{The Crown and the Loincloth}, and briefly, Raja Rao's \textit{Kanthapura} and R. K. Narayan's \textit{Waiting for the Mahatma}—to disinter the unmistakable, if unconscious, homoerotic discourse threading
them. In doing do, I hope to underline the importance of the homoerotic moment for the emergence and the consolidation of the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi.

Part III: Postcolonial Continuations

Chapter Five: “We have to prove that we are not eunuchs.”

Negotiations of Gender and Sexuality in Postcolonial India. In this chapter I will use my analysis of imperial anxieties and colonial responses to contextualize and explain contemporary socio-political moments in India. My claim that queerness was implicit in the constitution of India, will allow me to examine current political practices that seem to have emerged as a response to that history. At stake in this chapter is the idea that queer subjectivity was vital to the constitution of the Indian nation, and that it is therefore important to understand this history in order to fully comprehend political, religious, and literary contexts in present-day India. For instance, I will study the anxious masculinity of Stanley Wolpert’s Nine Hours to Rama (which is banned in India) and Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children to argue that the promulgation of masculine Hindu nationalism in contemporary India is haunted by the recollection of a time when the anxiety of preserving the empire as well as the desire of contesting it was positioned by negotiations staged around gender and sexuality. I will investigate the debates and anxieties that surrounded the, “to prove we are not eunuchs” justification of India’s recent nuclear testing, and examine how and to what ends writers and politicians—who are, as Rushdie once pointed out, engaged in a fight over the same territory—assert and contest links between masculinity and nationalism.
Endnotes for Introduction:


3 Homoeroticism commonly (and in this dissertation) designates something more than homosociality and something less than homosexuality; it implies a same sex intimacy which tends towards sexualization, although it may not necessarily be sexual.

4 I should point out here that Said and others have been criticized for what Joseph Boone has called the "conspicuously heteroerotic interpretive framework" of their work. See "Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism." PMLA. 110.1 (1995), 89-107.


7 It must be mentioned here that this was not the first publication that focused on the Indian homosexual: several sparsely funded, and to that extent non-comprehensive

Although studies on citizenship and nationhood (Anderson, 1991) have been crossed with gender theories (Mosse, 1985; Parker, 1992; Marie, 1994; Berlant, 1997) including theorizations of gender and nationalism in colonial India (Rosselli, 1980; Roy, 2002) as well as in contemporary India (Banerjee, 2000, 2005), these are either based entirely on theories like psychoanalysis and offer little historical evidence (Nandy, 1983), or based in history and removed from contemporary concerns (Sarkar, 1992; Chowdhury, 1995). The theoretical concerns of other studies on contemporary India (Brass, 1994; Jaffrelot, 1996; Basu et al, 1998) do not include debates in gender/postcolonial studies. My dissertation will put the distinct fields of gender and contemporary Indian culture studies in dialogue with postcolonial discourse analysis and colonial history studies.


Contrary to the accusations of his critics, Kripal too never makes any claim about a conscious homosexual/gay identity of Ramakrishna, but points to the demonstrable fact that the mystic’s desires always tended towards his male disciples.

My project begins in a place that is spatially rather diffuse, even though it is discursively distinct. While the particular concern of my dissertation is with the geopolitical space defined by India, I commence with a reference to historical and fictional constructions of Englishmen in a range of colonies—India, Burma, parts of Africa and the Middle East—linked through their actual or perceived act of going native.

This dissertation also participates in debates current in queer theory about the relationship between gender and sexuality, present particularly in the works of Annamarie Jagose, Jeffrey Weeks and Jonathan Goldberg.


“Interpellation” was used by Louis Althusser to describe the process by which ideology addresses or claims the individual as its subject, who then accepts that subject-position, and co-extensively, the power of ideology.


By “colonial masculinity” I am referring here both to colonizing and colonized men.

For a detailed discussion of the difference between being a man and being manly, see Ed Cohen’s *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 18, where he describes the reasons
why “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century there existed a heightened public awareness of the potential disjunction between male sex and “manly” gender.”

18 It is significant that this term came into usage around the time of the second challenge to British authority in 1919, which, as Sharpe points out, rode on the memory of 1857.

19 Sara Suleri. The Rhetoric of English India. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago P., 1992), 16.

20 While I will be studying the British empire in relation to India, the reason I am including Burmese Days is not only because its author was born in, and spent a lot of time in India, but also because Burma became part of the British Indian empire in 1886, and imperial directives regarding India, as well as the mutual inductions of Britain and India applied equally to Burma. Similarly, while my temporal focus in the first two sections will be on the years of the greatest imperial anxiety, i.e. roughly between the empire’s first significant destabilization in 1857 and its end in 1947, I will also include examples from other periods either to emphasize the continuity of some issue, attitude or practice, or its radical alteration in the period under consideration. In chapter three, in particular, taking account of the fact that fiction was not then a popular mode of nationalist self-expression, I will analyze texts that deal with the years relevant to this study, even when they are written after India became an independent nation.

21 Thomas Babington Macaulay, who served on the British “Supreme Council for India”, secure in the unquestioned imperial prepotency before the 1857 rebellion, argued in his 1835 Minute on Indian Education for “a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

22 Desire, as Homi Bhabha points out, is implicit in the idea of mimicry, and therefore reciprocal mimicry of racially divided men presents a significant disruptive potential to the imperial paradigm. However, since native men could never be British, their imitation of Englishness was always already flawed and imperfect. Despite this imperfection (or perhaps because of it) these babus, or brown sahibs, presented a threat to the colonizing powers at various levels: their transformation, through their adoption of English customs, clothing etc., could never be accepted as complete, or even serious, because the logic of imperialism demanded that the position of the English in their colonies be unassailably supreme; a continuum between nativeness and Englishness was untenable. Even as the middlemen that Macaulay wanted them to be, the native sahibs threatened to bridge the gulf that separated the colonizers and the colonized. A (literally or metaphorically) miscegenated person therefore was always a threat that needed to be multiply defused. The ascription of effeminacy, then, was a response directed against natives who were using their education, and/or their friendships with the non-pukka sahibs to shed their nativeness with all its pejorative associations.

23 Gandhi is referring here to his sexuality, perhaps unconsciously gendering his desire.


PART I

IMPERIAL ANXIETIES
CHAPTER ONE

"The smell of pukka sahibdom":

The Racial Contours of Imperial Homosexual Panic

In *The Rhetoric of English India*, Sara Suleri argues that the tendency of colonial discourse studies to rely upon binarisms, its history of gravitating towards the Manichean opposites of powerful/powerless, male/female, black/white etc. interrupts its objective of de-centering the master-narrative. The metaphor of rape, which has been a dominant trope of colonial discourse, also relies upon these crippling binaries and Suleri therefore arraigns its “unquestioning recuperation” by postcolonial critics. The trope of rape, she claims, serves as “a subterfuge to avoid the striking symbolic homoeroticism of Anglo-Indian narrative.”¹ Suleri correctly identifies rape as a master trope of colonial discourse. In both colonial discourse and in postcolonial discourse analysis, however, the position of the rape victim has not been constant, and has been occupied by the colonizing and the colonized woman, and even by the colonized nation. Earlier critics like Franz Fanon and more recent ones like Jenny Sharpe, for instance, theorize the rape of the colonizing woman by the native man, while others like Salman Rushdie, following Edward Said, suggest that if the metaphor of rape is to be used, then an accurate representation of the power dynamics during the colonial period can be made only when the violated female body is native, and the violator is the colonizing male.² Suleri, though, obfuscates this important difference: while her explicit reference by the term “rape” is to the feminization and violent possession of the colonized nation, her stated attempt to displace this critically unprofitable rape script through a reading of the “aborted [homoerotic] love
between Fielding and Aziz” in *A Passage to India* actually serves to displace another: that of the rape of a white woman (Adela) by a native man (Aziz).

Suleri’s criticism, then, implies not only alterity but also volition: that in the either/or-ness of rape/homoeroticism as the governing symbol of colonial interactions, only one could be selected; and further, that the body of postcolonial criticism made a conscious (hence “subterfuge”) yet unthinking (hence “unquestioning”) decision to avoid the symbol of homoeroticism and to recuperate that of rape. And Suleri is not alone in implying that the narrative of homo-eroticism/sexuality is suppressed or contained by that of rape; Elaine Freedgood argues as much when she states that “[t]he colonizer’s fear, which is undoubtedly also a wish, of penetration by the colonized has often been contained in colonial fiction[...]through the figure of heterosexual rape.” Again, Freedgood is referring in this quotation to the white woman’s rape, and is claiming, like Suleri, that this rape narrative somehow displaces the homoerotic impulse of colonial discourse.

I find this appraisal problematic for a few reasons. First, it participates in the discourse of binarism that Suleri decries, and in fact adds a new dubious pairing to the opposites that Abdul JanMohammed, following Fanon, enlisted: rape/homoeroticism. Second, the discursive predominance of the former, in imperial accounts and consequently in postcolonial discourse analysis, is due not to any deceptive stratagem but because, for reasons this essay will discuss shortly, rape existed as an overt trope in imperial narratives, while homoeroticism was zealously encoded. Third, the narrative of rape and the “striking” homoeroticism (which, although encoded in symbols was far from being merely emblematic) of the Anglo-Indian narrative were not competing, but
complementary symbols: one emplaced to provoke sexual anxiety and the other to induce homosexual panic; both aimed, ultimately, to shore up imperial power by contributing to the racial logic of the time. Finally, Suleri’s implicit argument that recovering the homoeroticism of this narrative as metaphor for colonial relations would somehow undo the above hierarchical binaries is specious, because the relations impelling both narratives were steeped in the same imperial dialectic.

In the following pages, I will first set up historical evidence regarding the complementariness of the discourse of rape and that of homoeroticism to the imperial exercise, and subsequently, I will decrypt what is almost a master-code of homoerotic imperatives: the Englishman who has “gone native”. In the second chapter in this section, I will provide literary instantiation for both these claims by closely analyzing two imperial texts, E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India and George Orwell’s Burmese Days.

**The Crisis in Imperial(ism)/Masculinity:**

In Bithia Mae Croker’s Diana Barrington, the eponymous heroine has this to say about her husband, Hugh Barrington, who is an Englishman serving in India: “I should hate a man who took an hour over his tie, lolled on the sofa reading poetry[...]I like to know that my husband is a man, and not an old woman. He shoots tigers, plays polo, and rides races.” Her enumeration of attributes which make a man a man—and not an old woman—includes a disdainful rejection of the characteristics of a dandy and an aesthete, and a vigorous approval of the manly activities of hunting, sports and adventure. Diana is representative of the fiction of this time, which brims with desire for what Mrinalini Sinha has labeled the ‘manly’ Englishman, someone who is physically robust, morally
rectitudinous and most of all, who is "dutiful, self-sacrificing, and willing to go to the ends of the earth in a spirit of patriotic zeal." The entanglement of the attributes of a gentleman with the imperial suitability of a man who "knows how to command," suggests that the formation of nineteenth century British masculinity was not an insular, metropolitan concern, but partook of the politics of the empire. Indeed, the most cursory perusal of these imperial fictions suggests that a very carefully defined image of English masculinity was being constructed at the time, an image imbued with a system of values that sought to add ballast to the vaunted superiority of the English race. Graham Dawson points out in *Soldier Heroes* that the nation plays a central role in the constitution of masculinity, as Britain did, recognizing and promoting versions which had a use-value in furthering the nationalist enterprise, and rejecting and suppressing those, "notably the effeminate man or the homosexual" that were in dissonance with the politics of the nation. I disagree with Dawson's claim that the effeminate and the homosexual man were, or are, "non-functional" to the national endeavor, and I will demonstrate their very significant contribution to nationalist imaginings, but I agree that the preferred and projected image of British masculinity and imperial identity reflected and reinforced each other.

Since the empire validated and was in turn validated by precise figurations of masculinity, renegotiating or reinventing one implied a commensurate remodeling of the other. In other words, the anxieties and triumphs of the empire impacted its definitions of masculinity and vice versa. One of the significant periods in the history of British imperialism, therefore, is the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when both the empire and imperial masculinity were threatened due to various events, movements and challenges,
within both the metropolitan British and the colonial Indian societies. In Britain, the women’s suffrage movement was gaining serious political impetus, and its preliminary consequence was already visible in the emergence of the New Woman, who in turn was threatening the ideology of “separate spheres,” or the absolute segregation of the private/domestic/female from the public/political/male. There was, further, a relatively rapid foregrounding of debates on homosexuality and effeminacy, following the trial of Oscar Wilde, which tarnished the perfect image of English masculinity by associating perversion (hitherto the adjective liberally applied to the colonized races) with Englishness. In India, the Indian “mutiny” destabilized the security of the empire. Queen Victoria’s promise of (theoretically) providing equal opportunity to native men in the Indian Civil Services added to the consternation about maintaining the balance of power. Further, British women began to arrive in the colonies in greater numbers than ever, following the completion of the Suez Canal, the simultaneous introduction of steamboats in 1869, and the consequent reduction of the journey between England and India from three months to as many weeks. Whether these women were categorized as belonging to the “New Woman” class, with her distinctly independent views about how the empire ought to be run or the natives ought to be treated, or as traditional female perpetually in need of male protection, women swarming colonial shores were considered an encumbrance by Englishmen anxiously attempting to repair the veneer of invulnerability that the mutiny had cracked. Both the empire and imperial masculinity, then, were being buffeted all around. In the following paragraphs, I will take a more detailed look at the various events I have rather breathlessly listed above, to determine the specific ways in which each contributed to the emergence of rape and homoeroticism as complementary
narratives, and the process by which the latter was encoded so it was just visible enough to serve as a warning, without being so obvious as to undermine British masculinity.

The revolt of 1857, acclaimed by Indian history as the "first war of Indian independence," and described more slightly by the British historians as "the sepoy mutiny," was a culmination of political, economic, social, religious and military discontent in India. The immediate cause of the revolt was the rumor that cartridges for the new Enfield rifles to be used by Indian soldiers, or sepoys, were greased with cow and pig fat, which was tantamount to offending religious sensibilities all around, Hindu as well as Muslim. Sepoys in Merut attacked the British garrison and then went on to join forces with sepoys in Delhi, a city they captured. With important Indian rulers like Rani Lakshmibai, Nana Sahib and Bahadur Shah joining the rebellion, the revolt spread to the east. A section of the English community was imprisoned subsequent to a siege in Lucknow, and these captives were later killed in Cawnpore. The British regained control by June of the following year, and then followed a series of horrific reprisals, which Indians described as "the Devil's wind". Entire villages were wiped out for the merest suspicion of harboring sympathy to the rebellion, numerous civilians were murdered, and sentenced sepoys were lashed to the mouths of cannons and blown to bits. The reprisals continued long after the mutiny, with incidents like the execution without trial of Sikh soldiers in 1872, the pillaging and carnage in Kabul in 1879, and even the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 being justified either as echoes of the Mutiny or as preemptive measures to prevent its recurrence. Ruthless British policies were also responsible, at least in part, for the millions of deaths which occurred during the 25 major famines in the second half of the nineteenth century.
In short, British-Indian relations took a sharp nose-dive in the years following the revolt. Stories of excesses committed by soldiers on the other side of the racial divide began to be circulated widely within both English and Indian communities. While a detailed focus on native reactions and attitudes in the years following the mutiny will form the subject of other chapters in this dissertation, I will here investigate the changing British outlook and policies following the events of 1857. I am not positing the mutiny as the fountainhead of every subsequent imperial policy; what I am suggesting is that it serves, in some cases, as an in/direct cause, in others as a catalyst, and in still others as a convenient temporal marker.

Although in the wake of the suppression of the rebellion the official British account dismissed the revolt as a fairly contained one, (“the Bengal Native Army alone had mutinied and [...] any civil disturbances were the natural by-products of the breakdown of law and order”12) subsequent narratives described the revolt in increasingly monstrous terms. One rumor that gained particular credence, for reasons that Jenny Sharpe brilliantly details in her Allegories of Empire, was that rebelling soldiers had raped and tortured innocent English women. The popular mutiny novels capitalized on this racial and sexual drama, with the effect that 1857 steadily became synecdochic of the dishonoring of white women by native men. A good example of the slow ossification of a rumor/fear into a historical truth is the fact that the Hunter Committee, instituted to investigate the Amritsar massacre of 1919, chose to remember and detail Nana Sahib’s incendiary “Ravishment Proclamations” calling for the dishonor of English women at Cawnpore, whereas earlier commissions that investigated the events of the mutiny in its
immediate aftermath found no evidence of the rape or mutilation of white women by native rebels.\textsuperscript{13}

I am not implying that sexual assaults on white women by native men never took place; I think in fact, that the truism that absence of proof is not proof of absence is, in this case, particularly relevant. Nancy Paxton makes a very persuasive argument in this regard when she states in \textit{Writing Under the Raj} that “rape would have been vastly underreported by both British and Indian women in India throughout the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries,”\textsuperscript{14} fraught as the word is with shame and imprecision. At a time when account after account was celebrating the valor of the Englishwoman who chose death over dishonor, the difficulty involved in a real woman reporting rape, and thus signifying that she lived to tell the tale, is evident. While conceding the truth of this fact, I would argue that a constant recourse to the idiom of rape served a real political purpose that had more to do with protecting the interests of the British empire than with defending its women. Sharpe argues a similar point in claiming that “rape is not a consistent and stable signifier but one that surfaces at strategic moments,”\textsuperscript{15} as does Ann Stoler in her essay “Carnal knowledge” when she describes how “concern over protection of white women intensified during real and perceived crisis of control – provoked by threats to the internal cohesion of the European communities or by infringement on its borders.”\textsuperscript{16}

The years following the revolt were characterized by just such a crisis of control, when challenges to the empire from its colonies were further confounded by the radical alteration in its domestic structuring signified by the emergence of the “New Woman.” Debates about the position and function of women in society were ongoing since the
emergence of the “Woman Question” in early nineteenth century, but the first major legislation that paved the way for increasing political and social rights for women was the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which not only allowed for secular divorce, but also restored rights over their property to divorced women. The 1870 Married Women’s Property Act, and its further amendment in 1882 granted married women the right to own their own property. The economic self-sufficiency that these legislations granted women broke ground for greater political rights. The suffrage movement, which was aimed at extending the right to vote to women, gathered momentum and caused extreme consternation in Britain. Part of this concern was related to the fear that the entrance of women in politics would weaken the empire. Alison Sainsbury demonstrates this link between imperialism and anti-suffragists by examining, among other things, the objections of Lord Curzon to the inclusion of women in the public sphere: “By men was India won” says Curzon, “by men alone can it be retained[...]It is man alone who can save women[...]women can take no part [...]By man the battle has been fought, by man it will be won. It is a man’s business, not a woman’s.” 17

Not only does the above statement, with its extraordinarily persistent repetition of “man” and “men” signal an acute anxiety about retaining masculine ascendancy, it also indicates panic about the putative collapse of distinctions between the “business” of men and that of women. The ideology of separate spheres had, of course kept these businesses discrete, and anti-suffrage people like Curzon encouraged women to help uphold the empire by refusing to directly participate in political action. The ideology of separate spheres, as Philippa Levine suggests, “was effective in polarizing the traits of masculinity
and femininity in the popular imagination,”\(^{18}\) and a further collapse of these traits, especially in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde’s trial for homosexuality, threatened social chaos.

If the New Woman was considered “odd”\(^ {19}\) and became “for many men a deeply feared and derided figure, emblematic of social chaos and misrule,”\(^ {20}\) equally disturbing was the decadent, effeminate Wildean dandy-aesthete. According to Alan Sinfield, “[d]ecadence and the New Woman were often attacked in the same breath. These two disruptions to the supposedly natural disposition of masculine and feminine attributes seemed to effect a twin assault on order and decency.”\(^ {21}\) It is interesting to note, with reference to the derangement of the boundary between the masculine and the feminine, that the Labouchere Amendment of 1885 (the act against homosexual offenses, under which Wilde was brought to trial and subsequently punished) was a tangential addendum, by a confessed homophobe Henry Labouchere, to an act which originally dealt with the provision of protective legislation against sexual exploitation to British women.\(^ {22}\) It is ironic too that it was the old mantra of “to protect our women” that stilled public concern over the potential for blackmail broached by the clause, which criminalized any man found guilty of “gross indecency” with another male whether in “public or private.” (Emphasis mine)\(^ {23}\)

Homosexuality made further inroads into public discourse in the years following the 1889 Cleveland Street Affair, which commenced with the discovery of a male brothel with an elite clientele and concluded with eminent and titled public figures like the Earl of Euston being implicated in the affair. The publicity attendant on this issue initiated varying degrees and kinds of discussions in England about sex between men, debates that
exploded around 1895, following the trials of Oscar Wilde for acts of “gross indecency” with other men. Wilde’s trial was landmark not only because it was the occasion for widespread public debate on homosexuality, but also because, as Sinfield points out in *The Wilde Century*, it resolutely imbricated effeminacy and homosexuality in public consciousness. Eve Sedgwick and Sinfield concur that effeminacy was earlier equated with aristocracy, and the Cleveland Street affair, where several aristocrats came under suspicion for homosexuality, may have made a contribution to this equation, but it was after the Wilde trials that the difference between what Ed Cohen describes as “the male sex and the ‘manly gender’” began to be identified and labeled. Consequently, in the words of Joseph Bristow, “effeminacy became the main stigma attached to male homosexuality in the eyes of English society.”

The affairs of Britain were also imperial affairs, and the British press was quick to relate the threat of sexual degeneracy to loss of political authority. The “muscular Christianity” that began demanding “stoicism, hardiness and endurance” was due to anxieties about effeminacy as well as the display of aggressive manliness that events like the Indian rebellion seemed to stipulate. Effeminate behavior, then, was in contradistinction to the demands upon masculinity that the empire made at the time. As Bristow puts it, events subsequent to the Wilde trials decisively polarized late nineteenth-century understandings of manhood. “If the trials prove anything,” he says, “it is that effeminacy and empire at this point stood in violent opposition.” Therefore, the idea that moral turpitude within Britain would occasion and promote rebellion in the colonies was repeatedly emphasized, and the link between individual decadence and political failure became such a commonplace that even late twentieth century historians like
Richard Shannon blithely reiterate the same idiom: “a nation of effeminate enfeebled bookworms scarce forms the most effective bulwark of a nation’s liberties.”

This conflation of individual with national character was not uncommon, as John H. Field points out in Toward a Programme of Imperial Life: The British at the Turn of the Century:

[A]dvocates and critics of imperialistic values and practices might differ profoundly over the future of the English people and over socially valuable character, but they shared the same basic presupposition: Individual character is directly related to social, national or racial character, which in turn is the key to social, national or racial supremacy, success, survival and so forth[...] That shared presupposition was expressed time and again in the form of analogy of individuals to nations. This argumentative leap from unit to whole approached the status of a late Victorian universal[...] Thus assertions of racial and national character were made by drawing immediate, direct parallels from observations of individual behaviours, and sometimes simply juxtaposing the characteristics at issue[...] The high incidence of this pattern of persuasion suggests that there were implicit understood models of human behavior upon which turn-of-the-century Britons could argue commitment to empire or disavowal of the imperial connection.(231-2)

Thus, in the fin-de-siècle Britain, sexual purity of the individual was linked very closely to national sovereignty. Effeminacy itself, as Sinfield argues, officiates to “police sexual categories, keeping them pure.” Sexual purity, in turn, was positioned as the custodian of racial supremacy. Therefore, the threat of sexual pollution, both homosexual and interracial, needed to be managed in the interests of the empire. In Britain, this translated into a plethora of interest groups, like the Eugenics movement and the Purity Campaign. A greater stress than ever was laid on the importance of public school education, and there were what Robert Young describes rather facetiously as “an assortment of calls for selective breeding for the improvement of British racial stock, sexual hygiene, male circumcision, prohibitions on masturbation, the Boy Scout movement, school games and subsidized school meals – doubtless with bromide in the tea.”
Management of Heterosexual Intimacies:

The rebellion of 1857, or at least manner in which it had been discursively constructed, had already predicated the necessity of separating the races. The mutiny was seen as an instantiation of the connection between political subversion and sexual impropriety, and there were "calls for middle-class respectability, domesticity and increased segregation," which, Stoler claims, all focused on European women.\textsuperscript{34} The argument that British policies of sexual and racial segregation were concentrated on European women is not quite accurate; indeed, one of the most important policies relating to such a separation was the Crewe circular of 1909. Previous to this circular, there had been other policies, like the umbrella Cantonments Act of 1864, which structured prostitution within military cantonments, and the Indian Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, which attempted to stem the spread of venereal diseases by making it mandatory for women engaged in prostitution to be registered and periodically inspected.\textsuperscript{35} The Crewe circular was the result of a series of public scandals involving colonizing men and local women in different British colonies.\textsuperscript{36} Also known as the "concubinage circular", this directive emphasized a strong official disapproval of relationships between colonists and native women. And while the circular was suggestive and not legislative, it clearly indicated that dissenters' careers would be seriously jeopardized.

Therefore while the fin-de-siècle British policies certainly expended effort in segregating white men and native women, the limitation to a strict enforcement of this partitioning was, as Levine points out, "the constant haunting fear of homosexuality."\textsuperscript{37} Freedgood reaches a similar conclusion when she points out that “[m]onogamous heterosexuality was thought to provide the maximum political security for imperialism,
with its confinement and containment of intimacy and sexuality within marriage. Any variety of heterosexuality, however, was seen as more conducive to imperial interests than homosexuality. Thus, although homosexuality was seldom discussed officially, it accented debates on prostitution. "The provision of prostitute women in military areas," Levine explains, "was regarded as a politically necessary sacrifice, despite rarely articulated concerns about miscegenation." (Here, I want to make note of the ineluctability, in the colonies, of two concerns, miscegenation and homosexuality—both were endlessly the subject of discourse in England—the connections between which I will tease out shortly.)

Despite the strictures against interracial affiliations, therefore, there were, as Suleri and several others have suggested, "necessary intimacies that obtain[ed] between ruler and ruled" which created a "counter-culture not always explicable in terms of an allegory of otherness." In other words, interracial alliances developed which threatened the narrative of racial alterity. As Michel Foucault suggests in *The History of Sexuality*, resistance is always attendant upon power, "and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." Some forms of resistance, or in this case interracial intimacies, were more threatening than others, and the imperial response to each was commensurate with the degree to which it challenged the authority of the empire. Liaisons between colonizing men and colonized women, while reprehensible, were not entirely damaging, particularly because the white man's access to native women maintained the balance of power.

A reversal in this role however, i.e. relations between native men and white women would be far more damaging; such intimacies would undermine imperial power.
The New Woman, with her threatening sexuality and independent politics was already a figure that was causing disquiet. Relationships, whether of English men or of English women, could not be legislated; further, the English woman’s intimacies could not even be regulated indirectly through covert warnings about career-suicide. Hence an even more effective method of control, that of self-policing, or surveillance through the panopticon principle, was effected by stigmatizing these relations. The threat of the breakdown of social order suggested by interracial rape, and the attendant specter of miscegenation were the instruments through which this dispersion of power was actualized. As I have noted above, the perpetual threat of the rape of the white woman by the native man was summoned at several instances, even though the relation of this threat to colonial reality was tenuous at the very best. When the only available script for expressing sexual relations between native men and British women was that of violent desire on the part of the former and resistant surrender by the latter, with dishonor underscoring the entire narrative, alternative locutions found no place. Therefore Sainsbury’s argument that the “overpowering of Englishwomen by Indian men—rape—is matched by English women’s power to choose [a British husband]”\textsuperscript{43} has a weightier valance than she allows, in as much as this Hobson’s choice between ignominy and prestige is really about a lack of alternatives.

The disgrace that was attendant on these relationships was further compounded by the potential ignominy of a child of mixed race, a child that colonial attitudes considered “illegal reproduction”, as Pamela Scully has shown in her analysis of rape cases in Cape Colony South Africa in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{44} Miscegenation was one of the biggest bugbears of the imperial exercise, and it is remarkable that miscegenation was discussed
not so much in relation to white men and native women—we have already noted, with Levine, the unwillingness to discuss miscegenation during the debate on prostitution in British official circles—but as the dreaded consequence of interracial rape. Fiction was more faithful to reality, and although the miscegenated children, or Eurasians, who lurk on the margins of colonial fiction usually have the most fleeting shadows for parents, the father is frequently a nameless, featureless white man, the mother is an equally historyless native woman. Official exchanges and policies, on the other hand, discussed miscegenation as a noxious outgrowth of interracial rape.

One of the narratives ancillary to miscegenation was that of degenerationism. Degeneration, Richard Eves and Nicholas Thomas argue in *Bad Colonists*, “was a counter-narrative to the idea that progress was inevitable. Rather than the future being assuredly bright and promising as progressivist historical narratives postulated, degenerationism held that there was the possibility of decline and regress.”45 We can hear in this description a clear echo of warnings about the link between sexual and political chaos, and solemn admonitions that one bad apple could spread inexorable rot. Young’s study of the *Essay on the Inequality of Races* by count Gobineau reveals analogous cautions. Gobineau proposes that the adulteration of blood is the basic cause for the degeneracy of nation, a view also shared by W.J. Moore’s *Health in the Tropics* and echoed by Charles Brooke in *Ten Years in Sarawak*. Brooke claims that only a miscegenated race can survive in the tropics, but, “the barrier once broken down, the remoter descendents of an European ancestor become rapidly feeble, astute, passionate, and indolent, as any of the darker races around them.” Not only is the descent into degeneration bad, it is also irreversible.46 Here too we notice the leap from the individual
or local to the universal, and find the suggestion of uncontrollable evil unleashed through miscegenation. The suggestion of the outside creeping in and carrying chaos in its wake is unmistakable, given that it was made at a time when the private/domestic and the public/political became unnervingly contiguous for many Britons.

Management of Homosexual Intimacies:

I have described in the above sections the historical reasons for the threat presented to the British empire by two kinds of interracial intimacies (heterosexual relations between English men and native women, and between native men and English women), the ways in which these relations were harnessed, the different degrees to which they were contained, and the reasons for the varying rigorousness of that containment. In this, the main section of this chapter, I will move on to the third, and as I will argue, most disturbing interracial relationship, that between men. I will take as my starting point the collapse of the boundaries between domesticity and politics, with which I concluded my previous section. The outlines and overlaps of secrecy and publicity implicit in this collapse are also at the heart of homosexuality and imperialism, as well as within the intersections between the two.

A number of critics, including Said, have argued that imperialism was “a specifically male institutional practice,” and John Tosh, in his essay “Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain 1880-1914,” describes how it came to be so. As is evident by the title of the essay, Tosh discerns a masculine revolt against domesticity in fin-de-siècle Britain. This “flight from domesticity”, he says, was aided by the public school culture: “Those who underwent the ordeal [of the public
school] learnt to distance themselves from home, to break away from its female inmates, and to find their place in a homosocial world (and sometimes a homosexual one too.)”

It seems, however, that it was not just men who were fleeing the domestic space; women too, as we have seen above, were intent on venturing beyond, or at least extending, its boundaries. It is also peculiarly apt (and ironic) that the flight from domesticity for British men involved a flight into the colonies, a site where the political and the domestic were coterminous, where even bodily functions impinged on the business of running the empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, of course, there were great numbers of British women in the colonies, including in India, and they were vitriolically criticized for having interrupted an “idyllic golden age of free contact between cultures.” I will look at this odd attribution of blame in the next chapter; for now I want to examine briefly the corollary to this anathema, the revered figure of the imperial gentleman, the idealized pukka (i.e. genuine/authentic) sahib.

The figure of the gentleman, according to Tim Middleton, aided in the construction of a gendered national identity, but also described the limits of the masculine/homosocial and the effeminate/homosexual. Any incongruence with this ideal, either as excessiveness or as lack, was a false note in the much trumpeted English masculinity. The homosocial could quickly veer off into the homosexual, and indeed, frequently did. Thus although Sedgwick characterizes the colonial space as a “remedial public school, a male place in which it is relatively safe for men to explore the crucial terrain of homosociality,” (emphasis mine) the colonies were also a male place in which it was relatively safe for men to explore the forbidden terrain of homosexuality. Ruppel and Holden claim, for instance, that the British often left Victorian England in part to
escape an increasingly controlled and policed sexuality. Similarly, Joseph Allen Boone says that "the possibility of sexual contact with and between men underwrites and at times even explains the historical appeal of orientalism as an occidental mode of male perception, appropriation, and control." Numerous other critics agree; in fact, as Lane says, the idea that the empire provided opportunities for sexual expressions that were denied at home has become a truism in queer studies.

Homosexuality, by the time of New Imperialism, had already had a variegated history (although the term itself was coined as late as 1892) of use, abuse and disuse, its significations varying in different social contexts. Critics like Alan Bray and Jonathan Goldberg, who study pre-nineteenth century male-male sexual relations, argue that because intimacies between men cemented hierarchical privileges, it was not really sodomy that was odious from the earliest times, but the "accusation of its performance by classes that imperiled social stability – spies, heretics, traitors." In other words, it is only when someone threatens the social order through some other act, like treachery, for example, that an accusation of being a sodomizer becomes a serious and condemnable allegation. I have already pointed out the continually reiterated belief that social and sexual disorders were engaged in a dynamic of reciprocity; this conviction also explains the increasing urgency of the focus upon homosexuality to the degree to which it interrupts existing arrangements of the social order. In fact, it seems that homosexuality becomes the target of anxieties even when the disruptions in social order have some other causative factor: Weeks, for instance, has detected a pattern of increase in the persecution of male homosexuals, depending on whether or not England was at war. Therefore a crisis in masculinity in particular redounds upon the social valence of homosexuality.
The occurrence of homosexuality in the colonial context is also usually present only as a subtext of other issues more central to the concerns of the empire. Nor, critics suggest, does it always seem to be an anathema to the empire. Freedgood, for example, argues that although

[0]officially, the British Empire reviled homosexuality; unofficially homosexuality and homosexuals were deployed strategically within empire, to build personal relationships that, in their intimacy and temporary equality, seemed to transcend the constraints and cruelties typical of other colonial relations. Men like Forster and Gide, T.E. Lawrence and Richard Burton, gave the empire a more human face and form. But they did so at their own risk: their contributions would never be officially avowed.(138)

As proof of her claim, Freedgood points to the fact that Burton was given a commission to investigate male brothels, and was dismissed from the army only when, and because, he mis-addressed his reply to a different office, thus making it obligatory for measures to be taken against him. While I disagree that Lawrence and Burton were consciously “deployed” because they were homosexuals, or because imperial power needed them to build relationships that called for either intimacy or equality with the colonized—and Forster, whose homosexuality was revealed only following the posthumous publication of some of his writings surely could not have been thus deployed at all—I do agree with the thought that impels Freedgood’s claim: that homosexuality was often co-opted in the services of the empire.

Weeks has argued against the idea that deviance is something contrary to society, an oppositional force that society responds to. Deviance, he claims is something that society creates and defines. The creation of any category always implies the presence of an oppositional category, and its consolidation also delineates the boundaries of its opposite. In other words, when meaning coheres around something, it enables a simultaneous production of meaning around its antipode; every suppressed representation facilitates and indicates some other representation. This oppositional representation, in
fact, forms the basis of my quarrel with the influential theory of Lane about homosexual desire being a “counterforce that shatters [the British] national allegory.” Lane uses the word allegory to designate “a rhetorical structure that substitutes partial and fragmentary emblems for subjective entities, thus organizing otherwise disparate groups and individuals into effective political units,” and he argues that the “radical inutility” of homosexual desire came into frequent conflict with Britain’s colonial allegories.57 It is true that there is a space for the emergence of antagonism or irreconcilability between national and sexual identifications, but that space is not necessarily barren with relation to the nation. I argue that on the contrary, homosexual desire enabled the coherence of the British national allegory, and that far from being inutile, same sex desire between men had tremendous use-value that was effectively employed by the empire. In order to make this argument, I will first discuss the concept of normativity in the context of imperial gender and sexuality as well as the racial contours of both, next I will detail what non-normativity implied within that context, and I will conclude with a discussion of how homoeroticism was harnessed by the empire.

According to Field, a majority of people “in most times internalize socially affirmed values (which are consciously held, explicit; thus codifiable) as traits of character (which are largely subconsciously felt, implicit; thus not fully codifiable).”58 When the conduct of people is congruent to these values and traits, it is considered normative. The conduct of imperialists was, of course, governed by their role as imperialists, a role founded on an assumption of the racial and moral superiority of the British. This role required a recognition of “the necessary demands of duty as socially imposed (thus accepting the necessity to sublimate desires, postpone gratifications, and
suppress counter qualities of [their] ‘nature’ [...] they ranked collective achievement shared in vicariously above what [they] considered merely individual goals.\textsuperscript{59} A masculine imperative underlined this role, as did the idea that the white race was far superior to the colored races, and as the (by now evidently hollow) refrain of the “white man’s burden” suggests, described the empire as founded on the need to rescue and uplift the native. An imperial man was never simply an individual; he was always a representative of the white race, a wheel that had to run along prescribed tracks lest the entire imperial machinery be thrown out of gear.

Such a complete identification with their role, and with a collective enterprise, however, was not necessarily all good, particularly because it carried the potential to breed and intensify, self-alienation.\textsuperscript{60} This process of alienation, of course, becomes easier the less invested one is in the existing power structures, or the less included one feels within them. At a time when British national identity went hand in hand with a reification of homosexuality, homoerotically inclined Britons would comprise one such marginalized group. There were others as well skirting the British society, and colonial discourse is littered with examples of Englishmen who are thus alienated, albeit to varying degrees.

Turning from their English compatriots, for these disenchanted Englishmen, often involved turning toward the natives. Now, while homosociality among Englishmen was obviously to be encouraged by a structure of power dependent upon such masculine amity, similar intimacies with the native were fraught with peril because they could potentially serve as the solvent, rather than the glue (to borrow Sedgwick’s vocabulary) of the hierarchical imperial order. The belief that homosexuality could reconcile
differences across class lines, Weeks tells us, already had a stronghold in discourse about homosexuality. The danger in the colonies was that a similar reconciliation across racial lines would be disastrous for a system of logic dependent upon maintaining that difference. "Who ever heard of a white so far a renegade," Melville asks in *Benito Cereno*, "as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguing in against it with negroes?"61 The anxiety that lurks in this statement indicates the potential for destabilization that was latent in interracial intimacies.

Another reason why interracial homosociality was disturbing at the time of New Imperialism was because native men were increasingly entering terrains that had earlier been closed to them. Following Macaulay’s infamous Minute on Education, for instance, increasing numbers of Indians were getting an English education, traveling to the metropole, and becoming more aware of their rights and of their potential. Queen Victoria’s appeasing proclamation on the heels of the revolt of 1857 that Indians would have an equal opportunity to serve in the Indian Civil Services had opened yet another avenue for native men. At such a time, it was necessary that the English stand together, and apart from the natives. The solution to prevent this third, and as I have said earlier, the most threatening form of the “necessary intimacies that obtained between the ruler and the ruled,” was similar in nature to the narrative of rape that was used to decrease potential liaisons between Englishwomen and Indian men. There, the interracial relationship was imbued with dishonor and shame, and the responsibility for degenerate desires had been placed with the native male. In this case, the native was labeled effeminate, thus stigmatizing any intimacy with him—it will be remembered, of course,
that effeminacy was equated with homosexuality at the time—and again, the responsibility for debauched sexuality was placed upon the native.

Under New Imperialism, the English consolidated their national identity by furbishing the gender and racial contours of that identity at the expense of the peoples they had colonized. "The stereotyped depiction of sexual 'degenerates'," says Mosse, "was transferred almost intact to the 'inferior' races" who were said to lack manliness.62 The crisis in masculinity in fin-de-siecle Britain was partially responsible for this transference. Where earlier colonial discourse had panegyrized the exotic colonies as occasioning strange and improbable adventures, and as being replete with alluring sexuality, early twentieth century discourse soberly concentrated on the production of a socially, politically, and sexually regulated imperial system. The realization of such a system was always already an impossibility because perpetuating the colonial rule demanded that chaos at all three levels be inseparable from the native racial identity that had been constructed by colonial discourse.63 Sinha reveals the racial and gender politics underlying the steady effeminization of the Indians who were potential threats to the empire:

One of the ways in which the racial policies of the British were justified was by projecting the contestable claims of racial superiority on to established gender hierarchies: the British men were naturally in position of power because of their masculinity, and the natives deserved to be ruled because they were effeminate. Thus while the charge of effeminacy was first labeled at only the Bengali elite, it slowly came to characterize the Indian middle class, especially Western educated middle class Indians(35).

The question of what this stereotype meant for Indian men, whether they internalized or rejected the label of effeminacy, and most importantly, whether the stigma attached to the word did succeed in completely disempowering them, is the concern of other chapters in this dissertation. So while a discussion of the effects of the marker of effeminacy will
have to wait, I am interested at present in disinterring the *intention* behind the creation of that stereotype.

We have noted above the horror that came to be associated with effeminacy in the late nineteenth century, and how it came to signify not only decadence and effteness but also homosexuality. As Weeks argues, the notion that effeminacy was the visible marker of homosexuality endured through the *fin-de-siecle* and well into the next century.\(^{64}\) Under New Imperialism, we notice the breakdown of biologism: manliness and maleness were no longer necessarily covalent. Masculinity was defined in opposition to effeminacy; one exuded manliness to the extent he disassociated himself from characteristics that denoted the reviled effeminate male. But effeminacy, as Fanon argues in *Black Skin White Masks*, can never be completely expelled from manliness, “it is its necessary corollary, present continually as the danger manliness has to dispel.”\(^{65}\) In other words, the price of manliness was perpetual vigilantism, one needed to persistently repel any suggestion of effeminacy in order to continue partaking of the privileges of masculinity (and these privileges, we should remember, were considerable, particularly in the imperial context.) In fact effeminacy, claims Bristow, “bore such shame that even homosexual men were driven to distance themselves from it at any cost.”\(^{66}\) As will become clear shortly, the contours of what Sedgwick designates “homosexual panic” are very evident in this desperate need to maintain masculine privilege by shaking off any association with effeminacy.

To understand Sedgwick’s formulation of homosexual panic (as well as the two other terms from her lexicon that will be important to this discussion), we need to begin with the theory put forward by Levi Strauss in 1949 that has since come to be known as
the “alliance theory”. Levi Strauss argued that kinship structures in human society are based upon a system of social exchanges between different members, and the predominant form of this exchange is that of women through the institution of marriage. This theory was later examined by Gayle Rubin in “The Traffic in Women”, in which she demonstrated how the alliance theory reiterated in slightly different terms the patriarchal schema in which women, as items of exchange between men, serve merely as channels of relationships between them without being active participants in the kinship structure.

Sedgwick broadened Rubin’s argument in her book *Between Men* and then later in *Epistemology of the Closet* (and in the process articulated a vocabulary that has since become idiomatic in Queer studies) by designating Levi-Strauss's male-male alliance structures as “homosocial,” and by describing a continuum between homosocial associations and homosexual relations. The term “homosocial” in Sedgewick’s description signifies a very broad spectrum of relations between men that are always attended by the possibility (and haunted by the fear) of becoming sexual. These homosocial bonds are just as strongly prescribed by society as their veering into homosexuality is proscribed. Indeed, homosocial alliances are the building blocks and the cementing material of the structure of patriarchy. Patriarchy demands that there be close coalitions between men, depends upon the fulfillment of that demand for its survival, and holds that demand as a precondition for allowing men what Sedgwick calls “male entitlement.” However, since (as Alan Bray also argues) there is really very little external difference, or difference in public perception between homosocial and homosexual relations—both, after all, depend upon close bonds between men—homosociality is in constant danger of being misrecognized. The fear of this misconstruction, and the
inescapability of the situation (because homosociality is made as compulsory by patriarchy as heterosexuality) is what gives rise to “an endemic and ineradicable state” of male homosexual panic.

The impelling force of homosexual panic is therefore not homosexuality, but the potential that homosociality carries both of sexualization and of misconstrual. From late-nineteenth century onwards, after the homosexual became a “species” instead of, as Foucault says, an aberration, this panic became an even more inseparable part of the construction of masculinity. And in the decades following the Wilde trials, homosexual panic also became a social panic about male friendships, and about the fear of the infection of manly homosocial bonds by effeminate homosexual ones. Therefore, when Bristow claims that an “enfeebled” masculinity, under New Imperialism, had become a figure of such immense “internalized self-loathing,” that even those who fell within the category of “‘enfeebled’ masculinity” despised effeminacy and strove to distance themselves from it, we can clearly detect the underlying homosexual panic: in the long chain of associations and significations, effeminacy stood for homosexuality and a homosocial intimacy with an effeminate person called forth a panic against being similarly labeled.

However the hegemony of any system is never absolute; “there are always counter-discourses and alternative norms circulating within any given society.” These alternative norms form what Suleri calls a “counter-culture not always explicable in terms of an allegory of otherness.” Despite the strictures against interracial homosocial intimacies, there were Englishmen who sought close relationships with native men, and who thus transgressed the strict boundaries of imperial masculinity. The idea of the pukka
sahib, simultaneously the racial and the masculine ideal of Englishness, carries within it the ghost of its opposite, the non-\textit{pukka} sahib, incongruent with the blueprint both of the British race as well as that of English masculinity. A white man who chose to go the non-\textit{pukka} route was understood as having “gone native”, a description that appears in various guises in colonial discourse. These guises are recognizable even though the act of going native is not always explicitly designated as such, because they are always accompanied by: 1) a loss of respect within the British community bordering on ostracism; 2) the steady deletion of British racial markers and a proportionate adoption of native ones; and most importantly, 3) a relationship with native men so unusually intimate that the racial and national allegiance of such Englishmen becomes suspect.

Going native also routinely carries a connotation of sexual impropriety, and while historical and fictional narratives frequently represent this transgression in a heterosexual idiom, providing the Englishman with a native mistress, I argue that this relatively normative sexual transgression screens interracial homoerotic intimacies between men. In other words, I suggest that accusations of Englishmen going native and anxieties about them having homoerotic relations with native men were coincident, both being perversions of British(ness/) masculinity. In another long chain of signification, then, Englishmen who “went native” shared an atypical intimacy with at least one native male, who normally belonged to the ‘native elite’ class, which was stigmatized as effeminate, a term that designated homosexuality, an appellation which, when applied to one male, makes all his same-sex intimacies suspect.

Claiming, as I am doing, that the act of “going native” was a code for Englishmen with homoerotic interests on the other side of the racial barrier, begs the question of why
homoeroticism needed to appear as a code in a period when there was little discursive shyness about homosexuality – a discourse, which, as Foucault, Weeks and others tell us, exploded in the nineteenth century. There is a general explanation why homosexuality was coded, and one that is more particular to the imperial context. Robert Aldrich summarizes the first one succinctly:

Homosexual longing, and the portrayal of it, has been obliged to assume a greater or lesser degree of coding or outright disguise until very recent times. Western society has been uncongenial to homosexuality: for centuries law considered homosexuality a crime (sometimes punishable by life imprisonment or execution), medicine labeled it a disease, religion called it a sin, psychology analyzed it as a perversion or personality disorder and general social mores castigated it as disgusting deviance. In these circumstances, open portrayal of homosexuality was proscribed.69

The second explanation, more relevant to the colonial context, is related to the maintenance of power equations. I discussed earlier what I see as the functional corollary of the narrative of homoeroticism, that of the rape of the white woman, and I argued that the proliferation of this discourse was aided by the fact that it kept in place, and even consolidated racial roles: it portrayed the native male as depraved, violent and rapacious, the Englishwoman as an unwilling victim who preferred death to such a dishonorable violation, and the Englishman as a wrathful and righteous avenger who either gallantly rescued his country woman or took terrible revenge on the native male. Now, the position of the rape victim, or in less violent terms, the position of the object of penetration, is not gender specific. In other words, a white man could have theoretically could have occupied a position of penetrability, a possibility that was clearly not alien to the time, as Sedgwick suggests: “a partly gothic-derived paranoid racist thematics of male penetration and undermining by subject peoples became a prominent feature of national ideology in Western Europe. Its culmination is an image of male rape.”70 However, the colonizing male as powerless victim of male violence was clearly not a tenable image in the light of
colonial relations. This, according to Sharpe, is also the reason why the discourse that proliferated around the 1857 rebellion feverishly held on to the image of the mutilated or dishonored female body. “[T]o show the male body as vulnerable to attack would potentially place the white male in the objectified space of the rape victim, and this would undercut colonial power at a moment when it needed propping up.”

Interracial homo-eroticism/sexuality could thus exist only as a code. The Englishman could not be shown as clearly complicit in a homoerotic relationship, he could certainly not be a victim, he could not even be the victimizer/sodomizer, because either perversion or powerlessness is implicit in all three positions. Hence, while provision had to be made against this alliance, it could not be openly vocalized, and could only exist as a code. In addition, an unequivocal discursive construction of British men with same sex intimacies as homosexual would carry the danger of an equally explicit response. Foucault tells us, for instance, that discourse initiated the homosexual into a specie in the nineteenth century, instead of the isolated act or aberration that it was earlier. A code however, can hardly be refuted in the same way; since a code always represents an excess of the signifier over the signified, it is clear enough to be understood but not plain enough to be opposed.

The problem with codes, however, is that the process of decoding requires that one meaning, not the obviously dominant one, be privileged. Since the encoding of desire, as Lane suggests, “illustrates a profound difficulty and variance of signification and a generic resistance to subjectivity’s meaning,” its decoding is similarly fraught with a heterogeneity of meanings. While recognizing the validity of this argument, I do want to argue for the importance of alternative codes, because they provide new, and
sometimes startling interpretations of what Dawson calls “cultural imaginaries”, the “vast networks of interlinking discursive themes, images, motifs, and narrative forms that are publicly available within a culture at any one time, and that articulate its psychic and social dimensions.” I suggest that these “networks”, though interconnected, do not necessarily combine to form a coherent picture of the psychic and social dimensions of the culture we attempt to access, and a search for alternative meanings is therefore important. So I would like to challenge, with Lane, “a form of historical and literary criticism that interprets the British Empire as a set of coherent policies and events whose social and political meanings are apparently self-evident[...] we miss a crucial element of colonial history when we ignore or dismiss the influence of unconscious identification, fantasy, and conflict on these political events.”

A number of recent works have tried to decode homosexual instances in different texts; queer theory, in fact, derives its most influential insights from textual ambivalence. While I am not arguing for a master-key that unlocks all these moments of narrative opacity, I do find that clusters of homosexual significations began to gather around the idea of “going native”, finding an historical impetus in people like Richard Burton and T.E. Lawrence, whose adoption of native markers, however temporarily, was connected latently to their homosexuality and overtly to their potential danger to the imperial exercise.

A number of Englishmen like Ochterney and Gardner, whom William Dalrymple has labeled “White Mughals” had “gone native” before the various crises from the second half of the nineteenth century, without invoking any horror from the English; surprise, perhaps, and amusement, but not vehement repulsion. White Mughals might dress like
the native and eat with him, but their allegiances were never questioned. And of course, in the period preceding the transfer of the Indian colony from the East Indian Company to the Crown following the 1857 revolt, the obvious economic motive of the Company had been sufficient, and since there had been no need for the constant justification that the purportedly moral imperative of the Empire demanded, Englishmen going native were not as disruptive to the order of things.

But under New Imperialism, as Steve Caton suggests, "for a political agent and representative of Western civilization[...] to go native represents a betrayal of country, cause, and even culture." Caton is referring here to Lawrence, whose assumption of Arab-ness was impelled at least in part by a desire to rule over the Arabs, as the following quote from Seven Pillars of Wisdom makes clear: "Leave your English friends and customs on the coast and fall back on Arab habits entirely. It is possible, starting thus to level with them, for the Europeans to beat the Arabs at their own game." Imagine then the consternation caused by an Englishman whose intimacies not only did not consolidate hierarchies, but threatened to disband them. The potential for democratization that Carpenter attributes to homosexuality in the following passage:

Perhaps the true Democracy rests, more firmly than anywhere else, on [Eros,] a sentiment which easily passes the bounds of class and caste, and unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society. It is noticeable how often uranians of good position and breeding are drawn to rougher types, as of manual workers, and frequently very permanent alliances grown up in this way, which although not publicly acknowledged have a decided influence on social institutions[...] and political tendencies. was not tenable in the imperial scheme of things. Remember that this was a decade obsessed with the transfer of power and the imperial desire to hold on to it. The educated native male was in a position to vie for a share in the structure of power, and therefore had to be undercut in a variety of ways, not only overtly through actual impediments in the way of his ascension to power, but also more insidiously, by making abortive and
perverse his potentially useful association with the Englishman, and by undercutting his self-worth by making him appear discursively pathetic.

As with the rape narrative, the coded account of homoeroticism upheld colonial logic: the burden of perversity was placed on the native male by labeling him effeminate, the transgression of the Englishman was shaded by encoding it, and since the phrase "going native" already denotes an expulsion from Englishness into nativity, the equation between race and moral rectitude was sustained. In fact, I would suggest that racial anxiety about miscegenation that fuelled the rape narrative also fed into the discursive coding of interracial homoeroticism. At a time when Englishmen were "going native" and natives were becoming "brown sahibs", there was a metaphorical miscegenation going on, a continuum was getting constructed between the two races, which was clearly untenable. A barrier was urgently required, and the white man who went native became that barrier, the "outside inside interiority," as Diana Fuss says, that makes "the articulation of the latter possible, a transgression of the border which is necessary to constitute the border as such."80

Thus, Englishmen who tended towards forming intimate relationships with native men were met with a discursive battery against their imperative, but if they chose not to heed the stigma, they took on what Mary McIntosh calls the "homosexual role." This is a "specialized, despised role" a label of deviancy which functions to keep up the barrier between acceptable conduct and unacceptable behavior and keeps "the bulk of society pure in rather the same way that the similar treatment of some kinds of criminal helps keep the rest of society law-abiding."81 Therefore, I would argue that homoerotic discursive instances do not automatically imply the "impact of narrative on a productive
disordering of binary dichotomies,” because the presence of homoeroticism does not undercut the discourse of alterity, as Suleri and others seem to suggest, but indeed, reinforces it.

I am not suggesting that there was an actual directive, a policy that dictated this sort of a coding of homoeroticism or the homosexual role, or that fiction writers were the medium of the implementation of that policy, but that what looks like resistance at the first sight may have already been co-opted in the service of the power it had meant to resist, and one must therefore be careful before celebrating it for its liberatory promise. In saying this, I am not making a claim for the absoluteness or the imperforateness of power; in fact, in the subsequent chapters I will demonstrate how the Indian nationalist movement provided a counter discourse to the colonial power, using its own terms to inaugurate a subject position that subverted, even while utilizing, the very tropes that were used by colonialism to perpetuate itself. What I hope to have accomplished in the preceding pages is first, a substantiation of my claim that the obvious narrative of rape and the covert one of homoeroticism were imbricated in so many ways that one cannot necessarily be claimed as more liberating than the other, and second, a demonstration of the manner in which “going native” came to stand for homosexuality, becoming a space where racial and sexual fears collided head on.

I find it interesting that while postcolonial criticism has not been quite alert to the homosexuality encoded in the description of going native, a lot of postcolonial fiction has been quick on the uptake. There are numerous instances of homosexual Englishmen who are described as having gone native in the fiction of British writers as well as that of Indian writers in English. Roy, for instance, describes in God of Small Things Kari Saipu,
“The Black Sahib. The Englishman who had ‘gone native.’ Who spoke Malayalam and wore mundus. Ayemenem’s own Kurtz. Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness. He had shot himself through the head ten years ago, when his young lover’s parents had taken the boy away from him and sent him to school.”82 Then there is Siddhartha Dhanvant Sanghvi’s recent The Last Song of Dusk, which not only claims that “the whole bloody point of the Raj” was to “ram someone in the rear. Hard. Against their will. For as long as they lasted,” but in a more reciprocal and gentler (though purple-prosed) instance of place-reversal, describes the sexual partner of Edward, a Britisher who has gone native: “Each night his stallion’s legs shuddered as he rammed Edward again and again, such gentle violence, such refined debauchery, until all of Edward melted like the frost on the grass and he felt he was everywhere: a liquid of flesh spreading over the bedsheets, over the Indian’s sweating body, over the floor.”83 There is also John Mist of Bharati Mukherjee’s The Tree Bride, again an Englishman described as having “gone native”, and again a homosexual man. From British fiction there is the English policeman Robert Merrick in Paul Scott’s The Raj Quartet and Harry Hamilton-Paul in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust. All these narrative instances, however, are not coded, and I would like to concentrate on those that are, so that I may provide literary instances of my discussion above. In the next chapter, then, I will read A Passage to India and Burmese Days in order to decode the homosexual in the text, and to examine the degree to which such an excavation of homoeroticism grants us critical liberation.
Endnotes for Chapter One:

8 Mrinalini Sinha correctly points out that studies like George Mosse’s examination of masculinity and nationalism in the 19th century, Catheine Hall and Leonore Davidoff’s work on the ideology of separate spheres in Britain at the time etc. suffer because they focus on metropolitan concerns about these issues, without considering them in the light of the history of British imperialism.
10 One of the main causes of this discontent was the Doctrine of Lapse, following which Lord Canning announced in 1856 that the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Jafar’s son would not be allowed ascension to the throne. The same year, under the General Services Enlistment Act, Indian soldiers or sepoys had to serve wherever directed, even though a sea voyage was against Hindu beliefs. Further, conversions to Christianity were being actively encouraged, with a recent law allowing the inheritance of ancestral property after proselytization.
11 See Jenny Sharpe’s reading of Edward Thompson’s *The Other Side of the Medal in Allegories of the Empire*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
13 Sharpe, 2.
15 Sharpe, 2.
16 Ann Stoler. "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia." *Gender and the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the*


19 The “odd” or “redundant” woman referred to the growing number of married women in late nineteenth century England, who had to remain single due to the imbalance in the numbers of men and women. However, as her very naming suggests, this woman was stigmatized variously as mannish and homosexual, and often came to stand for the New Woman. Elaine Showalter describes this woman thus: “the popular image of the odd woman conflated elements of the lesbian, the angular spinster, and the hysterical feminist.” See Sexual Anarchy: gender and Culture at the fin-de-siècle (New York: Viking, 1990), 23.


22 The Contagious Diseases Act of 1860 made it mandatory for women suspected of being prostitutes to submit to being examined for venereal diseases. Concern over the conditions of prostitutes and the increase in child prostitution called for amendments in the original act. The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act sought to offer greater protection to British women through various measures that included raising the age of consent for consensual sex for girls from thirteen to sixteen.

23 http://www.gayhistory.com/rev2/events/1885.htm

24 There were of course, other trials between 1901-6 that led to homosexuality-related legislations, such as the Dublin Castle Officials scandal in 1884, Britain’s introduction of flogging for homosexual soliciting in 1889, and several other campaigns to curb soliciting. See Christopher Lane. The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 158.


27 Bristow, 2.


29 Bristow, 11.

30 Lane, Ruling Passion, 159. Jeffrey Weeks also suggests that homosexuality was threatening because it was linked to fears of imperial decline. See Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Society Since 1800. (Longman Publishing Group, 1989), 107.


32 Sinfield, 26.

Stoler, 87.


See Lane, *Ruling Passion*, 157-8. An example of such a scandal is the Silberrad controversy, where a white man was accused of sexual impropriety with the Kenyan girls he had "adopted."

Levine, "Venereal Disease," 596.


Levine, "Venereal Disease," 596.

Suleri, 3, 7.


As the differing but related theories propounded by Levi Strauss, Gayle Rubin and Eve Sedgwick suggest, women are a currency of transaction between men. The English having access to native women but not allowing any reciprocity, increased, as it were, their stock.

Sainsbury, 170.


These authors have been studied by Young, 106-7; 143. However, degeneration was not an outcome of miscegenation alone; an extended inhabitation in the colonies could do the trick, as Richard Meinertzhagen's Kenya Diary (1902-1906) suggests: "my experience shows me that it is but a small percentage of white men whose characters do not in some way or other undergo a subtle process of deterioration when they are compelled to live for any length of time among savage races and under such conditions as exist in tropical climates. It is hard to reset the savagery of Africa when one falls under its spell. One soon reverts to one's ancestral character, both mind and temperament becoming brutalized. I have myself felt the magnetic power of the African climate drawing me lower and lower to the level of a savage." See Lane, *Ruling Passion*, 160.

Said, 206.


Sainsbury describes how even bowel movements became the subject of correspondence between the English, who attributed, for instance, constipation "to India, and not to their own decisions about what they would eat." She further suggests the inescapable conjunction of the domestic and the political when she states that a "well-ordered domestic establishment is both essential to the public business of government and
to the private well-being of the individual. The home is, in fact, elsewhere, in colonial
discourse explicitly figured as a microcosm of the British empire." Sainsbury, 176.
50 Philip Holden and Richard Ruppel. (eds.) Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and
Colonial Literature. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xv.
51 Ibid., 137.
53 Joseph A. Boone. “Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism”. PMLA.
110.1 (January 1995), 90.
54 Jonathan Goldberg. Sodomities: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities (Stanford
University Press, 1992), 119. Also see Alan Bray. Homosexuality in Renaissance
55 See Jeffrey Weeks. Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain From the Nineteenth
56 Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, 97-98.
57 Lane, Ruling Passion, 2.
58 John H. Field. Toward a Programme of Imperial Life: The British Empire at the Turn
59 Ibid., 233.
60 Ibid., 229-235.
61 Benito Cereno, Sec. 4. http://cla.calpoly.edu/~jbattenb/benitocereno/section4-bc.htm
62 George L. Mosse. Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality
in Modern Europe. (New York, 1985), 36.
63 See Rudi Bleyls. The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behaviour
Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1980. (New York: NYU
Press), 150.
64 See Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, 111.
65 Frantz Fanon. Black Skin, White Masks. Charles Markmann (trans.) (New York: Grove
66 Bristow, 10.
67 Sedgwick, 185.
68 Catherine Rottenberg. “Passing: Race, identification, and Desire.” Criticism. 45 (2003),
436.
70 Sedgwick, 169.
71 Sharpe, 67.
72 Lane, The Ruling Passion, 173.
73 Sedgwick makes an argument for the significance of discovering alternative codes
when she says that one must read for meanings other than the ones provided by “codes
most readily available to us.” She adds: “We needed for there to be sites where the
meanings didn’t line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with
fascination and love.”(3) See also Joseph Boone’s discussion of the usefulness of
74 Dawson, 48.
75 Lane, The Ruling Passion, 3.
According to Lane, we are in fact “reaching a point where no [enigmatic narrative] moment can appear without “queer” significance...textual opacity has become exclusively a queer issue, and every instance of narrative difficulty a site of undeclared sexual deviance (Lane, Burden of Intimacy, 225).

Steven C. Caton. Lawrence of Arabia: A Film’s Anthropology. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 161.


CHAPTER TWO

The Homoerotics of “Going Native” in *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days*

Studying *A Passage To India* and *Burmese Days* together is a profitable critical enterprise: there are sufficient similarities between the two to warrant their juxtaposition, and enough differences that they don’t seem reiterations of similar ideologies by like-minded individuals. The former, published in 1924, was the last lengthy fictional work completed by E.M. Forster;¹ the latter, published a decade later, was the first fiction that George Orwell wrote and published. Both novels were critical of the functioning of the empire, but while *A Passage* received a lot of attention, *Burmese Days* failed to make an impact – an initial reception that adumbrated subsequent critical interest. *A Passage* is one of the most frequently studied of the novels written during the colonial period (its popularity rivaled, perhaps, by Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*) and certainly the critical favorite within Forster’s oeuvre. *Burmese Days*, on the contrary, has received scant critical attention even within Orwell’s works. It is only recently that this novel has begun to be studied for its political insights and not just for intimations of biographical details that it was examined for earlier.

The differences that surrounded the creation of the two novels are numerous. Forster was in India for two brief visits, each a few months long, prior to the publication of *A Passage*, and during the second visit he was employed as a private secretary to an Indian Maharajah. Orwell, on the other hand, was implicated in the imperial enterprise to a greater extent (or at least to a closer degree) than Forster: he was born in India, went to England for his education when he was five, and returned to the colonies (Burma) for a
further six years to work with the Indian Imperial Police before he wrote *Burmese Days*. However, it seems as though Forster, as a homosexual man who found sexual expression and experience in the colonies denied to him in England, was more interested in maintaining the status quo than Orwell, who, at least in part, "epitomized the complex feelings of those young educated British who found they could no longer justify involvement in the mechanism of Empire." Most significant, for my present study, is the fact that unlike Forster, with his interracial homosexual liaisons, Orwell had a native mistress while he served in Burma, and he was openly disdainful of homosexuals. A *Passage* and *Burmese Days* more than just illustrate their respective authors' sexual outlooks and proclivities; they are arguably structured around these inclinations.

I have found it necessary to enumerate these differences in order to demonstrate and subsequently resolve a contradiction: despite the very different ideological bents of the authors, especially so far as their views on sexuality are concerned, why do *A Passage* and *Burmese Days* participate in and further the same imperial sexual dogma using the same preferred imperial narrative idiom? I will attempt to resolve this paradox through a close study of the two novels. In the process, I hope also to provide literary substantiation of my argument that decoding the narrative of homoeroticism does not guarantee the liberation that the narrative of rape forecloses, because both are harnessed to pull the weight of the same imperial ideology. These two novels will also illustrate my claim that being "non-pukka" or "going native" and having interracial homoerotic intimacies were related concerns, the former frequently serving as a code for the latter. Through an investigation of these issues, I hope to further my larger argument about the use-value of homosexuality to the formation/consolidation of a nation, demonstrating that
far from shattering “the British national allegory”, homosexuality had immense use-value in the British national enterprise.

The question of the intended or original meaning of a text is already a very thorny one, and it becomes even more complicated when one studies a social/political/cultural process through a work of fiction, with its refracted relation to reality, as I am doing. Theories seek to address this question by relating literary texts to the historical conditions of their production or reception by focusing variously on the author, the text, or the reader. My method is more integrative: I concentrate upon the unconscious element of the literary texts I study, but I also take into account the manifest literary conventions and narrative codes of the time as well as the authorial preoccupations that find expression in the fiction. My contention is that while fiction may fabricate and distort reality, it also distills and highlights it, and it is entirely possible to arrive at a historical truth through a careful reading of fiction. In this regard, three related ideas from theories of literary analysis are particularly urgent to my methodology: Raymond William’s formulation of “structures of feeling”, Michel Foucault’s conception of a “discourse” and Pierre Macherey’s notion of the “unconscious” within the text.⁴

Williams contends that the intellectual and imaginative work of a period echoes the social consciousness of that period, its humdrum lived reality, without being able to entirely contain it. Literature thus records “structures of feeling,” an impression of reality that is “naturally drawn upon” in the creation of a work of art in order to communicate to the audience of a particular time. It is possible, according to Williams, to arrive at the structure of feeling of a period by identifying the literary conventions of that period and by distilling its emotional center. Macherey makes a similar argument when he says that
while fiction is never simply mimetic, it does "tell us what a period thinks about itself" because "[t]he writer, as the producer of the text, does not manufacture the materials with which he works": in other words, the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of a particular text are responsible for both the conscious message as well as the unconscious element within it. Similarly, Foucault offers a text-centered theory that nevertheless makes an analogous argument in its claim that the 'truth' of a period is so designated by the available linguistic, cultural and political formations of a time. Discourse, according to Foucault, is directly implicated in making/enforcing meanings and thus in articulating the 'truth' of a particular period or culture; it is therefore one of the more pervasive though less tangible instruments of power.

Despite being unanimous in their contention that the meanings contained within texts are refracted and crystallized by their historical contexts, each of these three literary critics suggests divergent textual practices. Williams points to a reality within the text that it already seeks to convey, while Foucault points to a reality within the text that it primarily seeks to enforce. Macherey, on the other hand, points to a split in the text between what the text says and what can be said about it. My attempt will be to be attentive to all three modes of literary analysis—the structures of feeling within the texts that point to a manifest historical social/cultural circumstance or idea, the Foucauldian discursive instrumentality of texts seeking to enforce a particular truth, as well as the unconscious element that reveals a very productive incoherence in the texts—while paying particular attention to the third. Since my argument requires declouseting the homosexuals in the two novels under consideration, decoding the signifier of homosexuality, and delineating the disguised employment of the homoerotic narrative in
the services of the empire, I find it useful to put into praxis the argument that the "meaning of a novel, its real relationship with the ideologies that determine it, is to be found not in what it says but in what it cannot permit itself to say, the critic’s task being to reconstruct that hidden or repressed meaning by attending to the gaps, hesitancies, incoherencies that betray the effort of repression."5

A Passage to India:

Forster commenced work on A Passage to India in 1912, the year he visited his friend Syed Masood (to whom the book is dedicated) in India for a few months. However it was only over a decade later, and two years after another short visit to India in 1922, that Forster completed and published the novel. The book became an instant success, and was acclaimed by both English and Indian readers. Predictably enough, the only category of readers it left cold was the Anglo-Indians, some of whom are reported to have read it on their passage back to India, and to have become so incensed that they hurled copies of it overboard. At the same time that Anglo-Indians lambasted the novel for being "so full of technical error—indeed, so preposterous, that it cannot even be called a travesty", Indians praised it for its honesty and accuracy, and predicted that the British in India would "hate Mr. Forster for giving them away."6 Subsequent critical judgment was less sharply divided along British/Anglo-Indian/Indian lines, but the majority opinion remained positive on all sides, and Forster is celebrated most of all as an antidote to "that acrid – nationalism that literary men too often felt called upon to express in a time of crisis"7 and is placed at various points in the graph between anti-imperialist and half-hearted imperialist.
Even the homosexual aspect of Forster’s novel is now being enlisted in aid of this benign reputation; the homoeroticism between Aziz and Fielding is becoming the new promise in colonial relations: their relationship is commended as being far more equitable and less exploitative than the language of rape employed in so many colonial narratives. Forster is also credited with questioning the racialized narrative of rape, directly by making abortive Adela’s claim that Aziz attempted to rape her, and indirectly by suggesting a new and harmonious possibility of race relations in the intimacy between Aziz and Fielding. I want to argue that in both instances, first by narrating the admiration or attraction that Adela felt for the physical appearance of Aziz in the vocabulary or rape, and secondly by negating the possibility of a relationship between Aziz and Fielding, Forster not only participates in the ideology of his time, but actually furthers it.

Aziz, the Indian protagonist of Forster’s novel, is believed to have been modeled on Masood, a “handsome six-footer, bright, sportsmanly and outgoing[...]paragon of the Indian deemed valuable to the British Empire” for whom Forster harbored affection as well as attraction. He met and became friends with Masood in England very soon after he graduated from Cambridge, and while Masood himself was enrolled at Oxford. “With such credentials,” Robert Aldrich says, “it is not surprising that Masood attracted Forster’s attention. His exuberance, charm and dynamism added to the fascination, though Forster also realized that Masood could be light-headed, extravagant, pompous, and full of himself.” Masood seems to have been aware of Forster’s general sexual proclivity, although critics differ in their evaluation of Masood’s reaction to Forster’s declarations of love. Aldrich believes that Masood “was tolerant of homosexuality and fond enough of Forster to take his declarations of sexual love in his stride”; while Tariq
Rahman, in an extensive study of the biographical homosexual elements in *A Passage*, claims that “a clash of antithetical cultural mores” impeded a communication of homoerotic desire between the two men. Rahman argues that Masood’s conception of homosexuality was Greek, or ephebophilic, while that of Forster was androphilic, so although Forster’s declarations were of passion, not friendship, “[f]or Masood, this was the kind of language one could use with close friends with no hint of a sexual undertone at all.” Making a rather sweeping statement, Rahman claims further that “in India a large mustached man can never be given a passive role.”

If we discount Rahman’s rash ahistorical generalization, his particular claim that Forster’s homosexuality was androphilic seems historically verifiable. As we have seen in the previous chapter, late nineteenth century saw a virulent antipathy toward the least suggestion of effeminacy, and Forster too was complicit in resolutely distancing himself from the dreaded stigma. As Joseph Bristow notes, “the influence of the Wildean dandy-aesthete would be wholeheartedly repelled by Forster, in a series of fictions written across a period of seven decades.” However, as several critics have pointed out, Masood, when transfigured into Aziz, is made consciously less masculine. He is described in a serious of opposites when we first meet him: “He was an athletic little man, daintily put together, but really very strong. Nevertheless walking fatigued him”.

He is constantly referred to as a “boy” while he is conversing with friends at the start of the novel. Subsequently, adjectives suggestive of frailty are repeated to reinforce our impression of a dapper, rather good looking little fellow: while recounting her “little escapade” at the mosque, for instance, Mrs. Moore describes him to Ronny as “Rather small, with a little moustache and quick eyes”(29). Rahman, seemingly unconscious of
the paradoxical effeminization of Masood, despite his awareness of Forster's androphilia, suggests that Aziz was dwarfed and purged of "hard un congenial qualities" of Masood so that he could function within the text "as the weak and lovable beloved". The original, claims Rahman, would have been impossible to be made into "a soft lovable homosexual object in need of Fielding's protection and melting all warm hearts with love." 13

According to Robert Young, the feminization of indigenous peoples encouraged illicit attractions. 14 My contention, however, is that this feminization explained illicit attractions, and served to exonerate the colonizer of the accusation of perversity by laying the charge of non-normativity at the native door. In the exchanges between Fielding and Aziz we find that it is only the latter who continually mentions and even longs for sexual excitement—even though it is heterosexual excitement—from his description of breasts "like mangoes" to his persistent focus upon the unattractive body of Adela and his proposed visit to prostitutes in Calcutta. The sexuality attributed to Aziz seems unrestrained, even excessive, when compared to the conservative responses of Fielding to Aziz's sexual enthusiasm. Fielding's reactions to Aziz's suggestions are either prudish (as when Aziz talks about anonymous women with breasts like mangoes) or actually angry (when the woman Aziz refers to is Adela) but he never himself speaks of any analogous desire. While Fielding's reticence about (hetero)sexual pleasures contributes to the coded homosexual substratum of the novel, its more overt and visible effect is to desexualize Fielding even as it makes the sexuality of Aziz stand out in stark relief.

Restraint, in fact, seems to be the base-note of Fielding; just as excess is the defining characteristic of Aziz. The latter leaps between emotional peaks, he can be rude one moment and effusively friendly the next, the smallest thing can plunge him into
gloom or upcast him into fervid excitement. When he meets Mrs. Moore at the mosque, for example, he is at first suddenly and “furiously angry” and in the very next breath apologetic and delighted at having made her acquaintance. He repeats this pattern when Fielding comes to visit him while he is sick, ignoring him and sending him away at first, and then recalling him and sharing deep confidences with him, even showing him the picture of his wife to seal the bond of their “brotherhood”. Fielding, on the other hand, is almost a stoic in his expressed reactions and often even in his felt emotions. He wishes, in his exchanges with Aziz, “that he too could be carried away on waves of emotion” (127). He is never flustered or unduly excited, and the contrast between the two men is shown again and again, as, for instance, on the occasion of the arrest of Aziz. Fielding takes in the situation calmly, attempts to reassure Aziz, and in a very businesslike way, proceeds to do what he can about the situation. He is forthright about his support of Aziz’s innocence, unruffled about his ostracism from the English community, and all said, a very different being from the blubbering Aziz, with his cowardice at attempting to run away from the event of his arrest and his weakness in the face of the charges that are brought against him. The argument can be made, of course, that there is much more at stake for Aziz than there is for Fielding and the latter can therefore afford his calm, but their respective reactions are less the demands of plot than expressions of their characters. In other words, if their places were to be reversed, we would hardly expect a commensurate reversal in their reactions.

When attempting to make an equation between masculinity and moderation, we must remember the context that forms the backdrop of this equation and lends it veracity. In the late nineteenth century, masculinity was expressed in terms of self-restraint in
general and a strictly disciplined sexuality in particular. Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff tell us that although masculinity was expressed as excess in the late eighteenth century, by the mid nineteenth century this notion was substituted by successful self-disciplining.\textsuperscript{15} Christopher Lane agrees and points out that in England, two ideals of masculinity existed concurrently: “the lower classes were expected to act out their manliness by demonstrating their sexual prowess; the upper classes were expected to affirm their masculinity through sexual distance, abstinence and self control.”\textsuperscript{16} Whatever class Englishmen belonged to back in England, while in India they were expected, and expected themselves, to act in accordance with the norms of the best classes of Englishmen. Therefore, when Forster draws attention repeatedly to the moderation of Fielding and the excess of Aziz, he is very consciously reiterating and participating in an imperial system of meaning.

The net immediate consequence is the juxtaposition of an effeminate, oversexed, emotional native with a masculine, restrained, phlegmatic Englishman.\textsuperscript{17} This division of traits strongly indicates, but is not absolutely conclusive of the normativity of Englishness and the non-normativity of nativeness. Not only does the “[s]easoned and self contained” (210) Fielding need to be made less \textit{responsible} for the homoeroticism the novel goes on to explore, he must also be made less \textit{English}. Therefore, just as we first meet Aziz in a homosocial environment, “chattering” and dreamily reciting Persian poetry, lying “in a trance, sensuous but healthy”(6), we first come across the similarly “athletic and cheerful” Fielding at the “Bridge party” while he is intent upon doing things that set him apart from the other Englishmen. He is popular among the natives and so friendly with them that when it was time for refreshments at the party, unlike all the other
Englishmen he “did not move back to the English side, but burnt his mouth with gram. He talked to anyone and he ate anything”(46). As the friendship between the two matures, so does Fielding’s non-pukkaness. While earlier he is shown eager to converse and eat with the natives, by the time he decides to join forces with Aziz against the English community, he is described as having progressed much further into nativeness: “He receives deputations from the bazaar,” we are told, “and they all chew betel nut and smear one another’s hands with scent. It is not easy to enter into the mind of such a man.”(218) The earlier association of Fielding with the natives is evanescent—it takes place in a short-lived party—but the subsequent association is far more permanent, leaving behind, as it were, a perceivable mark. Not only is Fielding now smeared with native scent, he also chews betel nut, which leaves behind a tell-tale stain and therefore signifies differently from eating gram.

The idea of “going native” here is different from the will to knowledge that novels like Kim popularized. According to Francis Hutchins, “[a] popular stereotype in British fiction[...]is the Englishman elaborately stained with walnut juice who can pass with complete freedom and anonymity along the byways of Indian society. This genre[...]appealed to the British presumption that Indian society held no secrets for them[...]Englishmen constructed a myth of their own omniscience, and a further myth which presumed to describe the ‘real India’.”18 The difference between the benign or pretend variety of going native and its dangerous strain lies in the distinction between the praiseworthy ability to identify the native and the deplorable tendency to identify with him. Any ambiguity regarding the classification of Fielding’s act of going native is removed when his earlier claim that he knows “all about” Aziz but does not know him is
replaced by his willing and complete participation in the tribulations of Aziz. "You have sunk to the level of your associates" the Collector tells him, voicing the opinion of the English community "you are weak, weak, that is what is wrong with you" (210-11).

According to Elaine Freedgood, Fielding is "far from 'going native' in this choice [of siding with Aziz]. Forster carefully represents his national and racial subjectivity as different from but no less durable than that of his countrymen: it remains intact and separates him from both the hysterics of the Anglo-Indian herd and the even more emotionally overwrought Indians."19 However, the issue is not so much whether Fielding actually goes native, but that he is perceived as doing so by the Anglo-Indian community (the above description of Fielding's scented hands and so on is the description of McBryde, the police superintendent of Chandrapore), a perception Forster seems to want to encourage in his readers when he gratuitously puts an Indian child on the knee of Fielding as he sits in the court, and later rather pointlessly dresses him in uncomfortable native garb. Impressions were often more valuable to the empire than the underlying reality: anyone believed to harbor anti-imperial sentiments, for instance, immediately became a threat that needed to be managed, whatever the actuality of that belief. Therefore what I want to emphasize is not that Fielding went unquestionably and completely native—indeed, I will suggest that Forster left space for Fielding's non-pukkaness to be corrected later in the text subsequent to his marriage to Stella—but that Forster did use the both the obvious and the coded conventions of his time to suggest the dangers attendant upon going native. The argument that "Fielding's national identity is posed in opposition to the herd instinct", and that his identification with the native side of the rape issue has nothing to do with the idea of going native is true only so far as Forster,
himself sharing many of the characteristics of Fielding, could hardly imbue the charge of
going native with all the repugnance actually associated with it at the time. He does,
however, repeatedly express the imperial belief that mixing up with the natives “always
end[ed] in some indignity”(206) and that “nothing but disaster result[s] when English
people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially”(182). Forster also emphasizes the fact
that this indignity or disaster was not solely individual, but in fact redounded upon the
entire community. “[T]here’s no room for – well – personal views,” McBryde warns
Fielding, “The man who doesn’t toe the line is lost[...]he not only loses himself, he
weakens his friends. If you leave the line, you leave a gap in the line. These jackals[...]are
looking with all their eyes for a gap”(190).

It is true that there seems to be a criticism in A Passage of this immiscibility of
the two communities and a plea for less mutual suspicion: Forster is, after all exploring
the possibility of transcending racial barriers through all the main characters – Mrs.
Moore, Adela, Fielding and Aziz. The racism that impedes a free exchange between the
two races is also criticized in several passages in the novel. The problem, however, is that
Forster’s narrative ultimately underlines the impossibility of interracial social exchanges
that are uncircumscribed by racial distinction. Disaster and indignity do indeed result
when “English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially”: Adela suffers a (real
or hallucinated) sexual assault, Aziz is dragged through jail and court, and Fielding is
ostracized from his community and actually “offered[...]violence” by his own people.
And similarly, the choice of individuals to socialize with the natives does redound upon
the entire British community; when Fielding goes over to the native side, he does indeed
leave a gap. Perhaps it is his certainty about Aziz’s innocence that weighs in with Mrs.
Moore and with Adela, leading to Adela’s recantation of her accusation – and consequently, to a loss of face for the British.

Fielding, then, is portrayed as having “gone native” in the literal sense of the term, and Forster doesn’t contradict the negative valance that the designation came loaded with from about the late nineteenth century onwards. I want to now demonstrate how the idea of going native is also deployed by Forster in its more coded sense as related to, and even designating, homosexuality.

I have described in chapter one how the allegation of an Englishman having gone native or being non-pukka was described through certain attendant narrative markers, including ostracism from the English community and a loss of racial markers of whiteness. “Going native” also always signaled some kind of sexual impropriety. Given that heterosexual relations between Englishmen and native women were a trite fact of colonialism, it seems improbable that liaisoning with a woman would elicit the extreme reaction of expulsion from whiteness, both as a racial category and as a lived community. Therefore I suggest that when the allegation that an Englishman has going native is accompanied—as it often is—by a vicious rejection from the English community, a steady deletion of white characteristics and a compensatory embrace of markers of nativeness, and finally, a relationship with native men that is extraordinarily intimate, it is safe to assume that there is, to borrow a phrase from Lane, a homosexual in the text.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the nineteenth century “authority of a language that had been carefully expurgated so that [sex] was no longer directly named” but was perpetually “tracked down”\(^{20}\). That Forster was aware of a link between the unnamed yet relentlessly tracked homosexuality and the codedness of going native is
evident in another story that he wrote at the same time he began work on *A Passage*, but which, due to its homosexual content, got published only posthumously as part of the collection *The Life to Come and Other Stories*. "The Other Boat" tells of the intense, but ultimately tragic homosexual affair of an Englishman, Lionel, and a "half-caste" Moraes, who is called Cocoanut because of the shape of his head. In the following passage, Lionel has just told Cocoanut that his father’s "unspeakable" sin was that "He went native".

"With a girl or with a boy?"
"A boy? Good God! Well, I mean to say, with a girl, naturally – I mean, it was somewhere right away in the depths of Burma."
"Even in Burma there are boys. At least once I heard so. But the dad went native with a girl. Ver’ well. Might not there be offspring?"
"If there were, they’d be half-castes. Pretty depressing prospect. Well, you know what I mean. My family – Dad’s that’s to say — can trace itself back nearly two hundred years, and the Mater’s goes back to the War of Roses. It’s really pretty awful, Cocoa."
The half-caste smiled as the warrior floundered.(183)

The first significant element of the exchange between the two men is Cocoanut’s question about whether Lionel’s father went native with a girl or with a boy, as though "going native" were transitive, and made sense only in connection with an object, a girl or a boy. Equally instructive are the gaps and evasions that riddle Lionel’s reply. "A boy? Good God!" he says, as though the idea were preposterous: his surprise is excessive given the fact that he and Cocoanut have just shared physical intimacy. It was with a girl, "naturally", he says, contradicting the obviousness of this fact immediately by suggesting rather confusedly that his father went native “in the depths of Burma” and therefore it could only have been with a girl. Cocoa points out the speciousness of this argument, and then moves from the frightening specter of homosexuality to the equally “awful” possibility of miscegenated off-spring.

Miscegenation, as I have suggested earlier, was an anxiety that was impelled in part by the fear of racial degeneration: that the mixing of colored blood with white would
dilute the superiority of whiteness and finally make the white race indistinguishable from the other less fortunate races. The anxiety of maintaining racial supremacy was also related to the empire, the very foundation of which was based upon an argument of the English entitlement to rule as the greatest race of the time. Mixed race individuals, called Eurasians, were a bridge between the two races because they partook of characteristics of both – an untenable link that was continually defused by emphasizing the “worst of both races” moral fiber of Eurasians. Instead of functioning as bridges, then, Eurasians became dumpsters, powerless to protest the use they were put to because most of them hailed from the poorest classes of society.

However, in the late nineteenth century, there was a rise of another form of miscegenation: not literal, but metaphorical. Alongside the scattered Englishmen going native, there was a fast growing class of elite natives, the “brown sahibs”, intent on becoming English. While I will examine this class in detail in the next chapter, I do want to summarize here their effect on the empire, particularly their contribution to the (homo)sexual substratum of the phrase “going native”. Unlike Eurasians, this composite class comprised young members of some of the richest families in India who could afford an English education for their children, and often sent them to England for higher education. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw increasing numbers of Indians traveling to the metropole for studies, for qualifying the Indian civil services examinations and so on. An increased awareness of their own potential and qualifications vis a vis the Anglo-Indians combined in the elite native men with a greater understanding of the imperial political and economic exploitation of India. Their sense of being at par with the men who ruled them increased their expectations of being accepted as equals
when they returned home. Now since it was this category of Indian men whose very existence challenged the English claim to exclusivity—they were, to all appearances, like the English, eating, dressing, and talking like them, and often with better familial backgrounds—the danger they presented of constructing a continuum between Englishness and Indianness was imminent. In the words of Brian Axel, "we may discern, alongside a certain desire, a mounting sense of horror, indeed a morbid anxiety, around the figure of the double [Axel uses the term “double” to describe the brown sahib]. What had originally been envisioned as insurance against the dissipation of colonial rule in an era of expansion was transformed into first an articulate and critical yet still subservient class of people and then a very real threat to colonialism’s preservation."²¹

We have seen already how imperial discourse was quick to resignify circumstances threatening to it. The Indian rebellion of 1857 was discursively shrunk into a mutiny, and was made to showcase not native desire for freedom but their violence and sexual depravity. Eurasians were denatured so radically that far from being part English, they became in imperial commentary ridiculous caricatures immeasurably apart from the Englishness to which they so impractically aspired. The symbolically crossbred brown sahibs suffered a similar fate, and were cast in colonial discourse as wily “babus”, ludicrous, annoying and always abortive in their desire to imitate Englishness—much like the despised Eurasians, in fact. Hutchins notes the impatience of the British with the civilized pretensions of elite natives: “Englishmen sought to impose on Indians their own conception of what Indians were supposed to be like, so that now ‘[a] European magistrate reprimands a native pleader for appearing in court with his shoes on’—for acting, in other words, the way Englishmen were supposed to act rather than the way
Orientals were supposed to act."\textsuperscript{22} There were a host of pejorative connotations associated with babudom, which Mrinalini Sinha describes in \textit{Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly' Englishman and the 'Effeminate' Bengali}. As the title makes clear, one of these was a deplorable tendency toward effeminacy, as well as the 'unmanly' characteristics associated with effeminacy, such as cowardice: the Bengalee, Macaulay said for instance, "would see his country overrun, his house laid in ashes, his children murdered or dishonoured, without having the spirit to strike one blow."\textsuperscript{23}

The native elite was relentlessly discounted by the British, who soon adopted the attitude that this class of people was unrepresentative of the real India, and the concerns they voiced could therefore be ignored: British rule, the argument went, "spoke for the voiceless masses". Hutchins tells us that the "'real India' consisted of the ancient India of the countryside; and of retainers and dependents of British power [...] Indians who lived in cities, engaged in business and the professions, who were not dependent on British favor, without an interest in preserving for themselves a privileged position guaranteed by British might, were designated 'unrepresentative'"\textsuperscript{24} "There are some people who clamour for boons which it is impossible to give," noted Lord Curzon, "but the administrator looks rather to the silent and inarticulate masses."\textsuperscript{25}

Thus two of the ways to discredit the demands of educated Indians was to make them ridiculous and unrepresentative. A third step was to ensure that they did not obtain the boons that they clamored for through the Englishmen they were intimate with. "There was a saying among young Indians," Paul Scott says, that "friendships made with white men seldom stood the strain of separation and never the acuter strain of reunion on the Indian's native soil."\textsuperscript{26} The idea that Indians always wanted something from their white
friends and that they in fact employed all social exchanges and all claims of intimacy towards a furthering of their personal ambitions was, as the slightest acquaintance with colonial discourse reveals, a widely disseminated idea. By dwelling on the colonial privilege that Englishmen who were too intimate with natives stood to lose and contrasting it with all the personal investment in power that the natives stood to gain, imperial discourse made the politics of the empire and the vocabulary of exploitation and loss and gain intrude upon personal friendships.

The English paranoia about the motives of Indians expressing social interest was pervasive and evident enough to fracture most friendships between the two races. Where distrust of the natives was not enough of a deterrent for a sympathetic Englishman, he had to contend with the additional stigma of associating with a class stamped with the shameful and contagious label of effeminacy. However, where neither suspicion for the ruled race nor suspicion from the ruling race was strong enough to dissuade an Englishman from becoming intimate with natives, some form of desire surely played a not insignificant role. This desire was one of the most dangerous emotions as far as the empire was concerned. It signified the lining up of Englishness, to whatever small, individual extent, on the same side as the menacingly hybrid native elite (remember that romances between Englishmen and lower social classed in India “were brief and circumstantial. Longer-lasting friendships[...]were reserved for those of similar social standing”[27]).

Edward Carpenter and others had already popularized the notion that same-sex love was a potent force that could potentially “bridge the fatal gulf” between different classes and races of society. Carpenter, for instance, insisted that “homogenic” love could
create a bonding so firm that if homosexual love "became the normal thing the Indian
Empire [would] be built upon a rock so nothing can shake it." He quoted and seconded
the opinion of some "Mr. Beck" that

Incredible though it may appear, all degrees of friendship are possible between the
Anglo-Indian and his Eastern fellow-subject[...]To know the people, and to be trusted by
them that they will open out to us the inmost recessed of their hearts; to see them daily; to
come to love them as those who have in their nature but an average share of affection
cannot help loving them when they know them well – this is our ideal for the Indian
civilian. 28

The problem, of course was that emotional attachment with natives was hardly devoid of
threatening possibilities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the bridging
of the "fatal gulf" was not without its problems at the time that the empire saw natives
gathered over the other side all ready to clamber over to their privileged bank. So
Carpenter's claim that "as the ordinary love has a special function in the propagation of
the race, so the other has its special function in [...] the generation—not of bodily
children—but of those children of the mind, the philosophical conceptions and ideals
which transform our lives and those of society" 29 though undoubtedly reassuringly meant,
would have had quite the opposite effect, inducing anxiety instead of quelling it. Closing
the distance between England and India was, after all, hardly pleasant, as Fielding and
Adela tell us in A Passage:

"You can make India in England, apparently, just as you can make England in India."
"Frightfully expensive in both cases," said the girl.
"I suppose so."
"And nasty." (78)

Forster's novel participates lustily in the above issues. A Passage revolves, from
the very first moment, around the question of whether or not it is possible to be friends
with an Englishman. Aziz finds his friends heatedly discussing this question at the very
beginning of the novel, and though Aziz himself considers neutralism the best option and
ironically wants to have nothing whatsoever to do with the English, the others seem to reach the conclusion that friendship between the two races is feasible elsewhere, but absolutely impossible in India. Forster is aware of the English distrust of the motives of friendly Indians: Hamidullah, for instance, is rueful that although he was very close friends with an Englishman’s parents during his days at Cambridge, any attempt on his part to show friendliness would almost certainly be misconstrued: “He will probably think that I want something”(9). Similarly, later, the English collector, even as he attempts to be pleasant to the natives at his “Bridge party”, is perfunctory in his overtures because he remembers that “even the desirables wanted to get something out of him”(45). Forster also reveals the caricaturing of the native elite, the “Aryan brother in a topi and spats”(38) whose “latest dodge” is to cringe no longer in front of the English: “They used to cringe, but the younger generation believe in a show of manly independence”(33). The idea that the manly independence displayed by the native is only a dodge or a performance again betrays the English conviction of native unmanliness.

Forster is clearly aware of the imperial anxiety that is the source of opinions like “[w]hat you’ve got to stamp on is these educated classes”(205), as, for instance, when Mrs. Turton shrinks from the natives at the party because “she had discovered that some of the group was westernized and might apply her own standards to her”(43).\textsuperscript{30} Where Mrs. Turton’s discomfort is felt at an individual level, Ronny gives the larger political reason: “The educated Indians will be no good to us if there is a row, it’s simply not worth while conciliating them, that’s why they don’t matter. Most of the people you see are seditious at heart, and the rest ‘ld run squealing. The cultivator – he’s another story. The Pathan – he’s a man if you like”(39).
The belief that all educated Indians are either traitors or effeminate—and in either case, harmful to the Englishmen—was threatening enough alone, but was made even more frightening by the possibility that this individual seditiousness could translate into something larger and far more menacing. Major Turton, Forster says, “never realized that the educated Indians visited one another constantly, and were weaving, however painfully, a new social fabric” (55). Turton may not have realized it, but Forster did, and the imperialists did—and they also realized further that an Englishman’s support would compound the danger. Such support would not be merely an individual indiscretion, but would “leave a gap in the line” through which native infiltration would commence.

Given the above historical context (including the fact that Forster was close friends many influential writers and thinkers of the time, including Carpenter) and the numerous examples from A Passage that speak of Forster’s awareness of and involvement in imperial concerns, the discussion between Lionel and Cocoanut about going native “with a girl or a boy” that Forster depicts in the “Other Boat” cannot be interpreted as innocent or coincidental. Further, since Forster is aware of the signification of “going native” as a convention as well as a code, the fact that his narrative stains Fielding with “walnut juice” cannot but be seen as significant.

It is well known that homosexuality was a crime at the time Forster was writing, and it could therefore be expressed only through codes. Aldrich states, for instance, that

European homosexual desire manifested itself in certain identifiable but coded fashions[...]Hints, half-concessions, coded phrases, references to Ganymede, Antinous and other Greek figures, and praise for virile bodies and manly souls: such were ways that homosexual inclinations might be revealed to fellow initiates while concealed from the disapproving majority. (101)

Similarly, Rictor Norton points to the various discursive disguises that homosexuality was forced to adopt:
Male homosexual love is expressed in western literature through a maze of veils and half-truths, of subconscious ambiguities and deliberate obscurities, of symbols that conceal and allegories that reveal, of varying degrees of recognition, repression, denial, regrets, affirmation, and joy and celebration.

Forster was, of course aware of these codes, and he even employs several of them. My quarrel with him, however, is not that he expresses homosexuality as a code, but that he makes use of a code that entered the imperial discourse precisely because it disallowed agency to both the native elite and to the sympathetic Englishman who shared unofficial intimacies with the native. "Going native" veils not "praise for virile bodies and manly souls" but a shameful sympathy for the effeminate native; it connotes no affirmation or joy or celebration, only a denial of any investment of same-sex desire in imperial power.

The fact that Forster does make use of this negatively loaded attribute suggests his participation in and contribution to the imperial ideology, but even further, it reveals the pervasiveness of the ideology which allowed no vocabulary for interracial desire other than the one impregnated with disgrace and degradation. I would therefore also argue that despite the fact that Forster inflects the narrative of rape differently in A Passage—referring sardonically, for instance to McBryde's contestable (and derisively contested) declaration that "the darker races are physically attracted by the fairer and not vice versa", and Hamidullah's bitter censure about the one hundred and seventy million possibilities of who attacked Adela: "of course one or other of them entered the cave. Of course some Indian is the culprit, we must never doubt that"—the very fact that Forster employs the convention and the vocabulary of sexual assault and humiliation incriminates him in the ideology that he meant, perhaps, to challenge.

Albert Memmi argues that "[i]t is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual
relationships[...]Colonial relations do not stem from individual good will or actions, they
exists before [the individual colonizer’s] arrival, and whether he accepts them or rejects
them matters little.” Memmi’s description accurately summarizes the chasm between
Forster’s individual sexuality, his liberalism, and his discursive imperialism. The colonies
provided sexual opportunities for Forster that were foreclosed by the puritanism of
Victorian England. For personal reasons, then, Forster had an interest in supporting the
fact of the empire despite his criticism of some particular ways in which it functioned.
His exploration of the possibility of interracial alliances is therefore as individual and
sexual as it is political and imperial. Forster claimed his relationship to India was purely
personal: “It is on the basis of personal relationship that my connection with that strange
country rests. I didn’t go there to govern it or to make money or to improve people. I
went there to see a friend[...]The sense of racial tension, of incompatibility, never left
me. It was not a tourist’s outing, and the impression it left was deep.” The occasion for
his visit to India may have been personal, but the “incompatibility” that never left him
had its roots in the politics of the empire.

Freedgood argues that though Forster does not mention the political events in
Britain and in India between 1912 and 1924, the years of the commencement and
completion of Forster’s novel, “his new sense of Indians as “shits” may well be related to
the increasingly apparent vitality of the Indian nationalism.” This is, in fact, borne out
by A Passage, where a re/activated sense of racial and national identity in each induces
the final disunion of Aziz and Fielding. Very much like Forster, Fielding begins his
passage through India as “[n]either a missionary nor a student, he was happiest in the
give-and-take of a private conversation. The world, he believed, is a globe of men who
are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence"(46). He travels "lightly" until his affections are involved, at first homoerotically with Aziz, which precipitates the emphasis on his resemblance to the natives he socialized with and supported, and later heterosexually with Stella, which brings him back into the English fold, erasing markers of having "gone native" that had earlier stained him.

According to Lane, "far from resolving political distance into personal connection, interracial sexuality usually compels Forster’s characters to disavow or redefine the precise meaning of their sexual identities."35 I would add that it also calls for a parallel redefinition of their racial/national identities. The greater Fielding’s intimacy with Aziz and the more obvious his realigned allegiances, the more stark is his expulsion from whiteness. He is always an oddity, viewed suspiciously and not too well liked by Englishwomen, whom he neglects, and choosing instead to keep company with native men. Where imperial (not to mention masculine) decorum demands a choice between Englishwomen and Indian men, to choose “to keep with” Indian men is, as Touval says, “for whatever racial, racist, sexist, British standards of behavior—necessarily reducible to, and can only be explained by, a desire for Indian men, a desire strong enough, at any rate, to be entirely consistent with ‘dropping’ the women.”36 That Fielding’s approach to interracial relations is sexually inflected, and is recognized as such, is also visible in the homophobic reaction of the Englishman to whom Fielding addresses his offhand observation that the white race is really pinko-grey. The addressee is “subtly scandalized; his sense of insecurity [is] awoken, and he communicate[s] it to the rest of the herd”(52).
Despite the dismay and unease of his compatriots, Fielding is initially a member of the English club (I will discuss the significance of clubs and of club-memberships in greater detail in the next section) and is spoken to civilly. However, once his alignment with the other race becomes clear following the attack on Adela, he is evicted from the club. Although it is Fielding himself who tenders resignation of his membership, he is "propelled, a little more quickly than is natural" out of the men's room at the club, significantly, into the room where the women are playing cards. Like the natives, Fielding is no longer welcome at the club. He is reinstated later, but at the behest of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province who deplores racial prejudice and who praises Fielding for having taken "the broad, the sensible, the only possible charitable view from the first" (emphasis mine, 287). His reception at the club is thus icy, forced on both sides by the wish of the Lieutenant-Governor.

The friendship between Aziz and Fielding therefore is an interruption not only of heterosexual possibilities between Fielding and English women, but also of English homosociality at the club. The breach that occurs when Fielding, knowing that the Englishmen's honoring of Ronny also implies a censure of Aziz and of India, refuses to stand up at Ronny's entry into the clubroom can be healed only after he marries an Englishwoman, a half-sister of Ronny. Then he becomes desirous of reconciliation with Ronny, and appears to have "come into line with the Oppressors of India to some extent" (345).

Aziz's sense of his identity as an Indian surfaces just as forcefully – and perhaps even induces an analogous feeling in Fielding. In the aftermath of the trial, he is not effusively grateful to Fielding for his support, as the earlier Aziz would have been. On
the contrary, he peremptorily dismisses English patronage: "if it was not for his black face, we would almost allow him to join our club." The approval of your compatriots no longer interests me, I have become anti-British, and ought to have done so sooner, it would have saved me numerous misfortunes", he says to Fielding, who, with a slight neediness, replies, "Including knowing me"(279). Their relative positions seem very nearly reversed: it is Fielding who is now dressed in the attire of the other's race, while Aziz has discarded all pretensions of Englishness, including his English clothes. In fact one of the reasons why Fielding does not want to "give in to the East" is because he is averse to becoming another kind of Mohammad Latif, in a "state of affectionate dependence" upon Aziz and India.37 Aziz now has the power to give or to withhold; it is he who now things of the English as always wanting something: "And then the note turned into the sort of note that always did arrive from the State Guest House. Wanting something"(331). Similarly, while earlier it was Fielding who had shaken some semblance of courage into the sobbing Aziz at the time of his arrest, now it is Aziz who asks Ralph to "pull [himself] together and be a man" (336)38.

Forster's narration of homoeroticism in A Passage to India is therefore based on the condition that the Indian man become less manly and the Englishman become less English. Aziz and Fielding can each regain what they have lost only once their renunciation of the homosexual ideal is ascertained. Forster is not any less incriminated in imperialism because he is part of a sexual minority, or even because his sexual needs, if not his liberalism, demands greater amity and less hostility between the colonizing and the colonized races. His presentation of sexual and colonial dilemmas is not liberatory simply because he presents a minority view: his lexicon is, after all, so completely
infused with imperial ideology and idiom that his textual resolution cannot help but be a
reinforcement of sexual and colonial normativity.

_Burmese Days:_

Orwell’s 1934 novel reiterates and crystallizes several preoccupations of its
famous predecessor. Despite the considerably different sexual and imperial propensities
of the two men, their use of similar narrative codes and conventions suggest more than
just coevalness, as I will attempt to show in this section. Since the novel has received
significantly lesser critical attention than Forster’s novel, and since the homosexual
subtext of this novel has not been as thoroughly unraveled as that of _A Passage_, my
attempt here will be to actually decode moments of homoeroticism in the text even as I
try to reveal Orwell’s employment of the ideology and vocabulary of imperialism, much
like Forster did before him.

Critics have tended to place Orwell on the cusp of colonialism and
postcolonialism, locating his value in the “profound” difference in perspective that his
novel denotes, claiming, like A. P. Thornton, that Orwell reflected the public school ethos
without believing in either the imperial idea or the imperial mission, or more recently,
like William Roger Louis, that Orwell, along with Forster, did not just symbolize mistrust
in the empire but actively “contributed to the anti-Empire spirit of the times” through
their novels. _Burmese Days_ was in fact rejected initially for publication in England
because of its vocal criticism of the empire, and was published there only after its
American publication by Harper. It is interesting that Orwell’s novel was criticized using
the same argument about accuracy of portrayal, the Orientalist “will to knowledge”, that
Forster’s critics used while condemning or celebrating *A Passage*. An early reviewer, Sean O’Faolain, found *Burmese Days* “very heavy-handed” and was uneasy with both the hyperbole and the factuality of the novel: “Mr. Orwell[...] gives incidentally so grim a picture of Burmese life that while one fervently hopes he has exaggerated, one feels that the outlines, at least, are true.”42 Another reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* located in the novel a reaction against the glorification of the orient: “The book[...] is written with a pen steeped in gall. That gall is merited, for these people exist; but a little balance would have carried more conviction. The inaccuracies are no worse than in pleasant books which idealize the East[...] And when he writes of their English superiors, that few of them work as hard or intelligently as the postmaster of a provincial town, he shows that he can hardly have mixed with the men who really run the country.”43

On the other hand, however, biographers find *Burmese Days* a valuable source for Orwell’s life in Burma. Flory, the English protagonist of the novel, is frequently read as a sort of disguised young Orwell, and biographers have accordingly painted Orwell’s youth in all the colors of shyness, loneliness and alienation that define Flory, even wondering if Orwell’s relations with Burmese prostitutes were as numerous as Flory’s – like Flory, Orwell was well known to have at least one native mistress.

All facts, historical and textual, concur in Orwell’s heterosexuality. He is known, in fact, to have been contemptuous of homosexuality, if not actually homophobic. He was similarly disdainful of effeminacy, and believed in the virtues of manliness, which he equated with physical prowess. Pacifism was not a philosophy that appealed to Orwell; he found in it echoes of cowardice, even homosexuality, and called poets like W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender “nancy poets” and “pansies”.44 *Burmese Days* is clearly a
vehicle for a lot of the individual opinions that Orwell articulated, as well as for imperial ideologies that willy nilly got secreted into the text.

*Burmese Days* tells two related stories. One is the story of Flory’s desire to marry a fresh-from-England girl, Elizabeth, in order to alleviate his loneliness and his sense of futility both as an individual and as an imperialist. The other is a chronicle of the petty political intrigues of a local magistrate, U Po Kyin, in aid of his ultimately successful desire to become a member of the local English club. There is romance here, and politics, and much like in *A Passage*, in *Burmese Days* too the question of whether the result of this dual theme is a politicization of individual relationships and desires, or an investigation of the politics of the empire through an exploration of its effects on the most private affairs of individual, is arguable. Orwell’s text, along with Forster’s, falls somewhere between the romance novel (in the plot structures of which, “a successful disarming of the threat [of dishonor] by the [English] girl is rewarded by marriage to a young Englishman who has undergone his own test of bravery and loyalty to the empire”45) and the adventure novel (which answered “a demand for ‘virile and rational’ fiction by men to counter what was deemed a flood of debilitating feminine literature”46 and was “widely read as a conduct book by both metropolitan and colonial audiences as a way of producing a normative masculine subject”47). While participating in the conventions of both genres, each of these novels also simultaneously undercuts them. The English girls here are hardly the conventional heroines of the romance novel: Adela is too unattractive and Elizabeth too unpleasant. The attempt to rescue, or at least to restore, the honor of the former is communal (and ultimately futile), and does not end in happy wedding bells. The rescue of Elizabeth is a farce—Flory saves her from lowering water
buffalos—and the sexual threats to her are un-disarm-able because they are either the result of her gold-digging promiscuity or represented by a white man: an uncle, in fact. The leading men similarly fall short of the adventure ideal, not least because of the homoerotic undertow that marks them “not pukka” and makes them as unheroic as the natives they consort with.

Perhaps *A Passage* and *Burmese Days* best represent what Mary Lousie Pratt has designated the “anticonquest” text:

> The strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment that they assert European hegemony. The term ‘anti-conquest’ was chosen because, as I argue, in travel and exploration writings these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era. The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the ‘seeing-man,’ an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.45

The anticonquest text grants an absolution to the imperialist by pretending that it speaks from outside the power paradigm, but the exoneration is a false one because the narrative cannot escape its own privileged position. In the case of *Burmese Days*, for instance, Orwell might well place Flory in the “contact zone” of Burma, and have him employ “autoethnographic expression”, or an acquaintance with the culture of the other, for all he is worth, but he must leave the ideological edifice of the ruling power as firmly emplaced at the end of the novel as it was at the beginning.

So we have Flory, an unlikely hero who has studied in a cheap imitation of a public school, and who is (perhaps consequently) only an imitation English gentleman. He is a marked man from the word go – and literally so. The “first thing that one noticed in Flory,” Orwell tells us, “was a hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down to his left cheek.” Blue like a bruise, this mark affects not just the physical appearance but also the personality of Flory, making him look “woebegone, battered,” and imparting
a “sidelongness [to his movements, as he manoevred constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight”].\textsuperscript{49} This markedness, according to Alok Rai, is a conventional imperial code used to brand an anti-imperialist.\textsuperscript{50} I would argue that Flory’s mark is a symbol of his political and sexual contrariety; it is another version of the “walnut juice” that was used to color brown the Anglo-Indians who had interracial homosocial relationships.

In view of Flory’s longing for Elizabeth and his sexual relationship with a Burmese prostitute, Ma Hla May, among others, it is important to unpack my claim about the sexual non-normativity, that, I argue, is at the heart of the character of Flory.\textsuperscript{51} The first thing to note about Flory’s relationship with May in particular and with native prostitutes in general is that they fill him with extreme aversion and disgust. When he makes love to May, Flory is so passionless as to be mechanical, so much so that May asks him: “Why is master always so angry with me when he has made love to me?” Flory’s reply is to ask her to “get out”; as soon as he is “done with her” in fact, he turns away from her, “jaded and ashamed”, and wants immediately to be left alone. The narrator tells us that May “had never learned the wisdom of leaving him alone at these times”(53-5), and Flory rebuffs her again and again, successively ruder, until he does succeed in driving May away. Again later, when he has broken with May, we find him desperate to shake her loose, with money—and threats—but, “the wretched woman would not leave him alone. She began to follow him up the road like a disobedient dog”(198).

In stark contrast to Flory’s loveless relationship with his mistress is his very intimate and loyal relationship with his native servant, Ko S’la, who first resents May’s
presence in Flory’s house, and subsequently declares to his friends his intention of quitting his master’s service if/when he marries Elizabeth. According to Aldrich,

European engaged servants who often lived in their houses and traveled with them, cooked their meals, washed their clothes and served as guides and interpreters. The proximity and constancy of contact necessarily created physical intimacy, especially as servants helped their masters wash and dress, and sometimes slept in their bedrooms. Ample opportunities for sexual intercourse thus existed. (99)

Ko S’la does help Flory wash, dress and eat; indeed his attendance on Flory is almost an exact replica of Ma Kin’s attendance on her husband, U Po Kyin. Ko S’la, moreover, goes the extra mile: he not only dresses Flory, but is also an expert at undressing him; he not only serves food to his master, but arranges scarlet hibiscus flowers on the table and fans Flory as he eats; he not only accompanies Flory on his jaunts, but carries him if they needed to cross a stream. We are told that he has tended Flory through bouts of fever, and men attending upon their sick male friends was, as Parminder Bakshi argues in another context, a homoerotic code, because it enabled the portrayal of tenderness between men in a bedroom setting. (52) Ko S’la is completely devoted to Flory, and doesn’t allow anyone else to tender personal services to him. Flory too reciprocates the regard; although he is often rude to Ko S’la and addresses him as a European master would a native servant, he is also unwilling to displease Ko S’la – as for instance when he sneaks in his shaving things prior to meeting Elizabeth at the club, knowing Ko S’la would disapprove of his shaving twice in a day. In fact, one of Flory’s very last thoughts before killing himself is of Ko S’la, whom he generously remembers in his will. And ironically (but also aptly) Flory’s passing away is finally mourned only by two native men, Veeraswamy and Ko S’la.

Different relationships in this novel code the homosexual relationship differently, but all of them ultimately produce a queered body. For instance, it is significant that the
two women that Flory is heterosexually involved with are rather boyish looking. May’s body is “straight as a soldier’s” (87), and so lacking of curves that when Elizabeth sees her, she wants to know if May is a man or a woman. Elizabeth herself has “yellow hair as short as a boy’s” (81), and Flory compares her hair with his own. The homoerotic undertow in the character of Flory, then, is coded, but it is still evident, just as it was in the case of Fielding. Although there are no intimate confessions of “brotherhood” or even liking between Flory and any of the native men he is intimate with, Flory does offer a paean to the beauty of Burmese men: “I always think they’re rather charming-looking, the Burmese. They have such splendid bodies! Look at that fellow’s shoulders – like a bronze statue. Just think what sights you’d see” (118). But the homoeroticism of Burmese Days becomes most evident when Orwell’s narrator draws attention to the “near naked mali[...] moving in the jungle of flowers like some large nectar-sucking bird” (19). We will remember in Orwell’s mali undertones of Forster’s scantily clad, beautiful and impассive punkah-wallah. In all these cases, the fact that the laboring male body seems the only male body that can be openly aestheticized is a further example of my argument about the threat of the erotic potential of homoerotic intimacies between English men and native elite males. Despite the homoeroticism of the narrative, then, the only relationships that are actually sexualized in the novel are heterosexual ones, even though Flory is clearly unhappy in both, wanting more than anything else, as we have seen above, to be left alone.

Flory’s constantly stated desire that May leave him alone is strangely at odds with the loneliness that so constantly dogs and overwhelms Flory. It is emphasized at every point, from his early youth as an imperialist, down to his very bitter end:
He was too young to realize what this life was preparing for him. He did not see the years stretching out ahead, lonely, eventless, corrupting[...]. The hot, blowzy country, remote from danger, had a lonely, forgotten feeling[...]. His youth was finished. Eight years of Eastern life, fever, loneliness and intermittent drinking, had set their mark on him. Since then, each year had been lonelier and more bitter than the last[...]. He had realized that merely to go back to England was no remedy for loneliness[...]. Alone, alone, in the sea of life ensiled[...]. He could not stay any longer in this deadly place, alone with his thoughts among the endless, mindless leaves[...]. Alone, alone, the bitterness of being alone! (ch.4,5)

Not only are the leaves “mindless” and uncompanionable, in the “lonely places in the forest” that Flory haunts, the birds are equally reminiscent of his isolation. Birds don’t flock together around Flory: “One bird fluttered out and perched alone on the topmost bough, a small greyish shape[...]. some other bird uttered a cry of ‘AH ha ha! AH ha ha!’ -- a lonely, hollow sound like the echo of a laugh”(56). In this mind numbing solitude, Flory naturally, but ultimately unfortunately, adjusts “better to ideas than to people”(116). If there is one thing that Flory longs and longs for, it is company: “If he had one person, just one, to halve his loneliness!”(57).

Ranajit Guha points out in his essay “Not at Home in the Empire” that the loneliness of liberal imperialists (like Orwell) was immense and absolute because the role that they were required to inhabit was precisely the opposite of the one they wished to inhabit. The loneliness of rulers separated completely from the people they ruled was compounded by the imperial attitude that “the roundness of colonial autocracy” had successfully been melded with “the squareness of metropolitan liberalism”. But while the anxiety of imperialists in the midst of alien peoples and places that Guha talks about may have contributed to Flory’s loneliness, the outpost of the empire is not entirely to blame: indeed we are told that Burma “could be a paradise if one weren’t alone”(180). Flory longs for companionship not in order that it may take him away from Kyauktada—going back to England, he is convinced, would not reduce his loneliness in the smallest
degree—but so he can share his attachment for it: “What fun it could all be, if only you had someone to share it with you! How you could love this country, if only you were not alone!”(152).

It is this deathly solitude that Flory hopes to keep at bay through his marriage with Elizabeth. However, whatever he is looking for in a spouse is definitely not based on sexual desire: “If you like, I'd marry you and promise never even touch you with my finger. I wouldn’t mind even that, so long as you were with me. But I can't go on with my life alone, always alone”(277). A strange sentiment in a man who is proposing marriage (albeit rather hopelessly) although it is entirely in keeping with his earlier conclusion that what he needed most urgently was a friend who would “share his inner, secret life[...]Who would help him to live with nothing hidden, nothing unexpressed. Someone who understood him[...]A friend. Or a wife?”(179) Even as he longs for a friend, or that “quite impossible she” (although given the “meat market”, as Ellis describes it, of the colonies where women allegedly came down in droves to hunt husbands for themselves, why is “she” so impossible?) Flory shudders at the thought of some “damned memsahib, yellow and thin” – though he ultimately proposes to a woman every bit the yellow, thin memsahib.

“[His loneliness] was so devilishly difficult to explain. It is devilish to suffer from a pain that is all but nameless. Blessed are they who are stricken only with classifiable diseases!”(179), says the narrator. What, though, is Flory’s unclassifiable disease? What is the “inner, secret life” that Flory wishes to share with a friend – or with a wife? It is not just to “talk, simply to talk!”(117), because Flory feels an emptiness when he talks, simply talks with Elizabeth. He clearly desires, in his marriage, an opportunity to express
something that he is otherwise prohibited from expressing. And this, we see, is his furiously bolted contempt for his compatriots, for the hollowness of the pukka sahib pose, for the imperialists’ obvious repugnance of the land and the men they ruled over. But Flory doesn’t always lock up this particular vault; in fact, we see him volubly expressing his darkest, most secret opinions in his conversations with his native friend, the anglophile doctor Veeraswamy. Flory loves being able to escape from the club to the doctor’s house: “Such a glorious holiday from them” – he motioned with one heel in the direction of the Club – ‘from my beloved fellow Empire-builders. British prestige, the white man's burden, the pukka sahib sans peur et sans reproche – you know. Such a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while”(37). The doctor is the only person, in the entire novel, with whom Flory can actually talk as freely as he wants to be able to do with the woman he wishes to marry. With Elizabeth, all he can talk is trivialities; what he really wishes from her is for her to be a sort of female Veeraswamy, with whom he can talk freely and frankly, “desiring her sympathy more than her caresses”(226).

Dr. Veeraswamy, like the doctor in Forster’s A Passage, is the native elite man who is perceived by the British community as a threat. U Po Kyin vocalizes that threat at several points in the novel: for instance, he points to the fact that the status of a native can be advanced and consolidated through social intimacy with Englishmen, then later sends anonymous missives accusing Veeraswamy of disloyalty, of making homosexual attempts on the Military Police drummer boy and of inciting the natives to rape and murder English women, the three threats that the native male was discursively portrayed as representing. The English are aware of the threat of the brown sahibs, or the babus, as Westfield’s comment suggests: “Office babus are the real rulers of this country now. Our
number's up”(32). More immediately and specifically for the English at Kyauktada, their club might soon be infiltrated by one such representative (and token) babu. It is important to understand the seriousness that the threat of native access to the club represented to the English community in order to understand the plot dynamics of Burmese Days – to comprehend, for example, the reason for Flory’s suicide and the anglophone doctor’s irreparable fall from grace.

In her essay, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere”, Mrinalini Sinha argues that English clubs in the colonies were modeled on, but were not faithful copies of their metropolitan counterparts. The latter were remarkable and desirable because they restricted membership to exclude women and the lower social classes, and thus constituted a homosocial alternative to the domesticity of the English home. Sinha cites the ungentlemanly reaction of a club member in England, who, when he saw an Englishwoman who had unknowingly entered the club, “snatched a notice from the wall and holding it in front of him, barred further progress to the intruder. The notice ran ‘Dogs and other noxious animals are not allowed in the Club.’” This is reminiscent of course of the notorious public signs in India, “Dogs and natives not allowed.” Thus, Sinha concludes that

the “European” ascription of imperial social clubs derived from their predominantly whites-only membership policy in which all elite Europeans, whatever their nationalities, were potentially included[...]On the one hand, white women were grudgingly accorded the status of being clubbable so as to prevent them from getting into trouble if left on their own. On the other hand, the alleged protection of white women from the unprovoked attention of Indian men also made them crucial determinants in the “unclubbability” of Indians[...]The colonial elaboration of clubbability functioned precisely to ensure the constitution of the colonizer as unique and exceptional, on the one hand, and the constitution of the colonized as perpetually still-to-be-redeemed, on the other.”(489-515)

In A Passage as well as in Burmese Days, the English club functions as a symbol of English collectivity, a space where all the members are English first and individuals
never, where rituals (like the playing of the English anthem) reinforce the need for communality as exiles, where acceptance stamps members with acceptance as imperialists and rejection brands even an Englishman as non-pukka: as, in other words, the enemy. In A Passage we hear about the derision of educated native babus at the club, a sort of mutual reassurance that the native elite were not threats, but just clownish pretenders, and the narrator notes that the native elite displayed "none of the babuisms ascribed to them up at the club[...]Individually it knew better; as a club it declined to change"(69). The club is where the English congregate when they feel menaced by the natives, and if someone (like Fielding, as we have seen before) refuses to play as part of the team, he is immediately ousted, and his membership of the club is revoked. The natives, on their part, are happy caricaturing any rituals at the club that they are able to observe because their acceptance as members is not even a possibility given the politics of the time Forster is speaking of. The narrative likens the native fascination with club rituals to the attraction of "shrines" – interesting, precisely because they are seldom opened.

By the time of Orwell's novel, however, most English clubs have native members, and the club at Kyauktada is therefore under political necessity to elect a token native member.58 Here again the club, despite being a "dumpy one-storey wooden building" is both "the real center of the town[...]the real seat of the British power" and the "spiritual citadel[...]the Nirvana"(17) for which natives pine in vain. According to Valentine Chirol, the racial exclusivity of clubs contributed to nationalist agitation in the early twentieth century,59 a claim that is substantiated in this novel by the desperation of natives to be elected members, either in order to secure their positions or to further their
power. Indeed the siege at the club is due ultimately to the fact that Englishmen like Ellis are ready to do everything in their power to bar native membership to the club, and local men like U Po Kyin are doing everything they can to become members of the club. For Kyin, in fact, salvation is postpone-able, but the “nirvana” of the club is an immediate necessity. For Ellis, on the other hand, allowing native membership is equivalent to ceding the superiority of the ruling race: “Ill die in a ditch before I see a nigger here,”(23) he says, and a little later, “We’ve got to hang together and say, ‘we are the masters, and you beggars—’ Ellis pressed his small thumb down as though flattening a grub—‘you beggars keep your place!’”(32). Veeraswamy presents a threat to this racist posturing because his “clubbability” is increased not only by his educational and professional qualifications, but also because he is socially intimate with an Englishman. Both Ellis and Kyin in their separate obsessions with the club and what its membership symbolizes realize this fact, and both attempt, for different reasons, to tarnish the credibility of the doctor and to shame Flory into dropping his friendship.

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke claims that the only “respect-worthy character” in Burmese Days is Dr. Veeraswamy and praises Orwell accordingly for his “broad-mindedness”60. I disagree, vehemently, because I find in Veeraswamy’s portraiture the same disparagement and ridicule that was the discursive answer of the empire to the menace of the brown sahibs. The discrediting remarks regarding the doctor would have been forgivable had they been uttered only by racist imperialists like Ellis or the intriguing Kyin. These are numerous enough in themselves, but the narrator (and therefore the novelist) also continually participates in tearing down the good doctor, whose only fault seems to be that he has dared to be educated enough to potentially
become the equal of the Englishmen in Burma. Veeraswamy’s friendship with Flory is the source of much anxiety, particularly for Ellis, who is certain “Very-slimy” wants to insidiously work his way into the English club through the good offices of Flory. The doctor’s qualifications are the first to be discredited by Ellis, for whom Veeraswamy is only a “black babu who calls himself a doctor because he’s done two years at an Indian so-called university” (24). The narration reinforces the impression that Veeraswamy’s educated pretensions are really quite hollow. Not only is he slovenly in his attire, but even his library is “unappetizing”, containing books that passed the doctor’s criterion of having “what he called ‘a moral meaning’” (37). His anglophilia crosses way over into the ludicrous and the fulsome. Even his sibilant speech is incongruous with his attainments: “beware of hiss calumnies”, he warns Flory about Kyin, “‘He iss a crocodile. And like the crocodile’—the doctor nipped his thumb and finger impressively; his images became mixed sometimes—like the crocodile, he strikes always at the weakest spot” (49). Veeraswamy’s speech is inferior even to that of the bearer’s at the club, whose polished “I find it very difficult to keep ice cool now” provokes an outburst from Ellis: “Don’t talk like that, damn you[...]Have you swallowed a dictionary? ‘Please, master, can’t keeping ice cool’ – that’s how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk English too well. I can’t stick servants who talk English. D’you hear, butler?” (26).

The friendship between the continually disparaged native doctor and the alienated imperialist Flory is couched in words which describe something illicit, almost perverted between the two. When we first see Flory call on Dr. Veeraswamy, for instance, he likens his visit to “a Nonconformist minister dodging up to town and going home with a tart” (39). Similarly when Ellis, furious at the merest possibility of the doctor being a part
of the club, "pawing everyone with his sweaty hands", goes off on a rant about why natives should not be let into the club, he insinuates that there is something perverse in Flory's friendship with Veeraswamy, and also that Flory secretly desires to invite the doctor into the club as a member. "Why else do you go to that oily little babu's house every morning, then?" he asks, "Sitting down at table with him as though he was a white man, and drinking out of glasses his filthy black lips have slobbered over – it makes me spew to think of it"(24).

Between Veeraswamy and Flory, there is a frank exchange of political opinions, an expression of personal insecurities, and the doctor even proposes to introduce Flory to his wife (much like Aziz's sharing of his wife's photograph with Fielding). The tenacity of Flory's intimacy with the doctor, despite attempts from Ellis and U Po Kyin to shame him into relinquishing the alliance, can be adequately explained only by some sort of desire between the two men. Flory therefore experiences something very like homosexual panic when he receives an anonymous letter that remarks upon his "friendship and intimacy with Dr. Veeraswamy[...]frequenting with him, inviting him to your house, etc"(77). Instead of making the letter public as he ought to have done, Flory immediately tears the letter into very small pieces because although the "danger of making it public was very slight, very nebulous[...]one must beware of nebulous dangers in India"(79).

It is because of this "nebulous" danger that the unassertive Flory initially is unwilling to stick his neck out for the doctor by proposing his name for native membership in the club. With the arrival of Elizabeth, and following the intimacy that develops between them, however, Flory does an unexpected volte face, and actually volunteers his promise of bringing up the doctor's name at the next meeting of the club.
He is himself surprised by his promise, and realizes that it has been enabled by Elizabeth. “Just by existing she had made it possible for him, she had even made it natural to him, to act decently”. On the surface of things, Elizabeth has brought “England—dear England” to the mind of Flory, “where thought is free and one is not condemned forever to dance the danse du pukka sahib for the edification of the lower races”(151). But also, by sanctioning a claim to heterosexuality “just by existing” in Flory’s orbit, she makes it “natural” for him to openly avow his friendship with the doctor.

What facilitates my homoerotic reading of Flory’s character is his manifest unmanliness. Flory, in this regard, is very different from Fielding, just as Veeraswamy is different from Aziz. Veeraswamy is less dignified than Aziz, but he is also less effeminate: he is a trifle dramatic and emotional, but not sexualized either through his physical appearance or his speech/actions. Flory, on the other hand, is effeminate—very unlike the courageous, confident and straightforward Fielding. However, the more effeminate he is, the more he is also marked in his proximity to nativeness. Whereas Fielding’s brownness is discussed codedly within the English community (and the novel), Flory’s is openly discussed. Orwell dispenses with any pretense that Flory’s alienation from the club is self-imposed or willed—as it was in the case of Fielding—Flory just does not fit. “I shouldn’t wonder if he’s got a lick of the tar-brush himself”, says the combative Ellis of Flory, “It might explain that black mark on his face. Piebald. And he looks like a yellow-belly, with that black hair, and skin the colour of a lemon”(34). Just as Ellis wants to boot out any potential “nigger” from the club, he threatens also to blackball Flory and revoke his membership of the club. Indeed Flory’s discomfort in the club, his silence there, his “half smile of a man never sure of his popularity”(33) – in other
words, his "unclubbability" marks him as far more proximate to the natives than to the other Englishmen, and it is only his display of English manliness during the siege at the club that temporarily replaces him back within the folds of the English club and community.\textsuperscript{61}

According to Daphne Patai,

The most important truth we can know about Flory is not that he hates imperialism and is disgusted by the racist remarks of his countrymen but that his separateness is seen, both by himself and by others, as a failure to be a man. By his appreciation of Burmese culture and his occasional defense of the natives, he has broken with the posture of the dominant sahib and thus muddied the clear distinction between Englishmen and inferiorized, feminized Burmese. This is why Ellis refers to Flory as a "nigger's Nancy Boy." The breakdown of racial and cultural segregation implies the breakdown of that more fundamental identity established by gender.\textsuperscript{62}

By smudging the dividing lines of race, Flory also dilutes his claim to manliness. He doesn’t have any English friends that we see, but he seems to be friends with several of the natives. He respects them and their culture, and they reciprocate his regard, offering him their very best – food, entertainment, and transport. Although his cowardice prevents him from expressing it, Flory is sympathetic with the natives and more often than not, aligned against the humbug of his own race. He is a pacifist (which, as I have noted before, stands for effeminism and homosexuality in Orwell’s lexicon), unwilling to confront Ellis’ accusations, unable to stand up for the doctor or for what he believes in.

The most evident symbol of Flory’s effeminacy is his attitude towards (and sometimes lack of aptitude for) the “manly” activities of sports and hunting. We see the gulf between Flory’s masculinity and the imperial definition of manliness best when Flory tries to imitate the virile Verrall by mounting the latter’s pony and trying his hand at polo. We are told that he is uncomfortable from the very start in front of the young, tanned and fit cavalry officer, who “filled him with a horrible sense of inferiority”\textsuperscript{(186)}, but he mounts the pony because he doesn’t want to appear as lacking in front of
Elizabeth. The outcome is predictably ignoble: Flory is thrown off the horse before he has even mounted it properly, his un-marked cheek gets a nasty cut, and worst of all, he is completely ignored by Elizabeth.

Flory is a better hunter than he is a sportsman, though he is very unwilling to hunt. Hunting was a very important imperial pastime, as Hutchins tells us, central to the production of English masculinity and to the control of English sexuality:

[T]here was nothing frivolous about such English pastimes as riding and pig-sticking. Active exercise of this sort was felt to have as important an effect on character as work itself. It produced “manliness,” by which was implied the ability to lead others as well as to control oneself[...]. Ugly lusts for power and revenge melted away and even the lust for women assumed—so it was said—reasonable proportions after a day in pursuit of pig.(43, 52)

However, neither of these imperially salubrious effects of hunting are visible in the case of Flory, who hunts because he is expected to, not because he wants to; though they do impress Elizabeth enough to stimulate a temporary “understanding” between them. Although Elizabeth finds Flory “unmanly” when he expresses unusual intimacy with and sympathy towards the natives (“She was perfectly certain that that was not how white men ought to behave[...]She had thought him a manly man till this evening”(110)), and when he talks philosophically about things she cannot comprehend (“that ‘highbrow’ talk that was at once unintelligible and disquieting”(176)), his masculinity completely redeems itself in her eyes when he tells her about his hunting experiences, and subsequently not only takes her out hunting, but also shoots a tiger: “If only he would always talk about shooting, instead of about books and Art and that mucky poetry! In a sudden burst of admiration she decided that Flory was really quite a handsome man, in his way. He looked so splendidly manly”(161).

The most obvious symbol of Flory’s blurring of the boundaries of race and gender (and consequently, in accordance with the logic of “going native”, also sexuality) is his
birthmark. This birthmark, we are told, intrudes itself upon Flory’s consciousness when he does something that he is ashamed of, although he is always more or less aware of it. The narrative, however, foregrounds his birthmark not only when Flory is conscious of having done something unworthy, but also when his actions appear contemptible to his watchful compatriots and when Orwell wants to point out his racial or sexual non-normativity. Flory himself remembers his birthmark most acutely when his cowardice or his sexual insecurity becomes conspicuous. For example, when Ellis abusively attacks Flory for his friendship with Veeraswamy, Flory becomes nervously conscious of his deformity and as a result can neither meet Ellis’ eyes nor stand up for the doctor. Later again, when Ellis puts up a notice stating the collective English stance against the admission of “niggers” to the club, Flory is unable to demur about signing his name to it because he lacks “the small spark of courage that was needed to refuse”. He abhors the idea of a public slinging match: “At the very thought of it he flinched; he could feel his birthmark palpable on his cheek”(63). Similarly when Flory, brimming with inferiority in front of Verrall, is thrown ignominiously off his pony, his first reaction is to cover up his birthmark, “though the other cheek was the damaged one”(188). The sexual nervousness that the birthmark occasions is visible in Flory’s interactions with May and with Elizabeth. He turns away from the former after making love to her, and covers his cheek with his hand, “jaded and ashamed”. Similarly, he is unable to kiss Elizabeth in full daylight; he can be physically intimate with her only at night, and then only after a confirmation from her that she does not mind the mark that disfigures him.

Elizabeth seems hardly conscious of the mark at first. We hear nothing whatsoever from her about something that is so noticeable: not from the point of view of
Flory alone—that could be dismissed as acute self-consciousness—but continually commented upon or thought about by others like Ellis and Ko S'la. “It was a curious fact”, the narrator tells us, “that she scarcely noticed his birthmark at this time”(9). Of course at the time Elizabeth is not aware of the strictures of pukkaness, except in some dim, subconscious way. But as the “unmanliness” of Flory’s sympathy with the natives and of his “queer, perverse way of talking” becomes more evident, we find that she thinks that “there had always been something dubious about Flory”(175), including his age and his birthmark, not to mention his highbrow talk. Elizabeth associates “highbrow” talk with the aesthetes her mother socialized with in Paris, and consequently detests it heartily. As I have noted before, aestheticism was associated with effeminism in the nineteenth century. Further, Orwell was a firm believer in action; the lack of it that was suggested by aestheticism did not go down well with him, as is evident also in his picture of Elizabeth’s mother and her cronies. Therefore, the fact that Elizabeth is disquieted by Flory’s native intimacies, his highbrow talk, and his birthmark becomes cumulatively significant, especially when the same notes are resounded following her relationship with Verrall.

Verrall, as we have seen before, is Flory’s opposite in every way: his self-confidence is tremendous, he is contemptuous of the natives and not unwilling to kick them into obedience, he can intimidate the aggressive Ellis, his sportsmanship is admirable, and his sexual assurance is evident. It is only after Elizabeth meets this thorough imperialist that her earlier disquiet about Flory crystallizes into an active revulsion of his deformity: “she had almost forgotten Flory these days; when she thought of him, it was for some reason always his birthmark that she remembered”(214). The
birthmark now symbolizes everything that is repulsive about Flory, and the narrative brings it to the forefront in most of their subsequent meetings: "He stood there almost voiceless, lumpishly ugly with his face yellow and creased after the sleepless night, and his birthmark like a smear of dirt" (219).

The symbolism of Flory’s birthmark becomes complete, along with his humiliation, at the end, when May denounces him in front of the entire English community. His face, the narrator says, goes so pale “that the birth-mark seemed to glow upon it like a streak of blue paint.” By this time, Elizabeth is so revolted by Flory and his birthmark that “her revulsion made her almost physically sick.” She has known of his affair with May, and after her initial anger, not to mention her shameful failure to secure a husband, has even forgiven him. She is still repelled at the thought of a “grey-faced, maniacal creature” like May being Flory’s mistress,

[b]ut worse than that, worse than anything, was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonouring, how unforgivable a thing it was. (274)

Elizabeth is frantic to get away from Flory, and when he holds her up outside the Church and proposes marriage, her refusal is couched in a vocabulary clearly suggestive of the rape narrative. Anything would be better than marrying Flory, she says, “[a]nything—spinsterhood, drudgery, anything—sooner than the alternative.[...]

Death sooner, far sooner.” Elizabeth is aware that her refusal would mean more attempts by Lackersteen to rape her, but acquiescence to Flory’s offer of marriage is, to her, even worse than submitting to the rape attempts of her uncle. Not only is Flory dishonored, he is “less than a man”, and unable to forget “the devilish ugliness of his disfigured face in that moment”, “[Elizabeth] hated him as she would have hated a leper or a lunatic.” From an unfortunate
deformity that Elizabeth had once told Flory she did not mind, the birthmark comes to represent everything racially and sexually disgraceful. As Orwell puts it, “[i]t was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him” (278-9).

There are frequent references in the novel to the “secret” life that Flory is forced to live, and to its corrosive effects upon him:

In the end the secrecy of your revolt poisons you like a secret disease. Your whole life is a life of lies. Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs[...] listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody Nationalists should be boiled in oil. You hear your Oriental friends called ‘greasy little babus’, and you admit, dutifully, that they ARE greasy little babus[...] Time passed and each year Flory found himself less at home in the world of the sahibs[...] he had learned to live inwardly, secretly, in books and secret thoughts that could not be uttered[...] But it is a corrupting thing to live one’s real life in secret[...] It would be better to be the thickest-skulled pukka sahib[...] than to live silent, alone, consoling oneself in secret, sterile worlds. (69-72)

What Flory claims as his secret, his political sympathy with the natives, is hardly under wraps, as the discussion of his “bolshie-ism” at the club makes clear. The real secret of non-pukkaness is, as we have seen earlier, some hint of sexual impropriety. In a novel that teems with Englishmen patronizing Burmese prostitutes, however, Flory’s dereliction in this direction is hardly egregious. Why is it then that the narrative punishment of Flory’s sexual misdemeanor is a bloody suicide, when someone like Lackersteen who is guilty of adulterous sexual relations with scores of native women—not to mention, of threatening his own niece, an Englishwoman, with rape—is let off with nary a rapped knuckle?

According to Urmila Sheshagiri, “[t]he spectacle of Ma Hla May’s unclothed body makes public Flory’s transgression of the pukka sahib’s code; Orwell forces Ma Hla May to present herself as a metonym for the racial and sexual Otherness that are anathema to white imperial self-fashioning.” However, if the debasement of women is acceptable in Orwell’s scheme of things, as Sheshagiri herself earlier points out, then
surely having a native mistress hardly constitute a transgression of the code of the pukka sahib. Indeed we see Flory shamed after May’s scene in the church, but hardly meditating suicide: “I know I am disgraced” he says to Elizabeth “It was the vilest thing to happen. Only, in a sense, it wasn’t my fault”(275). A man planning to kill himself would hardly be considering marriage, which he clearly and desperately hopes for as he proposes to Elizabeth, appealing again to her to save him from having to live his lonely, decayed life again. He is willing to wait “a month, a year, five years” for Elizabeth, willing to forego physical intimacy with her. It is only when she rejects him with an unmistakable finality and he realizes that “he was back again to this-to the old, secret life”, that he decides in his hopelessness that “it was not endurable any longer”(279).64

In what is almost a summary of Flory’s character in the novel, Aldrich claims that “the very rumor of homosexuality was enough to drive a man to suicide. Allegations of sexual misbehavior[...]provided a way to discredit a figure who was perhaps not quite ‘of the right sort,’ someone who had rankled superiors and criticized expatriate Englishmen, who had become too intimate with local people and seemed too sympathetic to indigenous movements.”65 Despite what the narrator tells us is the reason for Flory’s suicide, homosexuality is therefore certainly coded into the narrative. “It was, finally” as the narrator tells us, “the birthmark that had damned him”, the birthmark which, as we have noted above, tarnished him racially and sexually. Even though death brings an immediate fading of the mark, Flory is always remembered as “a dark chap, with a birthmark”(283). The stain thus colors him entirely at the end, so that he is not just an ordinary, white Englishman with a blemish on his face, he is “a dark chap”(278) with an unfading, inseparable birthmark. Thus in Orwell, as in Forster, the Englishman who is not
pukka, who is intimate with a "babu" or an elite native male, who evinces a tendency
towards interracial same-sex love is a man racially marked in his proximity to nativeness.
What the narrator says of Ellis is true of the general imperial attitude at the time: "[a]ny
hint of friendly feeling toward an oriental seemed[...]a horrible perversity"(25).

In this chapter I have tried to examine two literary instances of the imbrication of
concerns about non-pukkaness/going native and having homoerotic interests in order to
show that imperial discourses that employ homoeroticism between colonizing and
colonized men neither displace the noxious connotations deployed by the narrative of
rape, nor do they present same-sex relations as emblematic of a more equitable and less
incapacitating view of colonial relations. Both exploit the same stigmatizing stereotypes,
both seek to make the native—or the taint of nativeness—responsible for any
manifestation of interracial desire. Neither, in the finally analysis, is critically liberating.
Endnotes for Chapter Two:

1. Some fiction by Forster that was written earlier than A Passage, was published much later; fiction that dealt overtly with homosexual themes was published after his death in 1970.


3. There is some (unsubstantiated) speculation about whether Orwell was a repressed homosexual. See Christopher Hitchens. Why Orwell Matters. (Basic Books, Reprint 2003).


9. Ibid., 306.


12. E. M. Forster. A Passage to India. (Harvest Books, 1965, c1924), 15. Henceforth, references to this novel are cited in-text.


17. I should make note here of Elaine Freedgood’s point that Aziz can be read as a “stereotypically ‘feminine’ Oriental or as a stereotypically ‘feminine’ homosexual”. However even if Aziz’s femininity is because of his sexuality and not his race, it is still significant that Forster chooses to make the Indian “homosexual” effeminate and his English partner manly. See “E.M. Forster’s Queer Nation: Taking the Closet to the Colony in A Passage to India.” Bodies of Writing, Bodies in Performance. Foster et al (eds.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 135.


19. Freedgood, 137.
22 Hutchins, 157.
23 Macaulay, quoted in Hutchins, 55, footnote 8.
24 Ibid., 156.
25 Ibid., 157, footnote 8.
27 Aldrich, 315.
28 Ibid., 313.
30 Forster—or the narrator—sometimes also participates in the denigration of the native elite (“European costume had lighted like a leprosy”), and at other times shows up the anxiety behind the English derision of the “babu” figure.
34 Freedgood, 139.
35 Lane, *The Ruling Passion,* 146.
37 Fielding’s fear also relates to the theory of degenerationism as well as the idea of tropicality and race, which is voiced in *A Passage* by the eternal race theorist McBrayne, who claims that natives can’t help themselves because of where they have been born and bred: “they have not a dog’s chance – we should be like them if we settled here”(184).
38 It is significant, as Francis B. Singh points out, that Aziz’s nationalist sentiments are voiced in “the overwhelmingly Hindu atmosphere of Mau[+] the confidence that Aziz manifests is what Gandhi hoped to instill among Muslim politicians.” See “Passage to India, the National Movement, and Independence.” *Twentieth Century Literature.* 31.2/3 (Summer/Autumn, 1985), 275.
39 This cusp, incidentally, is also where Sara Suleri also places *A Passage.*


49 George Orwell. Burmese Days. (Orlando: Harcourt, 1934), 17. Henceforth, references to this novel are cited in-text.


51 This non-normativity, however, is repressed; the only instance in the novel in which Flory actually mentions homosexuality is with disgust, and in reference to another Englishman, Macgregor: “How his bottom did stick out in those tight khaki shorts. Like one of those beastly middle-aged scoutmasters, homosexuals almost to a man.” The anger is brought out, significantly, by Flory’s intense disapproval of the strictures of pukkasahibdom: in this case, his anger is triggered by his conclusion that Macgregor exercised “in those ridiculous clothes[…] because it is the pukka sahib thing to take exercise before breakfast”(77).

52 Bakshi, 40-42.

53 This “fellow” is a laborer going about his business in the market.

54 U Po Kyin, the local magistrate is also homoeroticized, although not to the same extent (nor in the same way) as the near-naked mali. Kyin is described as undoubtedly gross, “yet shapely and even beautiful in his grossness; for the Burmese do not sag and bulge like white men, but grow fat symmetrically, like fruits swelling”(5). His meals are “not meals so much as orgies, debauches of curry and rice”, his room similarly “was dark and sluttish as all Burmese rooms are”(14). There is another scene with homoerotic undertones, where a native suspect’s “longyi” is removed and his buttocks examined by a native policeman in order to determine whether or not the man is guilty.

55 Ranajit Guha. “Not at Home in Empire.” Critical Inquiry. 23 (Spring, 1997), 485.

56 Mrinalini Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an imperial Institution in Colonial India.” Journal of British Studies. 40.4 (October 2001), 489-521. Ann Moya takes a cue from Sinha’s essay when she suggests that “for both the English minority and the native population, the club is explicitly a symbol of the white man’s unity and distinctiveness. For the English, it is a symbol of their superiority over the coloured Indians, of white civilization. It is the only place where the natives have no access and it has thus become a sort of sanctuary of the white man.”(97).

58 We must remember that there were natives within the clubs, bearers for instance, but it
is only the native elite who were seen as threatening the citadel-like English clubs. Also,
it is noteworthy that it the un-clubbability of natives was not just a social but also a
political necessity. Indeed Veeraswamy’s fascinated outburst (“consider how noble a type
iss the English gentleman! Their glorious loyalty to one another! The public school
spirit!”) is based to a large degree on his ignorance of the acrimony that is a regular
feature at the club. As Flory explains to the doctor, the seeming good fellowship amongst
the English is really quite fake, and that it is less social than it is political: “It’s a tradition
to booze together and swap meals and pretend to be friends, though we all hate each other
like poison. Hanging together, we call it. It's a political necessity.” This is another reason
why natives needed to be kept out of the club, so that the myth of white unity could be
maintained.
It is significant too that British editions of Orwell’s novel re-named the doctor as Dr.
Murkhaswami, which means “leader of fools.” See Jeffrey Meyers (ed.) *George Orwell:
61 However, as Nancy Paxton points out, Flory does not get the usual reward that is the
due of the typical rebellion-quashing hero of the mutiny novel: honor and marriage to the
most desirable English girl.
62 Daphne Patai. *The Orwell Mystique A Study in Male Ideology*. (Amherst: University of
Massachusetts Press, 1984), 37.
63 Urmila Sheshagiri. “Misogyny and Anti-Imperialism in George Orwell’s *Burmese
Days.*” *The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy*. Lázaro, Alberto.
(ed.) (Switzerland: Peter Lang, Bern, 2001), 114.
64 The narrative explanation that the thought of Elizabeth’s marriage to someone else, and
of her wedding night, was what threw Flory over is specious in light of the fact that Flory
saw Verrall’s earlier unmistakable physical intimacy with Elizabeth despairingly but
hardly suicidally.
65 Aldrich, 189. For a brilliant navigation of the link between public disgrace and
homosexuality, see Christopher Lane’s essay on Mason’s *The Four Feathers*, “The Fate
of the Pioneer: Mason, Haggard and the Colonial Frame of Homophilia.” *The Ruling
Passion*, 45-71.
PART II

NATIVE RESPONSES
CHAPTER THREE

_Bande Mataram_ and Celebrating the Masculine Principle

In the previous chapters, I have attempted to show that non-normative gender/sexuality and their deployment in discourse were vital in furthering the imperial enterprise. The empire used the discourse of effeminacy, and the specter of homoeroticism attendant upon it, to stigmatize interracial intimacies that were perceived as being potentially injurious to the logic of imperialism. Where stigmatization failed to prevent metaphorically miscegenated Englishmen from “going native”, interracial homosocial relationships were discursively encoded within a paradigm functionally similar to that of interracial heterosexual rape, so that the native, or the taint of nativeness, was once again encumbered with sexual and moral perversity. In this and the following chapter, I trace both the responses to and refractions of this discourse (of masculinity, effeminacy, and homoeroticism) through the period of the rise of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which culminated in Indian independence in 1947. The native response to the British charge of effeminacy and its attendant specter of (criminal) non-normative sexuality was, I suggest, dual and chronologically overlapping. There was, on the one hand, an internalization of the imperial contempt of ambiguous sexual or gender behavior. On the other hand, there was also a realization of the political potential of same-sex bonds, both when they were on the same side of the racial divide and when they straddled it. I argue therefore that it is in the imbricated continuation and contestation of imperial ideas about normative gender and sexuality that anticolonial movements, and subsequently Indian nationalism emerged. In doing so, I make an
argument for the importance of homoerotic narratives as sites where powerful directing
influences on native social reform movements, political mobilizations, and nationalist
ideologies are located. Nation-formation in India, I suggest, was contingent to a large
degree upon mobilizing and resignifying non-normative sexual/gender subjectivity.

I begin this chapter with an analysis of what constituted normative gender and
sexuality in India before the advent of the British transformed the idiom of sexual
privilege into the idiom of sexual perversion. Next, I trace one form of native response to
this altered sexual vocabulary: an internalization of the imperial contempt of ambiguous
sexual or gender behavior, and the resulting desire to get rid of the charge of effeminacy.
My analysis of two proto-nationalist texts, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Anandamath*
and Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora*, takes account of debates surrounding the re-
masculinization of the Indian male and emphasizes the centrality of male homosociality
to the nationalist enterprise. In these novels, an incipient awareness of the political
potency of male-male bonds already begins to be visible, despite the fact that they were
written at a time when there was an overt native attempt to repel imperial charges of
rampant sexual perversity. I further suggest that the very sweep of the allegation of native
male effeminacy replaces the anglophily of the effeminized babus with an incipient sense
of nationhood because it actuates a commonality, both in the desire of the brown sahibs
to gain access to imperial cultural capital and in their rejection, ridicule and
carcaturization by the British.
Normative Gender/Sexuality in India:

Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, authors of *Same Sex Love in India*, state in the introduction to their comprehensive anthology of Indian writing on homosexuality that “[l]abels like “abnormal, “unnatural,” and “unhealthy’ are of relatively very recent origin in India,” and that texts from pre-nineteenth century India indicate “a set of generally tolerant traditions” of, and attitudes towards, homosexuality. They contrast this acceptance of a variety of sexual proclivities in pre-colonial India with that of “many parts of Europe, [where] men found engaging in homosexual acts were vilified, tortured, or legally executed.”

In fact, several instances in ancient Indian texts counter the constantly repeated, almost canonized Foucauldian notion that homosexuality existed only as an undefined individual sexual behavior till the late nineteenth century, when it crossed over from nameless aberration into labeled specie as a result of being identified as a category by European sexologists – in other words, that the homosexual was brought into being by the profusion of discourses that transformed the act of sodomy into a species of people with defined characteristics, histories, and behaviors. Until the late nineteenth century, Foucault claims, homosexuality was in act; it became a person, or a category only as a sort of answering back to the discourse that evoked it: the discourse thus pre-dated the category. In some of the earliest texts of Indian literature and history, however, there is a definite homosexual presence and group identity; the homosexual is found as a category, under labels like *Trittiya Prakriti* or *A’sekya,* but is seen merely as a practitioner of one kind of sexuality, and is as un/remarkable as that of any other.

The abovementioned categories are fluid and occasionally contradictory, but so are sexual identities. What is important is that variant sexuality is known to have existed,
noted, and tolerated in India for centuries before the arrival of the British on the scene. This is true also of ambiguous gender behavior. Puranic and Katha literature has several stories that hinge on cross-dressing, and on the ensuing homoerotic exchanges between men and between women. The Hindu pantheon, and consequently a lot of early Indian literature, is full of shape-shifting gods who “become” women temporarily in order to test the celibacy of a devotee or to seduce and destroy an embodied evil or two. “Ardhnareshwar”, another name for Lord Shiva, is, as the name suggests, a god (ishwar) who is half (ardh) woman (nari). Indeed androgyny, as we shall see in greater detail later, held a liberatory promise for men both in the Bhakti movement of medieval India (this, in its later version in Bengal, centered on Shakti, or goddess centered worship, which later metamorphosed into the nationalist cry of bande mataram) and in the Vaishnava culture (into which Gandhi, who restored dignity to androgyny, was born).

Hindu religion and beliefs normalized variations of sexual and gender identities. The belief that the human soul is caught in a cycle of birth-death-rebirth until it attains salvation, for instance, has frequently been drawn on to explain same sex intimacies. The intense relationships of the venerated late nineteenth century Hindu religious leader Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa with various of his male disciples had, as Jeffrey Kripal has so convincingly demonstrated in Kali’s Child, a prominent and unmistakable homoerotic undertone. The most intense of these attachments was with Narendra Nath Dutta, who later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda. “I can’t bear it when I don’t see him,” Ramakrishna said of Vivekananda, “I wept so much and still Narendra didn’t come! He doesn’t understand at all what I feel for him[…] What will people think, seeing a man of my age weeping and pining for a boy like him[…] And yet I can’t stop myself.”
Vivekananda, who was soon to embark on a project of re-masculinization of the effete Indian male, emphasized Ramakrishna's explanation of this attachment as one that was spiritual and "eternal" and that had been through earlier incarnations:

He said to me affectionately, as if to a familiar friend, 'You've come so late. Was that right? Couldn't you guess how I've been waiting for you?' And then suddenly he folded his palms together and began addressing me as if I was some divine being. 'I know who you are, My Lord. You are the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana. You have come back to earth to take away the sufferings and sorrows of mankind.' I was absolutely dumbfounded.8

Unlike Hinduism, Islam explicitly condemns variant sexuality. Apart from the Sodom and Gomorrah parable, the Quran also says, "If two men among you are guilty of lewdness,/ Punish them both./If they repent and amend, leave them alone: for God is Oft-Returning Most Merciful."9 Despite this intolerance, homosexuality between men is present and visible in Indian-Muslim history. As Kidwai and Vanita have stated, Muslims who relocated to India were "inheritors of a literary tradition that included not just pre-Islamic poetry but also The Thousand and One Nights and a large body of literature wherein male beauty and love between men were celebrated."10 Sufism, for instance, began with interiorizing the teachings of Islam: "It is from the Qur'an, constantly recited, meditated, and experienced, that Sufism proceeded, in its origin and its development."11 Yet, the later Sufis couched the longings of human beings for the divine in homoerotic vocabulary, arguing that "only same-gender love could transcend sex and therefore not distract the seeker from his ultimate aim of gnosis. Worldly love (ishq-i-majazi) was only a bridge to reach divine love (ishq-i baqiqi), so the loving gaze at the worldly beloved (mashuq) was pure."12 Whether the male beloved is the ultimate destination of the male Sufi, or merely a temporary conduit, a potent homoerotic emotion is certainly being acknowledged in Sufi poetry.
The idea of the beloved as male influenced later Urdu poetry, and several Urdu poetic traditions like the ghazal, the iham goi and Rekhti were unapologetically homoerotic. In the literary conventions of the Urdu ghazal, the poet, or the lover, and the beloved were always gendered male when they were gendered at all; further, the tropes used in the ghazal frequently posited male-male love as the highest ideal of love. The iham goi, a poetry of double entendre, whose poets were, according to one recent critic, homoerotically inclined, further eliminated any coyness about sexual expression that may have constrained the ghazal. Similarly frank in its sexuality was Rekhti, a form of Urdu poetry in a female voice that was unambiguous in its narration of female sexuality, including, although not limited to, female homosexuality. According to Carla Petievich, the extant records of Rekhti indicate that this poetry was written and narrated not by women, but by male poets, sometimes in drag, to a male audience.

Urdu poets, according to Tariq Rahman, “neither celebrate nor denigrate homosexual love to the exclusion of other types of passion. They accept it as one natural outlet for erotic feelings, and are quick to use pseudo-mystical arguments against any religious-minded detractor. In short, they do not feel stigmatized at all.” This seems evidenced by the fact that the most prominent practitioners of Urdu poetry, like Abbru and Mir Taqi Mir, openly addressed their male beloveds in verse, acknowledged their homoerotic attractions and attachments, and yet were clearly venerated by their contemporaries. It is because, as C. M. Naim says, society seemed to have “a non-negative” attitude toward homosexuality, that these poets did not feel stigmatized, or part of a persecuted minority, until the homophobic revisionism of native culture and traditions by the British empire, particularly in the years following the revolt of 1857.
This earlier “non-negative” approach to same-sex relations is present not only in religious and/or literary traditions in India, but in historical instances as well. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazniah, the eleventh century Muslim ruler commended three centuries later by the legendary political theorist Ziauddin Barani as an ideal monarch, was openly in love with a slave named Ayaz. Barani’s near-contemporary, Mubarak Shah Khilji was in love with Khusro, an erstwhile Hindu and shepherd, who later murdered his lover and declared himself the king. During Akbar’s reign in the sixteenth century, many nobles are known to have had homosexual relations despite Akbar’s disapproval. His son Jahangir “discussed with [a] visitor the relative attractions of fair and dark slave boys,” and was described by an English visitor, Terry, as keeping “little boys’ for “a wicked use” in his palace.\(^{17}\) To have sexual access to young people of both sexes was seen not as a perversion, but as a privilege. When any of these homosexual attachments were condemned, it was only because they were seen as politically inexpedient or as subverting the extant social order, and not because of any perceived perversion. When desire augured a reversal of power relations or destabilized the status quo—for instance when “the slave control[led] the ‘slave of love, his master’\(^{18}\), as Indrani Chatterjee puts it—such dependence was denounced.

Cases of androgyne were similarly tolerated. Its most famous practitioner may be Nawab Nasiruddin Haider, who ruled Avadh for a decade in the early nineteenth century. Nasiruddin Haider dressed frequently as a woman and usually lived in the women’s quarters in his palace. To mark certain religious occasions, he pretended to be a woman in labor. Several men in his court imitated him, “becoming” women during certain times.\(^{19}\) Similarly, Raja Gangadhar Rao Niwalkar, the last male ruler of Jhansi and
husband of the valiant Rani Lakshmi Bai, would frequently wear women’s clothes and ornaments.

One day the Resident Saheb gently and politely asked, “For many days I have heard the same story and I have long wished to ask you about this matter[...]. Maharaj you are an important ruler among the states and you also have the Brahman-dharma. It has come to my ears that you customarily wears women’s dress. Each month you observe the period of impurity and you cover your arms with bangles. Is all this worthy of you?” Whereupon Babasaheb replied, “I am but a small feudatory. In front of the English, all the kings and princes, east to west, north to south, have put on bangles. There is no hero in front of you. There is no male on earth who is not wearing bangles.”

Babasaheb’s drag demonstrates both an internalization of the imperial effeminization of the native male as well as an act of defiance: a “feudatory” ruler stubbornly and deliberately falling short of imperial standards of appropriate gender behavior—thus inviting the mild reproof of the British Resident—cannot but be seen as an instance of resistance. It is a duality that, in the words of Homi Bhabha, “unsets the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.”21 Native response to imperial condemnation of Indian sexual and gender behaviors thus partook of both internalization and resistance, an ambivalence we will examine in greater detail in subsequent sections. A similar irresolution seems present also in the British condemnation, which, though present everywhere, was never quite perfected. “This condemnation,” says Benita Parry, “was certainly a matter of gender politics, but it was also the occasion for underwriting the role of the Raj in reforming a people given to degenerate ways.”22

**Colonial Gender Politics:**

Thomas Macaulay, who was one of the chief architects of the colonial system of education in India, and who was later to help frame the anti-sodomy statute in the Indian
Penal code and thus criminalize homosexuality, had this to say about the Bengalis, the people first effeminized and babu-ized in India:

The race by whom this rich tract was peopled, enervated by a soft climate and accustomed to peaceful employments, bear the same relation to other Asiatics which the Asiatics generally bear to the bold and energetic children of Europe[...]Whatever the Bengali does he does languidly. His favorite pursuits are sedentary. He shrinks from bodily exertion, and though voluble in dispute, and singularly pertinacious in the war of chance he seldom engages in personal conflict, and scarcely ever enlists as a soldier. There, never perhaps existed a people so thoroughly lined for a foreign yoke.²³

In another essay, he adds to the list of “effeminate” characteristics:

The physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapor bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardly breeds. Courage, independence, veracity, are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavorable. His mind bears a singular analogy to his body. It is weak even to helplessness for purposes of manly resistance; but its suppleness and its tact move the children of sterner climates to admiration, not unmingled with contempt. All those arts which are the natural defence of the weak are[...]familiar to this subtle race[...]With all his softness, the Bengalee is by no means placable in his enmities or prone to pity. The pertinacity with which he adheres to his purposes yields only to the immediate pressure of fear. Nor does he lack a certain kind of courage which is often wanting in his masters[...]the Bengalee, who would see his country overrun, his house laid in ashes, his children murdered or dishonoured, without having the spirit to strike one blow, has yet been known to endure torture with the firmness of Muclus, and to mount the scaffold with the steady step and even pulse of Algernon Sydney.²⁴

The effeminacy of the Bengali, in Macaulay’s logic, fits him for being ruled by a hardier, or manlier, race. What is fascinating about Macaulay’s description is not so much his generalizations, or even his feminization of an entire race—these were common characteristics of Orientalist rhetoric—as his startling switch at the end of the quoted passage from searing contempt to grudging admiration. Within the space of a few sentences, the race ridiculed because, among other things, courage was an attribute “to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavorable” is praised as having “a certain kind of courage which is often wanting in his masters.” Let us note, but put aside for a moment this ambivalence in Macaulay’s condemnation, while we trace how the Bengali became a babu when he was made to approximate the ruling race, and why the
babu was subsequently ridiculed and effeminized in colonial discourse, until the imputation of babu-hood spread like a canker to infect not only the Bengalis, but all educated, politically conscious, disaffected Indians.

The colonial policy that had called forth a group of Western educated Indians to serve as mediators between the rulers and their subjects was responsible for the emergence of the babu figure. Modhumita Roy says that this minuscule hegemonized elite volunteered its collusion with the Raj in the interest of its own social mobility, and was seen by the British as forming "an indistinct sort of link[...] between the rulers and the people." In the decade preceding the mutiny, the English-educated urban Bengali babu, constituted what there was of native public opinion. As Francis Hutchins points out, "Indians who[...] were not dependent on British favor, without an interest in preserving for themselves a privileged position guaranteed by British might, were designated "unrepresentative." The tide of British opinion changed as the imitation brown sahibs began to approximate their putative white originals. The British "fantasy of originality", in Bhabha's words, was threatened. Soon, then, the "real India" began to consist of rural India; the empire began to speak "for the voiceless masses" and silenced the educated Indians. "There are some people who clamour for boons which it is impossible to give," Lord Curzon, said, voicing the imperial opinion, "but the administrator looks rather to the silent and inarticulate masses." And in this context, the babu was born in colonial discourse, an effeminate man brimming with cowardice, malice and deceit, a status seeker and tuft-hunter, a multiply alienated individual given to political sedition. Mrinalini Sinha quotes a contemporary account in The Times in London as saying that "The Crown took the babu in hand and developed the babu into his present state of
loquacity and disloyalty.” The word babu, Sinha notes, was emptied of the respect that was inherent in the title, and was impregnated instead with “the grandiose pretensions and the economic impotence of the potentially disloyal Anglicized or English-educated Indian.”

This caricaturization of the potential political threat posed by an educated Indian middle class to the hitherto exclusive privileges of Anglo-Indians was a move to defuse that threat. Thus the word babu accordingly expanded in scope to include, along with the Bengali elite it originally designated, politically discontented, English educated natives from all over India. Sinha quotes an editorial in the Amrita Bazar Patrika, according to which, “if any one of the dumb millions gets his tongue, he becomes a babu at once and then it is only a babu who speaks.” Even the Indian National Congress, which forged political associations across India, was ridiculed as a typical babu organization. In order to discredit anomalies like the anglicized babu, colonial policy was reformulated to ostensibly support indigenous traditions and culture: although, as reforms around native traditions like child marriage demonstrate, the policy was not always strictly adhered to. Hence native males were divided into ‘martial’ and ‘non-martial’ races, and the distinction between the two reflected not “a traditional Indian organization of masculinity but a colonial understanding of the ways in which certain attributes of masculinity were supposedly distributed in traditional Indian society.”

Having concluded to their own satisfaction that the babu was, indeed, effeminate, colonial discourse set out to discover, or invent, racially contoured reasons for the effeminacy.

It is important to take a brief look at these putative reasons—excessive sexuality, child marriage, enfeebling diet, matrifocal Hinduism—because each of them became
politically charged with diverse significations for Indian nationalists. The construct of the babu was, as Sinha suggests, overdetermined by various late nineteenth-century historical circumstances; one of these was, as we have seen in the first chapter, the intersection of debates about native effeminacy with an anxiety about the regulation of British sexuality, both in the colonies and in the metropole. Age of Consent Act controversy of 1891, for instance, had crossed over from England (as had the Anti-Sodomy Statute of 1860) and sought to teach “manly self-control” to the native male who followed the Hindu custom of child marriage. The babu was believed to be not only physically weak, but also morally feeble, and for both reasons, deemed unfit for self-rule. “The assumption underlying the legislation was not only that premature consummation causes moral and physical effeminacy but that effeminate men were more likely to indulge in premature consummation,” a circularity of logic that, Sinha argues, marked a large portion of the discourse on native sexuality. Not only was the excessive sexuality suggested by premature consummation seen as immediately (or individually) enfeebling, but also perpetually (or racially) debilitating, since it could result only in weak and sickly offspring. Further, the matrifocal focus of Hindu religion and culture, combined with the sexually charged atmosphere of the zenanas, was seen as resulting in an irresolute race of men, something akin to the ridiculed mama’s boys of England. Herbert Risley (1851–1911), an amateur British anthropologist, put forward yet another influential theory for the supposed decline of the once virile Aryan race, blaming, among other things the “enfeebling” vegetarian diet of the Hindu male.
Rewiring the "Babu":

The discursive construct of the effeminate babu had consequences on both sides of the colonial divide. On the colonial side, because he suggested a parody or an excess of Englishness, the babu introduced chronic unease because he transformed the putative original into, in Judith Butler's felicitous phrase, a "panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization."32 On the colonized side, it called forth a scrutiny of native masculinity that, in various ways, contributed to the growth of nationalism. What is additionally interesting about this historical process is that it calls into question, even reverses, the imperial pretense of an entirely conscious colonizing agency while mimicking the native (the "walnut juice stain" phenomenon I have discussed in earlier chapters) even as it ascribes a crippling lack of consciousness to the colonized.

Ashis Nandy suggests that if there is truth in the depiction of the babu, perhaps "[w]hat looks like Westernization is[...only a means of domesticating the West, sometimes by reducing the West to the level of the comic and the trivial."33 Bhabha's theorizations of the act of mimicry and the idea of hybridity and ambivalence that have become so influential in postcolonial studies are relevant here. Bhabha makes a gesture toward the fragility lurking at the heart of colonial power when he emphasizes the simultaneous necessity for and threat presented by native mimicry of Englishness. By their very position as authorized versions of the ruling race, as "part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire," mimic men disrupt the authoritative singularity of the colonizing power and introduce disturbing ambivalence into its discursive certainty. There is an eternal slippage between identity and difference in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which introduces contradiction and ambivalence into the
heart of colonial discourse and prevents it from attaining the imperforate authority to which it aspires.

Thus, in an attempt to manage dissent and minimize difference through the production of hybrid subjects, the empire simultaneously bred a fatal fault in its own ways of understanding and representing the colonized. Despite the overt ridicule of the babu in colonial discourse, there is also the simultaneous consciousness that "it is the British who were manipulated, the British who were the silly somnambulists. My Indian brother is not a brown Englishman, he is an Indian who has learned to move around in my drawing room, and will move around in it so long as it suits him for his own purposes. And when he adopts my ideas he does so to suit himself, and retains them so far and as long as it suits him."\(^{34}\) Individuals from the ruling race are known to have challenged the contention that an Indian is essentially deceitful by pointing out that he is conscientious and honest with his own people.\(^{35}\) Even Kipling, although he continually ridicules the babu for employing effeminate tactics like sycophancy, flattery, evasion, lying and passive-aggression, also registers his cognizance of the subversive potential of the Babu's adaptation of English ways to suit his needs.\(^{36}\) Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, editors of *Contesting Power: Everyday Resistance in South Asian Society & History* argue that intentionality is not necessarily pivotal to resistance: I am not suggesting that the resistance of the native was always deliberate, but that a perhaps unconscious act (say, the imitation of English manners, customs and language) bred an anxiety that ultimately resulted in fully conscious movements of resistance.\(^{37}\)

According to Nandy, "a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized, through socioeconomic and psychological rewards and punishments, to accept
new social norms and cognitive categories."³⁸ On the colonized side, then, the initial native reaction to the imperial attribution of effeminacy was acceptance. One reason for this ready acquiescence was, as Tanika Sarkar points out, the fact that in colonial society manhood was "defined not just through financial solvency but by the nature of relationship to property."³⁹ At a time when nativity implied an absolute and permanent subordination, when the educated classes could aspire at best to serve in the lower rungs of any profession and at worst fear a rejection from an overcrowded, racially structured system, this "relationship to property" was clearly tenuous. This fostered a powerful sense of powerlessness and emasculation among the educated middle classes in India.

Despite this sense of impotence, the balance of power was not absolutely on the side of the colonialists: as Bhabha has demonstrated, colonial authority was at no moment complete, imperforate or unilateral. The ridiculed figure of the babu in the colonial discourse, which at some level undercut the potential challenge posed by an educated and politically aware class, at another level served to realize the potential of that challenge by providing a common space—even though this space was a negative one—to the elite who had been rejected by the colonial system. Thus, the vocal support of imperial policies by Bengali elite during the 1857 mutiny changed first into a scattered criticism of certain policies in the last third of the nineteenth century and subsequently grew into a united and vehemently seditionist outcry.

This coming-togetherness was actuated in part by the realization of communality, of a common fate under the colonial system, on the part of the native elite. Benedict Andersen uses the notion of "pilgrimage" to explain the process of transformation of a colonial state into a nation state: the native elite visiting the metropole found not only
“traveling companions” with whom they shared a communality that went beyond their similar accents and physiognomies but they also discovered “ideas about the nation and nationalism.” Many of the caricaturized “babus” were educated in the best schools and universities in England. There are some existing accounts of the scholarly “pilgrimages” of Indians in England, and these reveal an intent awareness among educated natives of one another, and of the difference in how they and their endeavors to gain access to imperial cultural capital were perceived and treated in England and in India. The commonality of desire among these brown sahibs and the similarity of their effeminate lampoonery served to replace their anglophily with an incipient sense of nationhood.

Nationalism, according to Anderson, was a pre-emptive measure on the part of dominant groups menaced with exclusion (or at the very least marginalization) in the governance of a newly emergent, nationally imagined community. Indeed, rejection by the British and/or their Raj in India seems one of the main reasons why so many native characters in colonial literature become nationalists: Nannhe Singh in Philip Mason’s Call the New Witness, Dhyan Singh in Candler’s Abdication, Ragya in Kincaid’s Their Ways Divide, and Shere Ali in A.E.W. Masons The Broken Road are some examples of Indians who turn revolutionary/nationalist because imperial politics allow no other space of power or payment for them. There are several similar historical examples of anglophiles adopting nationalism following their disenchantment with their fantasies of accessing imperial power. Take for instance Surendranath Banerjee who passed the examinations for the Civil Service in 1869, but was disqualified because of an alleged discrepancy in his age. The nation-wide indignation that the blatant unjustice of Banerjee’s dismissal evoked resulted in his reinstatement. In 1871, Banerjee—until then
thoroughly anglicized—was once again dismissed on some trivial grounds, probably because of he had had a disagreement with an English magistrate. Banerjee attempted to fight the injustice, even going to England to appeal in person to the India office, but to no avail. So thorough was his expulsion that he was not allowed to join the Bar, his second choice. This is how Banerjee describes his transformation in his *A Nation in Making*:

I felt that I had suffered because I was an Indian, a member of a community that lay disorganized, had no public opinion, and no voice in the councils of their Government. I felt with all the passionate warmth of youth that we were helots, hewers of wood and drawers of water in the land of our birth. The personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people. In the midst, of impending ruin and dark, frowning misfortune, I formed the determination of addressing myself to the task of helping our people in this direction of redressing our wrongs and protecting our rights, both as individuals and as a nation.43

Thus, as Banerjee’s testimony demonstrates, the interpellation of native men as effeminate, and the sense of absolute powerlessness that this name-calling engendered in them also initiated these men into a subject position from which they proceeded to answer back, often in unexpected ways.

As a result of their disillusionment, native men who had themselves received English education and had once been anglicized used their learning and their elite positions to galvanize the general public into a disenchantment with westernization, and to induct in them a disaffection for the ruling race. “If the Bengalis were impotent in the use of arms,” Singh says, “they could wield their tongues and pens like weapons.”43 This bitterness would later grow into the full fledged *Swadeshi* movement, but even at the time that the wave against westernization first set in, it impelled significant changes within Indian society. For instance, the self-perception of effeminacy by the native elite brought about a movement to expunge the root causes of this disrepute, and as a result, nationalists became intent upon reconstituting Indian masculinity. The close, hard look at the charge of effeminacy that this necessitated brought to light the fact that the colonial
system was at least partly responsible, through its many acts of omission and commission, for the decline in native masculinity. Indian intellectuals and political leaders suggested a causal relationship between the westernization of the babu and his effeminacy, suggesting that the brown sahib's "scorn for indigenous pastimes and obsession with everything English [and] the excessive concentration on studies" lead to "brain fever" and "feeble development of muscles." The relative material security provided by the British rule, and the mechanization imported into India by them was also blamed for the decline of physical pursuits: Gandhi, for instance, attributed many of the ills of the western civilization to the machines that diminished beneficial physical exertions. The imperial system was responsible for their degeneration, said the native elite, and indeed "[i]t would be strange if after so many centuries of coercion[...and of demoralizing social conditions, any manliness should survive, especially as when any sign of it is displayed by individuals, it is discouraged[...]as impertinence and disloyalty."

This brewing discontent was further exacerbated by the imperial response to the native volunteer movement of 1885. Due to a Russian war scare in March 1885, the empire felt the need for an additional Volunteer Force in India. Four natives offered their services, were initially accepted, but following a directive from the government, were later rejected. Indians took this rejection as a slight. The Praja Bandhu asked: "are the English afraid of Bengalis, or do they not trust them? Are Bengalis quite unable to bear arms, or is this the result of the one-sidedness so conspicuous in English character?" In reaction to the rebuff, there were petitions for the formation of native volunteer corps from all over India, until the government rejected all such demands a year later. The
rejection of the native volunteering petitions fostered the perception that the colonial government was responsible foremasculating Indian men. The feeling that native men had reclaimed their lost masculinity by offering to volunteer was so strong that the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* suggested that it was fear of Bengali prowess that had led the colonial authorities to reject the native volunteer demand. The *Bengalee* declared triumphantly that by insisting upon volunteering, Bengal had disproved “once[and] for all the imputation of unmanliness which our critics took a delight in bringing against us,” and even suggested that the emasculation of native men might be a deliberate ploy of the imperial government: “are we to be debarred from cultivating the manlier qualities because forsooth the possession of them by a subject race might be a source of embarrassment to the Government?” The sense of grievance against the fact of colonization became ever more vocal:

> Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made unmanly, and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defense against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers, and miscreants.  

This mood of confidence was bolstered by researches into ancient Indian history, culture and civilization, which illuminated the lost glory of the once magnificent nation. A new Aryan racial identity was forged for Hindu men by intellectual leaders like Rajnarayan Bose, known for his support of the *Brahmo Samaj*. Chowdury-Sengupta points out that Bose’s claim of Aryan descent for Hindus was derived from Orientalist ideas, from which it sought distinction by precluding all the minority communities in India that did not accept the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the eighteen Puranas as histories of their past:

> Hindus are the ancient inhabitants of this land and they have lived here for thousands and thousands of years; they are also the majority; even if they are defeated as a nation, this is
their country; not the rash usurpers”, but only the Hindus are the true, legitimate children of the Bharat Mata. No matter who confiscates their wealth, their dignity, their freedom, their princely status, their landed property the Hindus will still retain the right to use the adjective ‘national’.  

It is important to remember that it was the Hindu male who had been effeminized by colonial discourse; Muslim men did not figure as babus, because they were deemed to be more “martial” than their Hindu brethren. Therefore the move to shore up native masculinity was more or less a move to shore up Hindu masculinity. And the return to an earlier state of respectability and virility involved the idealization of a time that was not only pre-colonial, but pre-Muslim. Therefore while there was a coming together (of seditionist Hindus), there was also a moving apart (from Muslims who were also seen as interlopers). This, as I will demonstrate later in this dissertation, had important repercussions on Indian nationalism as well as on the reformulation of Indian gender and sexuality.

The idea that the willingness of native volunteers to enlist, and thus their willingness to fight, somehow redeemed native masculinity indicates that inherent in Indian resistance to colonial rule was also a capitulation to colonial rules about what constitutes appropriate masculinity and how it ought to be performed. Before Gandhi destabilized imperial masculinity by associating courage with ahimsa, or non violence, instead of aggression, a martial spirit was accepted by nationalists as the appropriate expression of manliness. Men were constantly reminded that they had to fight to defend and prove their masculinity. Consider an extract from the BM, which castigates the victims of an attack upon a Hindu community in Peshawar:

[W]e do not sympathize with out afflicted Hindu brethren who have been plundered and insulted. Now, how can we accord generous recognition to cowardice and social atrophy? How can we esteem a population devoid of manliness. It is inconceivable that a self-respecting manly community should be so helpless[...].Is the Hindu community of Peshawar composed of old women and children? Are there no young men among them?
Consequently, there was renewed interest in physical culture and wrestling as a means of remasculating the effete Indian: several nationalists espoused a return to *akhadas* (gymnasiums) in order to cultivate native physical prowess. It is important to note that this revival/return was emphasized as a *revival/return*: in other words, the discourse on nationalism italicized wrestling and physical culture as ancient, rural traditions that had escaped colonial contamination. Thus in fin-de-seicle India, physical culture became an act of resistance against the empire.

**Rewriting Literary/Cultural Traditions:**

Internalizing British standards of gender and sexual behavior and expunging the charge of weakness and immorality also postulated a native rewriting of traditions that tolerated, and thus allowed the existence of, non-standard gender and/or sexuality. In this, native reformists were aided by the British empire, which, though it depended upon and even nurtured certain kinds of homosocial attachments as we have seen in the earlier chapters, was, at the same time, homophobic and self-righteously intolerant of the gender variance visible in the literary and cultural traditions of India. One of the first indicators of the state of things to come was the addition of the anti-sodomy statute to the Indian Penal Code in 1860. According to Suparna Bhaskaran, this law, which criminalizes sexual acts "against the order of nature" may have been progressive in Britain, where it reduced the punishment for sodomy from execution to a decade of imprisonment, but given the historical tolerance of sexual ambiguity in pre-colonial India, the anti-sodomy law was retrogressive in the Indian context.
In the years immediately following the failed revolt of 1857, around the same time that sodomy became illegal, homoerotic poetic traditions began to be bowdlerized and rewritten. The downfall of the last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar also sounded the death knell for poets who had been traditionally patronized by the Mughal regime. The education wing of the British government took charge of native literature and systematically discredited traditions of writing that, to the rulers, smacked of “vulgarity” and/or homoeroticism. Poets who had been favored by Mughal royalty no longer found any patronage. Mirza Ghalib, one of the greatest Urdu poets, for example, was divested of the support he had received from the court of Zafar. Ghalib petitioned the British government several times for his patronage to be restored to him, but his efforts were abortive. He lived on a meager salary from the Nawab of Rampur and died in relative poverty. Even more pertinent is the case of the poet Shabbir Hasan Khan (a.k.a Josh Malihabadi) who admitted in his autobiography, *Yaadon Ki Baraat*, to having been in love with men twice: Hasan Khan’s poetry was banned by the British. In place of the poets responsible for the homoerotic, sexually explicit poetry that was anathema to the empire, a new generation of “reformist” poets grew, groomed by the British to drastically restructure their inherited literary traditions. Scott Kugle, in his essay on colonial homophobia and the Urdu literary tradition, describes the revisionism thus:

The administration raised up a new generation of “reformist” Urdu literati who were educators in colleges. Their salaries were paid by the colonial administration and they were commissioned to write “new poetry” that discredited older styles of writing. What followed was a complex revision of the literary tradition of Urdu and Persian poetics as Muslim poets, literati, and historians purged their literature of most erotic rhymes and especially of homocentric themes. This purge was partly motivated by fear of colonial laws and partly by ambition to gain salaried positions in the colonial administration.51

There were two ways in which reformists as well as nationalists rewrote a rich literary convention: by abolishing extant texts, and by misreading them. One of the most
important poets of this new breed was Hali, who critiqued the earlier dominant poetic forms, like the ghazal, as immoral and unnatural, and favored the form called the *Musaddas*. He called for an “ethnic cleansing” of poetry which he labeled “Persianate”, and deemed the “Arabic” model worthy of imitation, since it was manly and pure. Hali left certain words, like natural/unnatural, moral/immoral, civilization/despotic government, transliterated from English in his critiques of Urdu poetry. Kugle rightly suggests that these words are untranslated because the moral force of these words “would have been lost had they been detached the English language and thus from the colonial regime.” According to Frances W. Pritchett, Hali even catalogued words that ought to be censored in poetry, because they could specify a male gender for the beloved of a male poet, else, argued Hali, “we will be adjudged guilty according to the (British obscenity) law.” Hali is also known as having pioneered the misreading strategy, suggesting that the homoerotic poetry was merely a literary convention and not historical/social reality. Other advocates of reformation argued that the male beloved in the ghazal was God, or that the gendering was only in deference to social conventions that disallowed references to women in verse. The upshot was that subsequent to the imperial “cleansing” of 19th century ghazal, the beloved began to be gendered female.

At the same time, there was also a studied reluctance on the part of poets to write the playful and erotic iham goi form of poetry. Kidwai and Vanita suggest that “[t]he denigration of *iham goi* as serious poetry coincides with the time when homoeroticism in Urdu poetry begins to disappear.” Rekhti was another form of Urdu poetry that was suppressed and excised from poet-bibliographies because it was labeled obscene. According to T. Graham Bailey, Rekhti expressed desires of “women of no reputation”
and was therefore “a debased form of lyric invented by a debased mind in a debased age.” Kidwai and Vanita suggest that one of the reasons Rekhti was labeled obscene is probably that it emerged in Avadh, the last kingdom to be annexed by the East India Company before the 1857 mutiny, and also the site of the stiffest resistance to colonial rule. This suggests that part of the reason for drawing attention to the putative immorality or decadence of certain literary traditions may, at least in part, be actuated by a desire to shame a potential/present threat into submission to imperial codes.

One of the most vehement and longest lasting debates on Indian sexuality, masculinity, and literature was generated by the publication of a book, intriguingly entitled *Chaklet* (translated and published in 2006 by OUP as *Chocolate And Other Writings on Male-Male Desire*) by Pandey Bechan Sharma, who wrote under the name of *Ugra* (powerful, or formidable). *Chocolate* is a collection of eight short stories, with titles like ‘Kamariya Nagin si Bal Khaye’ (the waist situates, serpentine) ‘Vyabhichari Pyar’ (disturbing/transient love) and ‘He Sukumar’ (o beautiful youth). Sharma claimed that the stories, which discussed sodomy, pederasty and male homosexuality, were based on real incidents, and that homosexuality was a prevalent sexual practice, especially in northern India, where the beautiful young boys were called “chocolate”, “pocket-book” and “money-order”. “Chocolate”, he wrote, “is the name for those innocent, tender, and beautiful boys of the country, whom society’s demons push into the mouth of ruin to quench their own lusts.” This statement illustrates Sharma’s rationale for his collection: an attempt to expose and eradicate the “plague” of homosexuality that made men weak and feminine.
Sharma's detractors weren't buying this justification. They claimed that the actual effect of Ugra's writings titillated, and therefore encouraged, homosexual desire. The chief among Sharma's critics was Banarsidas Chaturvedi, editor of the influential journal Vishal Bharat, who wrote: "It is the height of impertinence to discuss such fancies and ideas in the book. Any cultured person who reads the names of Socrates and Shakespeare, Surdas and Tulsidas, Rama and Krishna, in such a context would denounce the author a thousand times." Chaturvedi's criticism, directed at Chocolate's insinuation of homoerotic exchanges between Krishna and Arjun, Ram and Tulsidas and Krishna and Surdas and the ambiguous sexuality of Socrates and Shakespeare centers, as Vanita suggests, on a contestation of Sharma's interpretation of a received culture/tradition: ultimately, the debate seems to be about who owns culture.

Meryl Attman argues that popular sex literature could sometimes be a medium through which the dominant culture, under the guise of breaking taboos, could actually reinforce them. I suggest that the converse is also true: that popular sex literature like Sharma's Chocolate could also, under the guise of reinforcing taboos, actually break them. Chocolate emphasized not only the homoeroticism inherent in and tolerated by the past that was being celebrated by nationalists at the time, but also alluded to the "new" sites that encouraged male homoeroticism, including jails and social service organizations. This new homoeroticism was, as we shall see, axial to Indian nationalism, but nationalists, intent as they were upon rescuing native masculinity from the charge of immorality and abnormality, rejected Sharma's claim—even though interestingly, both had the same ultimate goal of eliminating any grounds for the charge of effeminacy. Consequently, claiming ownership of culture, cardinal literary associations like the Hindi
Sahitya Sammelan and many university departments and journals condemned Sharma’s text, and others like it, designating them *ghasleti sahitya* (inflammatory literature) and launching a counter-movement against such literature, known as *ghasleti andolan* (which, remarkably, was sustained for more than twelve years). Even Gandhi was brought into the fray, and he initially condemned the book without having read it. Later however, he read the text and wrote that the aim of the book was “pure” since the author’s attempt was to generate “revulsion against inhuman behavior.”

This desire of Hindu nationalists to fashion a more acceptable collective identity for themselves led to a growth in print culture, with rapidly increasing numbers of publishing houses, presses and libraries. With this growth, there was also a consolidation of what constituted ‘Indian literature’. Influential writers like Maithilisharan Gupt bemoaned the degeneration of literature: “The literature of our community was filled with noble precepts, but now we are just filled with lust and desire[...]Obscene literature is causing great harm to our character[...]To excite lasciviousness is the only business of poets.” As a result of this quest for more appropriate aesthetic values in literature, the depiction of women also underwent a gradual, and ultimately complete, transformation. Several critics, including Tanika Sarkar and Sikata Banerjee, have noted the emergence of a new literary female ideal, in the depiction of which emphasis shifted from the erotic, sexually playful heroine to a desexualized Hindu wife and mother. Invested with nationalist and Hindu values, the new ideal for womanhood included self-sacrifice, chastity, sublimated passion, femininity and purity—ideals that, in the Oriental discourse of wanton eastern sexuality, had been denied Indian women.
In the following two sections, I will examine literary instances of the controversies and transformations that I have discussed above. The first text I will study is Bankimchandra Chatterjee’s *Anandamath*, most famous for its *Bande Mataram* (praise the mother) verse, which first became India’s slogan for independence, and subsequently, the national song of independent India. Subsequently, I will look at Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora* in order to sketch, if only in silhouette, the kind of nationalist that was emerging from all the detritus of colonial discourse on the effeminate native babu.

*Anandamath*:

In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Partha Chatterjee notes that Indian nationalism as a discourse emerged in various guises, “through the reinterpretation of religious texts, through the promulgation and contestation of colonial laws, through debates, polemics, and literature in the burgeoning periodical press, and through the new form of prose narrative imported from Britain through colonial education, the novel.” Of these forms, the novel was perhaps the least overt in the portrayal of nationalistic aspirations. This was in part because of the position of the elite Indian as simultaneously privileged and marginal who desired to negotiate power for themselves both in the nationalist and in the colonialist paradigms. Indian novels in general, but those written in English in particular, were therefore rather ambivalent about imperial rule and nationalist politics, and, as Jyotsna Rege notes, the plots and protagonists of these novels reproduced their authors’ ambivalence. Their readership was fairly circumscribed, and addressed, for the most part, the British and/or other elite natives: a dual address, “to the people who were said to constitute the nation and to the colonial masters whose claim to rule
nationalism questioned. Further, the novel was a realistic genre, which implied that these writers conform to the truth—or more accurately the truth of the ruling race—and this truth was, as we have seen above, notoriously pejorative towards the native elite, of which writers were a part. Novelists therefore experimented with ways of disguising colonial reality even as they appeared to conform to it. Many writers, including Chatterjee, forsook English for their regional languages, and went on to write their most celebrated works in their mother-tongues. For those who continued to write in English, the Indian novel became the space where various discourses of nationalism were rehearsed and debated and different kinds of national subjects were imagined. Ideas about social reform and political action found expression here, and action, as Chatterjee and Rege note, became a progressively more pressing subject matter.

Chatterjee’s *Anandamath* is the prototypal Indian novel that imaginatively figured a modern Indian subject of action. The novel appeared in serial form in 1881 in the literary journal *Bangadarshan* which Bankimchandra himself published. The action of the novel predates its publication by a century: it is set in the Bengal famine of 1772 and is ostensibly based upon the *sannyasi* rebellion that followed the famine. Several years before and since the famous mutiny of 1857, the British had to deal with a number of small peasant insurgencies, which, Ranajit Guha points out, they saw as discrete criminal acts instead of what they really were: a demand for social justice and a will to political change that would later crystallize into the various struggles for national independence. One of these peasant rebellions followed the famine in Bengal in the late eighteenth century, when the East India Company did nothing to mitigate the destitution of a population they had been exacting payments from. Sanyasis, or ascetics, were supposed
to have played an important role in organizing these series of revolts. This is the time-space that *Anandamath* fictionalizes, imagining, in place of the historically rather dispersed phenomenon, a united secret society whose sole aim was to challenge an inequitable foreign ruler through militant action.

However, as Tapan Raychaudhary suggests, "[o]fficial sensitivity to seditious intent in literary works was well known at the time when Bankim wrote [his] novels." The author was aware of this fact, and it is perhaps thus that the enemy is disguised—the rebellion is not so much against the British, who are only the defenders of Muslim rule, as it is against the Muslim rule itself—and British rule is categorically praised at the end of the novel. Despite this flattery, Bankim had to excise passages from later editions of his novel. Because of the probable self-censorship pre-publication and the imposed censorship post-publication, an attempt to categorically determine the authorial intent is even thornier in this particular case than is usual. What is clear, though, is that *Anandamath* did reconceptualize the problem of action in the Indian novel, and did discursively launch a move toward nationalism. I suggest that it made three main contributions which (occasionally with necessary alterations) decisively inspired central tenets in the Indian movement for independence: 1) it depicted, by situating its plot in the ascetic rebellion, militant action by a group of people not inherently militaristic 2) it symbolized the nation as a universal mother-goddess that needed her children to restore her past glory, and 3) it posited celibacy, or at least the sublimation of sexual desire into militant and nationalistic fervor, and male homosocial units, as central to its plot of rebellion and violent action.
The plot of Anandamath, such as it is, is as follows: The title of the novel refers to a secret community of guerrilla warriors, known as santans (children) who live in a forest, and whose mission is to free Bharatmata (India as mother-goddess) from despotic foreign rule and to thus restore the past glory of their nation. Mahendra Singh, a rich landlord who has left his home (perhaps in search of relief from the famine), is separated from his wife, Kalyani, and his daughter, Sukumari, who fall in the hands of robbers and are later rescued by the leader of the santans, sage Satyananda. The sage asks Mahendra to join their stronghold, impressing upon him the monastic rule of Anandamath: every santan, even when a householder, must renounce his family, and take a vow of celibacy. Mahendra is unwilling to do this, until Kalyani poisons herself so that he may be free of familial bonds. Their child, Sukumari, also consumes poison accidentally. Believing both his wife and child to be dead, Mahendra joins Anandamath. Unknown to him, however, Kalyani and Sukumari are separately rescued by two santans, Bhabananda (who falls in fruitless love with Kalyani, a chaste wife) and Jibananda (who entrusts the little Sukumari to the care of his sister). Jibananda’s wife, unbeknownst to him, then enters the order of the santans in the guise of a man. The santans lose initial skirmishes with the (Muslim-defended-by-British) ruling powers, but they slowly gain strength in numbers, and rout their enemies in numerous clashes. They are finally attacked by an army led by the British Major Edwards, and the santans seem to be losing the concluding battle in the text, until help arrives, and the santans emerge victorious. Awkward characters, like the hapless Bhabananda, are killed in the battle; the others survive: Mahendra and Kalyani reunite as a family, and Jibananda and Shanti continue living celibate lives dedicated to the service of the mother-country.
One of the interesting details in this novel is the process by which Anandamath grows in strength and numbers. Aside from the nameless recruits that the reader presumes but never meets, the two people s/he does see getting initiated into the order are Mahendra and Shanti. One is a rich landowner, who is, additionally, a householder; the other is a woman, married to one of the santans. In the context of the masculinization debates (and the resulting emphasis on physical strength) in which the novel was written, it is significant that Bankimchandra should choose to focus on a “powerless” babu and a young woman as the two newest members of a guerilla organization.

Mahendra is someone who, at the time Bankimchandra was writing the novel, would have been categorized as one of the much-derided babus because of his elite status. We find the author referring to the stereotype of the babu during a confrontation with the English—rather anachronistically, because at the time of the events upon which the novel is based, the babu had not even been imagined by Macaulay, far less rejected by his countrymen. “The Baboo seems particularly submissive tonight,” one of the assailants mocks Mahendra. In saying this, he verbalizes what the narrator had until then been insinuating of the unequally matched opponents: the word “vigorous” is used to refer to the abductors thrice in the space of twice as many lines, whereas in order to describe Mahendra, who is removed “without much difficulty,” the narrator uses far less felicitous words, including “powerless,” “submitted,” and “uselessness”.

Bankimchandra is known to have been in agreement with the depiction of the Bengali male as weak and effeminate, attributing the degeneration to Bengal’s long history of subjugation. In the words of Tapan Raychaudhuri, “[d]espite references to occasional periods of glory and cultural achievements of great value and his doubts
concerning the ascription of weakness to Bengalis even in the historical past, Bankim believed that the climate and Turkish rule had induced a degeneration in the Bengali personality and over time it had lost all dignity and manly feelings, though not a certain acuteness of intellect."\textsuperscript{67} In her reading of \textit{Anandamath}, Rege notes that Madhav (meaning perhaps Mahendra) is mocked by the robber chief "as Englishmen regularly mocked English-educated Bengalis," adding that by so doing, the narrator is "clearly suggesting that however else Madhav's English education may ennoble him, it certainly does not make him more of a man."\textsuperscript{68} Bankimchandra is certainly referring to what had become almost a lore in colonial discourse by the late nineteenth century—the shameful feebleness of the native male. I would disagree however that the narrator is suggesting a connection between English education and un-manliness, since, as Rege herself points out, the author believed in "\textit{anusilan} (culture)—learning from the British in areas where Indians were weak."\textsuperscript{69} Bankimchandra frequently emphasized that the philosophy of Hindus, who aspired to become knowledgeable in order to achieve salvation, was completely antipodal to British objectives: "Europeans are devotees of power. That is the key to their advancement. We are negligent of power: that is the key to our downfall."\textsuperscript{70}

It is with this awareness—of some kind of strength being required to counter the might of the British—that Bankimchandra initiates the "powerless" Mahendra into the secret stronghold that is devoted to fighting for the glory of the country. Bhabananda, the santan who falls in love with Mahendra's wife mocks him when he is unwilling to join Anandamath, saying: "Mahendra Sinha, I thought you might be a real man, but I see now that you're like the rest of them—a devourer only of fine things!"\textsuperscript{146} Thus Bhabananda implies both a lack of manliness and a sybaritic frailty in Mahendra's reluctance to join
the militant group. Immediately afterwards, Bhabananda attempts to convince Mahendran that such a lack/weakness of an individual or a community need not be permanent, and that inadequate physical strength could still be compensated for with tenacity of purpose and unflinching courage:

Mahendra: You're comparing the Bengalis to the English?
Bhabananda: Why not? There is a limit to physical strength.
Mahendra: Then what makes this difference between the British and the Indian soldier?
Bhabananda: Because the British soldier would never run away even to save his life. The Indian soldier runs away when he begins to perspire; he seeks cold drinks. The Englishman surpasses the Indian in tenacity. He never abandons his duty before he finishes it. Then consider the question of courage: A cannon ball falls only on one spot. But a whole company of Indian soldiers would run away if one single cannon ball fell among them. On the other hand, British soldiers would not run away even if dozens of cannon balls should fall in their midst.
Mahendra: Do you think you children have acquired these virtues?
Bhabananda: We have to acquire them by patient practice.(43)

Thus, we already hear the first strains of what Gandhi would later turn into the grand concert of an independence movement that relied upon a tenacious will to freedom and believed that physical strength, unlike moral courage, was limited.

Bankimchandra of course sought to inspire not just a tenacious will to freedom but also a will to fight for that freedom. In order to do this, he had to reconcile the then prevalent Hindu attitude of pacifism with the militant demands of resistance to foreign domination. Chatterjee notes that Bankimchandra tried to find a way for Hindus to gain a positive sense of nationalist identity by reinventing for them an identity that had had a glorious past and tradition, one that, in fact was entirely consonant with the Hindu religion. Mahendra, for instance, flinches at the prospect of violence, and demands to know how the santans can possibly be Vaishnava Hindus; for Vaishnavas, he argues, nonviolence is the highest code of practice:

Satyananda said, "Yes, for the Vaishnavas who follow Lord Chaitanya. Nonviolence is the mark of the false Vaishnavism that arose in imitation of the atheist Buddhist code of practice. The mark of authentic Vaishnava practice is subduing the evil-doer and rescuing
the world. For is not Vishnu himself the protector of our world! On no fewer than ten occasions did he take on a body to rescue the earth. (179)

By taking recourse to the discourse of authenticity, not to mention religious scriptures, the author suggests that violence in their particular case would not only be legitimate, it would be necessary: just as a true Vaishnava would subdue the evildoer, so must they “get rid of this demonic race.” Soon the Children, Mahendra not least among them, gain so much strength, the author tells us, that sepoys of the “local administration[... ] would flee even when they heard an old woman utter Hari’s name!” (189)

That even a native woman could, if she adopted the right guise and attitude, strike terror in the heart of the enemy is indicated also through the character of Shanti, a Hindu woman, whose husband, Jibananda, has left her to join the sacred brotherhood. Shanti, interestingly, follows Jibananda into the Anandamath in the guise of a man. Shanti is, for my critical purposes, the most interesting character in the text; it is around her that the various concerns of the novel crystallize. First, although she is in the guise of a man, the way in which at least two men in the novel react to her suggests an underlying homoeroticism, both within the monastic brotherhood, as well as between the two opponent races. Second, by so readily passing for a man, she throws into question the “manliness” of the entire community of men with whom a woman can so easily blend; at the same time, however, by demonstrating her prowess as a warrior, she suggests that appearances can be deceptive, that what looks feminine and weak may in fact be a redoubttable enemy. Third, she exemplifies a sexuality that has been sublimated into ardent nationalism: she refuses to renounce, or even let her husband renounce, their vow of celibacy even after the concluding battle has been won by the santans. And finally, she stands in opposition to the other central female character in the novel, the dutiful wife
Kalyani, and embodies one of the two kinds of women the author deems relevant in the nation-building project. (Gandhi would later synthesize both these categories into one ideal for Indian womanhood.)

When Shanti first enters Anandamath, nobody suspects her true identity as a woman. She insists that she be put up in Jibananda’s room, and nobody finds this desire on her part objectionable, or even strange. Soon, Jibananda enters the bedroom, and suspects that the newly christened “Nabinananda” is in fact Shanti—although this is a suspicion so improbable that Jibananda could not have been (and is not shown as being) certain of this fact. A curious dialogue takes place between them that exposes for a moment the possibility of same-sex attraction in a monastery which is so strictly celibate it makes death the punishment for having any association with a woman.

“A wife! So you have a wife?”
“I’m sure I had one.”
“So you think I’m your wife?”
Once again Jibananda joined his palms, covered his neck with a cloth, and said very respectfully, “By your leave. Sir, I do.”
“Well”, said Shanti, “now that such a laughable idea has entered your head, what do you think you should do?”
“Rip off that covering you’re wearing and drink the nectar of your lips!”
“That just goes to show, Sir”, said Shanti, “what a wicked mind you have, or how exceptionally fond of hashish you are!”(187)

It is not Jibananda alone who is affected by this pretty young wo/man; Captain Thomas, the “brave” English soldier whose courage is much praised in the novel, seems to feel similarly attracted. Thomas, in a scene suggestive of romance, has gone hunting into the forest, and is now alone, having left his other companions behind.

He wandered about looking for a tiger, but saw none. Instead, what did he see, swathed in creepers and shrubs with flowers in full bloom? A young ascetic, brightening the Forest with his beauty! The fragrance of the blooms seemed to increase through contact with that heavenly form.(191)

Note the sensuous imagery, the words suggestive of tempting sexuality: a figure in the forest, alone, dressed in flowers “in full bloom” which smelled the sweeter for touching
the “beauty” that brightened the forest. Captain Thomas is “amazed” at this vision, and then suddenly and unaccountably furiously angry, until he discovers that the young ascetic is actually a woman. Immediately upon discovering her gender, Thomas can now express the attraction that he has already felt. “Will you come and live with me?” he asks, startling the reader with the impetuosity of his desire, “You’re a very spirited woman. I’m very pleased with your courage.” (192)

One might argue, of course, that Shanti’s disguise as Nabinananda was imperfect, that these men saw beyond the male camouflage and discerned the woman underneath. However, as the leader of the brotherhood says of Shanti/Nabinananda: “He approached me for the first time today—a very young man, but I was very pleased with the way he spoke and behaved. He seemed the genuine article to me.” (177) What does Satyananda mean by “genuine article” when he is not aware of any possibility contrary to his declaration? The above quote could imply that Satyananda entertains some sort of a doubt about the real gender of the “very young man” from the very beginning—but if he does, there is no reason why he doesn’t immediately set out to discover the truth. I would argue then that the author makes Satyananda talk of “the genuine article” as a sort of a secret nod to the reader, a reassurance that Shanti has been successful in her mission to join Anandamath. The contradiction between a disguise so perfect as to be impenetrable to the shrewd leader of the santans, and so flawed as to invite the amorous attention of two men may be resolved if one either considers the “genuine article” to be always be an imperfect realization of its own idealization (in other words, if one believes that masculinity is always ultimately an imitation, and that consequently even the much praised English masculinity was an approximation at best) or that the “genuine article” in
this case, the Bengali male, appeared much like the "counterfeit" Bengali female. In either case, the prestige of native masculinity is rescued: in the first case by throwing into doubt the validity of English masculinity, and in the second by Shanti's redemption, through her continually astonishing bravery, of what might seem frail and effeminate.

That Shanti must adopt a masculine identity in order to find her way into Anandamath is significant, and has been commented upon by critics, who frequently see this as proof of the fact that "actual women themselves find no role to play in the national narrative, except as minor figures in the more conventional domestic plot." What this argument ignores is the fact that Shanti's real identity is detected by Satyananda before her initiation into the order, and it is only after she demonstrates her martial skills that the leader decides to collude in her deception and let her in. Further, it is as woman that Shanti challenges the English, allaying enemy suspicions with her beauty and fragility and then launching an unexpected attack.

That men learn not to succumb to this beauty seems to be the lesson she teaches the deceived enemy in general, and her husband in particular. From the first, she repulses her husband's sexual overtures, and reminds him constantly of his vow of celibacy. Their sexual desire seems completely sublimated into patriotic service, as is evident by their passionately singing the nationalistic Bande Mataram verse when they experience desire for each other. Even at the end, when the hurly-burly's done and the battle's won, Shanti still insists that she and Jibananda continue as before, as comrades-in-arms, and the husband and wife fade away from the text to the chant of Bande Mataram.

In some ways, then, the quest for freedom from an alien and oppressive role is seen as being incompatible with the demands of a family, and this is yet another concept
that Gandhi would later magnify into a personal obsession and a national requirement. The homosocial unit of the secret rebels disrupts the heterosexual familial unit, separating Shanti from Jibananda and Kalyani from Mahendra. Satyananda explains the rigid rules of his brotherhood about celibacy thus: “ordinary men become very attached to women and that stops them from the task at hand. This is why the Children vow not to sit next to a woman.”(184) A wife and a family, he says, makes people “forget God’s work” and they become less willing to sacrifice their lives, should the need arise, in the service of their country(178). Satyananda thus equates serving the country with serving god, and emphasizes the absolute nature of this service, alongside which there must not exist any competing demands.

What facilitates the transference of passion from wife to country is the figuration of both woman and country as mother. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, Bankimchandra was the first to use the idea of motherhood as a political unit.72 The figuration of India as a mother enslaved by the enemy, crying out to the children to free her took hold of the national imaginations so powerfully, that the cry of Bande Mataram, or hail the mother-goddess-nation, became at first a slogan of the Indian independence movement and later the country’s national song. The moment in the text when one of the santans sings the song in the forest is perhaps one of the most intense. This is particularly so because is preceded by a scene of terror and violence, when some of the santans ambush their enemy in order to rescue Mahendra, whom they hope to convert to their cause. One of the children allows himself to be captured by the enemy. He is dressed in the robes of a holy man, and acts with feigned humility towards his capturers, although “his eyes flash” with anger. Suddenly, a shot fells the lieutenant, and santans encircle the
enemy, cutting off heads and cracking skulls: “When the sahib fell down headless from his horse, the order to fire could no more be given.” There are cries of “Kill the sepoys, kill the sepoys!” Then almost as suddenly as it had commenced, the violence ceases, and Bhabananda, who has just killed a man, starts singing Bande Mataram in the moonlit forest. As Rege says, the “spasmodic intensity of anti-colonial violence in Anandamath has a Fanonian purgative force and an elevated aftermath.” The emotion of the santans upon hearing the song is almost religious in its fervor. Mahendra, surprised at the intensity of the song, exclaims that it “refers to a country, and not to a mortal mother,” and is told that for the santans, Mother India is the only mother, the only relationship they consider extant and sacred. Later, Mahendra is shown three images of India, one resplendent in its ancient glory, the second one tattered and torn, and the last, “a golden India — bright, beautiful, full of glory and dignity,” the Mother “as she is destined to be.” The fusion of the religious and the patriotic, the goddess Shakti and the need for revolutionary action, sexual restraint and indulgence in violent action, engendered what has been called “the religion of patriotism”.

For Mahendra, since reunion with his wife and child is possible only once the goals of the santans are attained, the enslaved mother is also his wife Kalyani. A chaste Hindu wife who does not hesitate to consume poison when she finds herself in the path of her husband’s duty to his motherland, Kalyani is also a mother who can allow her child to consume poison, even though accidentally—thus implying the magnitude of sacrifice required of Indian women if the fight against the alien rulers is to succeed. Kalyani dreams of a woman, part-goddess and part-country, who demands that Kalyani give up her claims on her husband: “Then I heard the clearest, sweetest music of what sounded
like a flute, and the four-armed One seemed to say to me, ‘Leave your husband now and come to Me. This is your Mother; your husband must serve her’”(159). And this the obliging Kalyani readily does. Sarkar notes that one of the characteristics of Bankimchandra’s “nationalist phase” novels (which includes Anandamath) is the gradual replacement of flesh-and-blood women with an abstract shape of the enslaved “feminine figuration of the motherland.” Kalyani is that abstract shape, the ideal woman who is simultaneously to be sacrificed as wife and saved as mother.

In his preface to the first edition of Anandamath, Bankimchandra penned this cryptic statement: “The wife of the Bengalee is very often his chief support; sometimes also she is not.” The married couples in Anandamath, have, for the most part, consonant world-views. Marriage, as Rege notes, “helped to domesticate the cultural hybrid of Indian nationalism and [allowed] it to take root in the private sphere.” With growing nationalistic aspirations, the emergence of contending national definitions was inevitable; in this context, a harmonious marriage metaphorically also implied a unanimous nationalism, and conversely, contentious conjugality became a microcosm of nationalism’s internal conflicts. Tagore has depicted such a marriage in The Home and the World, a text that is centered upon the conflict between (and that attempts to reconcile) militant nationalism and liberal reformism. A similar conflict between divergent self-definitions of different national subjects is also at the heart of his novel Gora. In the next section I will study Tagore’s Gora, including in my study brief analyses of his The Home and the World—both novels have, for my purposes, similar concerns that, while they amplify each other, do not warrant separate, in-depth examination.
Gora:

Although the title of Tagore’s novel refers to only one of its two male protagonists as though he were the main character, the chapters of Gora are equally divided between the eponymous hero and Binoy, Gora’s closest friend and confidante. As Mukherjee points out, the differences between the gentle Binoy and the militant Gora represent the two main strands of nationalistic definitions that confronted both the author and the nation around 1910, the year in which Tagore wrote his novel. Like most other novels written in India at the time, Gora is a novel of ideas: in other words, the plot is mainly an occasion for an interplay of ideas, for debates and suggestions; the plot itself is fairly meager. “Gora” is at once an abbreviation of “Gourmohan” (Gora’s real name) and the Hindi equivalent of “whiteskin” (a colloquialism used to refer to the English), and upon this duality hinges the personal history of one of the two protagonists of Tagore’s story. During the rebellion of 1857, a pregnant Englishwoman was offered shelter by Anandmoyi, a Hindu Brahmin woman. The Englishwoman died in childbirth and Anandmoyi shed her orthodox Hinduism in order to adopt the orphan child, whom she named Gourmohan. Gora grew up into a well educated youth: one who, despite Anandmoyi’s best efforts, was militantly nationalistic, and stringently observant of orthodox Hindu rites. The novel begins with Gora’s friend Binoy’s rapidly growing attraction towards one of the daughters of Paresh Babu, who has converted to Brahmo Samaj (an unorthodox, moderate version of Hinduism). Gora tries to discourage Binoy’s new alliances, and Binoy himself tries to give them up, but the attempts of both prove futile. A rift develops between them, and grows through the novel, until it becomes unbridgeable when Binoy marries the Brahmo Samaji’s daughter. In the meantime, Gora
has also been conversing with another of Paresh babu’s girls, who like him is an adopted child. Once he is told the facts of his birth and history, he decides to take on a more moderate outlook, and marries the woman he has admired for so long. The novel ends with the suggestion that the chasm between the two friends has now closed.

Even this brief summary serves to substantiate the argument that if there is one axis around which the plot of Gora revolves, it is that of the friendship between Binoy and Gora. This is the first reason why Gora is relevant to my critical concerns: the homosocial bond between the two male protagonists veers into the homoerotic, as I shall illustrate in the following paragraphs, and it is ultimately the strength of their mutual desire that enables a reconciliation of their divergent nationalist outlooks. The attraction of the men for one another creates affiliations that may turn political, creates leaders and followers and engenders passionate attachment to particular ideologies. I will further argue that in Tagore’s narrative, an abstract figure of an idealized woman-country-goddess often forms the third point in the Sedgwickian triangulation of male homoerotic desire in the absence of, or in addition to, actual women. Because the Mother-Goddess of Bankimchandra’s Anandamath is now humanized and sexualized, the religious patriotism of the earlier novel also transforms into something less pietistic—although not any less fervent. Tagore seems to deplore the idea of violent action in the grip of religious euphoria, and suggests that the best action may sometimes be no action at all: an idea that Gandhian nationalism intensified into the powerful nationwide movement of passive resistance. Finally, Gora is interesting in the context of my argument because of the text’s awareness of Gora’s race, which is conspicuous by its curious absence.
The novel is set in the late nineteenth century Bengal, at the time when the question of national self-definition was just beginning to move into the foreground, and the ideology of militant nationalism was coming up against the more pacifistic philosophy of cultural revivalism. These two political theories were not hermetically sealed, of course, but existed in various hybrid forms. Gora represents one such composite—an interesting fact, given his race—since he is an English educated Hindu revivalist who is aggressively nationalistic. Once a reformist Brahmo Samaj supporter, he now observes the most stringent caste purity as well as all the orthodox Hindu rituals, and does so combatively: Gora, we are told, “would in fact be only too delighted if he got a chance in the street of quarrelling with an Englishman.”(51) Nearly six feet tall, broad-boned, with large hands “like the paws of a tiger,” Gora’s voice sounds like “distant thunder” and his arguments have the effect of “physical blows”. He is, in Rege’s words, the “epitome of a Hindu nationalist ideal of action[…]a powerhouse of passionately focused energy and religious-patriotic zeal.”77 This is ironic given the fact that Gora is actually not Bengali/native, and that therefore when Gora’s masculinity, his sheer physicality are being complemented, it is white masculinity that is really being praised. However, given how oblivious everyone including the narrator seems to be to this important fact, it seems not at all ironic in the world-view of the text.78 Although English educated and once westernized, Gora is not the effeminate Babu of English lore; he is in fact the result of what reformers of native masculinity like Swami Vivekananda (on whom the character is said to be based) demanded of men: “muscles of iron and nerves of steel.” He even holds physical strength training classes for young men.79 Binoy, in contrast is gentle and tolerant, easily led by the combative Gora and a half-hearted
follower of the political ideologies Gora has set for the group of men who seem completely enthralled by his charisma. Both men are unmarried, unemployed, and poised on the brink of change—yet afraid of change because it might take them apart from each other.

Despite the fact that same-sex friendship is described in Indian culture in terms far more emotional than it is in the West, the bond between Binoy and Gora seems excessively intimate. They eat together and talk late into the night, we are told, later “waking up startled to find that they had fallen asleep together on the mat.”(17) So close are the two friends, when Binoy meets Paresh Babu and his daughter, he finds that “his single-hearted loyalty to Gora had suffered because of his allowing room for intimacy with Paresh Babu.” Binoy is thus “prepared for Gora’s sneers and upbraiding, but to be cast off in this way was more than he could have imagined possible”(121). Despite being “cast off”, Binoy paces in front of Gora’s house all day like an anxious lover, but Gora is unrelenting, because he realizes that it is not Paresh Babu but his daughter whom Binoy has allowed to come between them. “But Binoy, why do you insist on holding on to me?” he asks, “The time has come for you to give me up along with the other things in Hindu society which are displeasing to you. Otherwise Paresh Babu’s daughters will feel hurt!”(119) Binoy, on his part, despite having struck up a new alliance, remains loyal to Gora; he talks of his friend relentlessly at Paresh Babu’s house, and “the more he had talked about his friend, the more eager he had become to meet him.”(133) Whenever Binoy does something he thinks Gora would disapprove of—like attending a Brahmo Samaj meeting with Paresh Babu and his daughters, for instance—he sneaks around like an adulterous wife, hoping his friend would not get to know of his betrayal. But Gora,
true to the role of the betrayed husband, follows Binoy into the meeting; upon seeing him, “[t]he happiness which had lit up [Binoy’s] mind all this time was suddenly extinguished.” (134) All day, each waits to be reconciled with the other: “it was unthinkable to Gora that [Binoy] would not come to make it up. So in all that he was doing he kept listening for Binoy’s footsteps.” (136)

The scene in which Binoy confesses his regard for Paresh Babu’s daughter is particularly indicative of the erotic undercurrent between the two men. It is important too because of the fact that even as Binoy makes a declaration of his passion, he leaves the subject of his passion unnamed. As I will demonstrate, the girl Binoy is attracted to from the very first is Sucharita, Paresh babu’s adopted daughter; by leaving the object of Binoy’s passion unnamed during his confession, Tagore makes space for the pretense that it was Lolita, the daughter Binoy ultimately marries, whom Binoy has been in love with all along. This also allows Gora to fall in love with, and later marry, Sucharita. While this traffic of desire between the two men is an idea I will explore in greater detail later, I want to point to the sensuous and emotional intensity of the scene of Binoy’s confessional:

The moon unfolded into a radiant blossom, filling the skies above him with its expanding petals. His whole life, its consciousness, its power seemed to lose itself in the bliss of its supreme beauty. When Gora came to himself again, he said suddenly: “Binoy, even this love of yours you will have to transcend—I tell you it will not do to stop there. One day I will show you how great and true is He who has called me His mighty power. Today I am filled with a great joy—I know I will never give you up into any lesser hands.” Binoy rose from the mat and came and stood beside Gora, who with an unwanted enthusiasm pressed Binoy to his bosom as he said: “Brother, for us ‘tis death—the same death. We two are one; none shall separate us, none shall ever hinder us.” Gora’s tumultuous emotion sent its waves pulsing through Binoy’s heart, and without a word he surrendered himself completely to his friend’s influence. They paced the terrace together in silence, while the eastern sky flushed crimson[…]When after two or three hours’ sleep, Gora awoke and saw Binoy sleeping beside him, his heart was filled with joy. He felt as relieved as one who has dreamt that he has lost some thing very precious, and wakes up to find that it was only a dream. He realized, with Binoy beside him, how crippled his life would have been if he had given up his friend.” (168)
This scene, with the two men under a moonlit sky talking of love, embracing, vowing never to let anyone separate them, and then awakening next to each other is definitely suggestive of an intimacy that transcends ordinary friendship. And this intimacy, despite being riddled with jealousy through the course of the novel, is reestablished at the end, and that within the normative heterosexual unit of the family.

The way *Gora* achieves this is through what Eve Sedgwick has described as the “homoerotic triangle.” Sedgwick argues that “[c]ulture depends on a perfected but always friable self-ignorance in men as to the significance of their desire for other men”⁸⁰, and that homophobic constructions of heterosexuality depend upon the rather slippery distinction between men’s identification with men and their desire for women—a distinction made flimsy because of the collapsibility of boundaries between identification and desire. When the idea of the homosocial (male friendship) is combined with desire, then an unbroken continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual immediately presents itself. This continuum is only accepted and understood by society when a third point in the relationship, forming an erotic triangle, interrupts the linearity of the desire between men. This third point is women, who, as Claude Levi-Strauss, Gayle Rubin and Foucault argue, form a medium of exchange between men. If this traffic in women makes women only the “conduit” of relationships between men, then clearly the real partners of the relationship are men. Thus Sedgwick argues that the desire for women serves a “more or less perfunctory detour on the way to a closer, but homophobically proscribed, bonding with another man.”⁸¹ Male-male desire is understood because it is routed through a woman, and these three points in the field of desire are what Sedgwick connects into an erotic triangle.
Sedgwick’s scenario is perfectly applicable to the situation of Binoy and Gora, whose homosocial bond is clearly laced with desire; their relationship must therefore be routed through a woman. At first, Gora’s half-brother’s daughter, Sukumari, is proffered as the currency of social exchange between the two men. From the very moment the alliance between Binoy and Sukumari is mentioned, both Gora and Binoy look upon it as the excuse that would bring them together by making up their immediate quarrel and by establishing a permanent bond for the future. Although Binoy does not think the match suitable, the narrators tell us: “If the marriage took place, thought he to himself, then he would really become one of Gora’s family, not to be so easily cast off[...] he felt a special pleasure for the moment, because this proposal of Mohim’s would give him an excuse for seeking Gora’s advice.”(126) Gora, on his part, we are told, would never have entertained this proposal before his friend’s entanglement with Paresh babu’s daughter. “To-day, however, it did not seem to him to be so entirely unworthy of regard. At any event, it gives him an immediate excuse for going to see Binoy.”(138) By agreeing to marry Sukumari, Binoy was trying to pay “at last an adequate price for Gora’s friendship.”(184) Later, when the author finds the possibility of another route of connection between Gora and Binoy, he makes Binoy withdraw from his earlier acquiescence: “When he had consented to the proposal of marriage he had been thinking only of his friendship with Gora, but he had never visualized clearly what it would mean in other connections.”(277)

The new homoerotic triangle involves Sucharita, Paresh Babu’s adopted daughter with whom Binoy had been in love earlier. It is curious that the later chapters of the novel (as well as what little criticism there is on Gora) seem to be completely oblivious to the fact that it is toward Sucharita that Binoy first finds himself attracted, and that Gora starts
intercourse with her only because “[h]e was anxious to discover what the attraction was that exercised such an influence over Binoy’s heart.”(211) When Binoy first meets Sucharita, he is instantly captivated by her: “What wonderful eyes! It never occurred to him to ask whether they were large or small, black or brown[...]the girl’s eyes, which were on him[...]prevented him from finishing his sentence.”(10) So flurried is Binoy that he omits to return her bow, and he “reproached himself again and again for this trifling omission. He mentally reviewed every detail of his behavior” in the presence of Sucharita and found it “atrocious”. When Sucharita leaves his house in which she and her ill father had temporarily found shelter, he finds her handkerchief and thinks about Baul’s song about the surprising capacity of love to make one captive: “Into the cage flies the unknown bird, It comes I know not whence.”(12) He even feels “greatly attracted”(13) to Sucharita’s brother when he sees the resemblance between the siblings. So evident is his regard that Sucharita is very aware of it: “Sucharita was not unaware, in her heart of hearts, of having acquired an influence over Binoy, but she tried to laugh the matter off.”(196) Then within a few pages we are told that Gora wants to discover what keeps Binoy away from him. From that point, the narration becomes completely blind to all the above incidents, and pretends that Binoy had all along been in love with Lolita, another of Paresh Babu’s daughters – thus freeing up Sucharita for Gora.

Lolita is, for reasons that are very evident, jealous of Gora’s influence over Binoy. “It’s nothing but Gora, Gora, Gora day in and day out,” she complains to her sister, “his friend Gora may be a great man, but isn’t he himself a man also?” Sucharita does not agree that Binoy’s great devotion prevents him from being a man, but Lolita keeps wishing to “untie his bonds for him and free him from his friend.”(193-4) It is Binoy’s
knowledge that he is acting or is being perceived as unmanly that makes Binoy continue
his alliance with Lolita: “Binoy’s old instincts rise up to shame him[...]‘Lolita thinks that
I am afraid of Gora, as a school boy of his master[...]Is Gora my keeper that I to be
answerable to him?’”(201) He later converts to the Brahmo Samaj for the same reason, to
prove himself manly, and thus creates a temporary rift in their friendship: just before he is
about to convert, he feels a swelling of pride because “[t]he honor of his manhood was at
stake,”(603) and by converting he thinks he is about to rescue it. In the meantime, Lolita
compromises her reputation by traveling alone with him on a steamer one night, but even
there the shadow of Gora is between them: “from the depths of Binoy’s awakening
manhood, and mingled with the silent message of the ever-awake Bridegroom[...]there
was also another thought which kept recurring to him in the darkness of this moonless
night: ‘Tonight Gora is in gaol!’”(330) While Gora is in gaol, Gora’s foster mother
Anandmoyi encourages Binoy to quickly marry Lolita, and thus save her reputation:

“If you had any manhood,” said Anandmoyi, “you could easily save her from the clutches
of such a rumor.”[...]
“But, mother, we must think of Gora, mustn’t we?” argued Binoy.
“No, my child,” said Anandmoyi decisively, “this is not a matter in which Gora should be
consulted. I know he will be angry, and I don’t want him to be angry with you. But what
can we do? If you have any regard for Lolita you can never allow her to be an object of
scandal to her Samaj all her days.” But this was more easily said than done! Since Gora
had been sent to gaol Binoy’s love for him had flowed with redoubled force, and how
could he prepare such a heavy blow for him?”(540)

Lolita “prid[es] herself on her influence over Binoy,” and the idea that he is “not able to
extricate himself from his friend’s clutches mak[es] her feel antagonistic towards him for
his weakness.”(595) Even on the morning of his wedding, Binoy feels the need to meet
his friend and wakes up early to go and meet him: “‘I know that you will probably not
come,’ faltered Binoy, ‘but without at least speaking to you once today I could not take
such a step. That is why I have come to you so early this morning.’”(790) All is well
however, because at the end Gora marries Sucharita, and makes the alliance between the friends even stronger by translating their friendship into a familial relationship. The antagonism between a Westernized Brahmoism (into which Binoy has unconvincingly converted) and orthodox Hindu nationalism (which Gora has to adapt to his discovery of his racial background) are also thus reconciled.

Gora says earlier in the novel that women are “a part of the world problem, which must be dealt with by solution or compromise, but which [can] not be ignored.”(211) According to Rege, the men in Gora “eventually realize that it is not only the symbol of Woman that is necessary to complete their masculinist nationalistic vision, but also the participation of real women themselves, helping actively to shape the new India.”82 However, I see the role of the women in the novel as indirect at best; they are merely inserted in the economy of desire between men, either as real women, or as an abstract and idealized symbol – it doesn’t seem to matter which, just as it doesn’t particularly matter which of the two women are loved by which of the two men. Gora in fact explicitly counters Rege’s argument, when he thinks to himself “that it is woman who ought to be called the motherland[...]The misfortunes of the country are insults to her, and it is because we are indifferent to those insults that in these days we have cause to be ashamed of our manhood[...]the further we banish woman from us, and the smaller the place we give to her in our lives, the weaker does our manhood become.”(581)

My argument that the figure of the mother-goddess forms the third point in the Sedgwickian triangulation of male homoerotic desire is best illustrated in Tagore’s nationalistic fiction through the Nikhil-Bimala-Sandeep triangle in The Home and the World. Briefly, the plot of this novel revolves around a rich, mild-mannered landlord
Nikhil, his wife Bimala whom he is attempting to modernize, and his friend Sandeep who has long been "fleecing" Nikhil in the name of their friendship. Bimala, although initially disapproving of Sandeep's many impositions upon her husband, gets drawn towards Sandeep, who in turn boosts her self-image by elevating her to the level of a goddess. Nikhil is aware of this growing attraction, but he chooses not to intervene, because he is such a good, gentle man. At the end, Bimala gets a rude awakening, and, disillusioned with Sandeep's rhetoric, decides that her husband is the better man of the two after all.

That the homosocial bond between the two men is unusually close is suggested by Bimala's initially complaint that Nikhil "would unquestioningly supply him with the money[...]over and above the regular living allowance which Sandip Babu also received from him. The strangest part of it was that my husband and Sandip Babu did not agree in their opinions."(17) But that this friendship is laced by desire is evident in several incidents in the novel: for instance, when Sandeep replaces Bimala's picture with his own in a photo frame so that his picture is now next to that of Nikhil; or when he wishes aloud in the presence of Bimala that Nikhil would read a book about "modern sex-problems and various other matters" and then attempts to connect this wish to the swadeshi movement while both Bimala and the reader look on, uncomprehending. In this context, it is significant that Sandeep becomes attracted to, or at least pretends to be attracted to, Bimala; yet, however, he can not bring himself to really be physically intimate with her even though she seems more than willing. Her desire is fired by Sandeep's transformation of her from a mere woman into a goddess: "When, in Sandip's appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship me, then does my blood dance, indeed and the barriers of my hesitation totter."(90) The praise of
Sandeep sounds to her like the praise of all the patriots all over India, and it is in under the pretense of serving her country by becoming a symbol that Bimla justifies her adulterous longings. She dresses enticingly, not, she tells herself, for any other reason but that “the eyes of men fail to discern the goddess, if outward beauty be lacking.”(25)

Notice, again, the blurring between woman and goddess in the following paragraphs:

“I can see that you are that beautiful spirit of fire, which burns the home to ashes and lights up the larger world with its flame[…]Impart grace to all that is baneful.” It was not clear to whom Sandip Babu addressed his last appeal. It might have been She whom because worshipped with his Bande Mataram. It might have been the Womanhood of his country. Or it might have been its representative, the woman before him.

“Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the Shakti of our country? The Geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is[…]If, with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map-made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt — do you know what kind of skirt? — like that of the earthen-red sari you wore the other day, with a broad blood-red border. Can I ever forget it? Such are the visions which give vigor to life, and joy to death!”

Sandip’s eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not say.

Nikhil cannot “wholeheartedly[…]accept the spirit of Bande Mataram”(21) and refuses to “run amuck crying Bande Mataram”(44) because he believes that service is distinct from worship, and that “[t]o worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.”(21)

Therefore Sandip elevates Nikhil’s wife, whom he does wholeheartedly accept and towards whom he is completely devoted into the embodiment of the mother-country, thus establishing a conduit of fervent desire between them.

Binoy and Nikhil have similar nationalistic ideologies, as do Gora and Sandeep; the former two are pacifists and reformists and the latter two are militant nationalists. In both novels, although the pacifists are shown as extremely passive on occasion, they are the more sympathetic male protagonist. Tagore makes even Gora, a defensively hypermasculine nationalist reiterate two of Gandhi’s central tenets. The first is that “[h]e who submits to injustice is also guilty—he causes wrong-doing to grow[...]being meek
and tolerant is no dharma. It encourages the wrong doer.”(303) The second is that “[i]f we have the mistaken notion that because the English are strong unless we become exactly like them [we cannot succeed] then that impossibility will never be achieved, for by mere imitation we shall eventually be neither one nor the other.”(221) Rege notes that, “Tagore[...]questioned both the colonialist idea of action and the nationalist notion of karma which he sees as disturbingly similar to each other.”85 To just act, or to just use power, simply because one is able to, is not admirable. In the words of Paresh Babu in Gora, “[i]t is no use saying that it is one’s duty to be doing something; often enough one’s chief duty is not to do anything at all.”(607)

As I will describe in the next chapter, these are the ideas that Gandhi reiterated, reconstructed and resignified into a movement that finally culminated in the independence of India. The idea of passive and non-violent resistance, the positioning of India as Mother India and the concomitant stipulation that her “sons” be celibate and that her “daughters” facilitate this chastity, the transformation of sexual into nationalistic fervor, the consecration of homosocial units of dedicated freedom fighters over the traditional heterosexual familial units—these are some of the central tenets of the Indian freedom struggle whose long history I have sought to trace in this chapter. The imperial charge of native effeminacy, and the consequent refiguration of Indian masculinity (not to mention standards of normative gender and sexual behavior) was, as I have attempted to show above, in many ways the impetus for all these varying, and yet related, definitions of the nation and the national subject. Having already suggested that homoerotic narratives are important sites that had palpable impact on the growth of a nationalistic spirit in India, I will explore, in the next chapter, the extent to which a
mobilization of non-normative sexual/gender subjectivity contributed to nation-formation in India.
Endnotes for Chapter Three:

1 Saleem Kidwai and Ruth Vanita (ed.) Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History. (New York: Palgrave-St Martin's, 2000), xxiv.
3 In Sushruta Samhita, and ancient medical text, the term A’sekya is used to designate a man who can have an erection only by “sucking the genitals and drinking the sperm of another man”. Tritiya Prakriti is a category in the Kamasutra that indicates homosexually inclined individuals. See Kidwai et al, 26.
4 Queer historians have similarly pointed to terms like ganymede, tribade, and sapphist being used in Europe from the Renaissance onward.
5 For examples of such stories, see Kidwai et al, 55-103.
6 Peter Drucker has examined the varieties of same-sex eroticism in the third world and noted the tolerance of ambiguous sexual and gender identities in his essay “In the Tropics There Is No Sin: Sexuality and Gay-Lesbian Movements in the Third World.” New Left Review. 218 (July-August 1996), 75-101.
7 Kidwai et al, 230.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 110.
10 Ibid., 112-3.
12 Kidwai et al, 115.
13 Ibid., 123.
21 Homi Bhabha. The Location of Culture. (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

24 Ibid.


27 Ibid., 157.


29 Quoted in Sinha, 15-16.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 68.


34 Nandy quotes Duncan M. Derrett, 77.


38 Nandy, 3.


41 Accounts of Indians in the metropole in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are now available in microfiche: see *The Empire Writes Back.* (Marlborough, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew, 2003).


43 Singh, 141.

44 Quoted in Sinha, 22.

45 Quoted in Nandy, 9.

46 Quoted in Krishnaswamy, 126.

47 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 40.
54 Kidwai et al, 123.
56 This is not to suggest that there was an all-round submission to the imperial move to bowdlerize Indian literary traditions in general, and Urdu poetry in particular. Firaq Gorakhpuri, the early twentieth century Urdu poet, for example, wrote a long essay in defense of the ghazal, addressing the suppression of homosexuality and asserting the right of poets to write what they pleased: if this writing was homoerotic, he said, the poets need neither apologize nor justify their writing as “poetic convention.” Penal codes did not dictate truth, Firaq wrote, and homosexuality was not criminal: “[F]rom Havelock Ellis to the present, writers all over the world who had done serious academic work or research, had accepted that some people love people of their own sex. Scientists do not fear slander.” (Quoted in Kidwai et al, 265).
59 Quoted in Kidwai et al, 249.
62 Quoted in Kidwai et al, 253.
64 Quoted in Charu Gupta. “‘Dirty’ Hindi Literature: Contests About Obscenity in Late Colonial North India.” South Asia Research. 20 (September, 2000), 95.
66 Ibid.
67 Quoted in Ray, 197
68 Rege, 28.
69 Rege, 38.


Rege, 34.


Rege, 30.

Mukherjee discussed Anandamath in Realism and Reality, 47-56.

Rege, 42.

All racial markers must of course have been present in Gora, and therefore it is surprising that nobody suspects him to be non-Bengali, that no one points out or even mentions his difference as being racial. Even when Gora discovers the truth at the end, it is with surprising equanimity. So thoroughly has Gora become native that his difference seems not at all noticeable. This adoption of nativity, however, suggests to me not at all the “stained brown with walnut juice” colonial arrogance, but Gandhi’s famous assertion: “If the English become Indianized we can accommodate them.” (The Penguin Gandhi Reader, 38).

Indeed it seems that it is only a schoolboy-infatuation for Gora that holds his little band of young men together and by his side. When he goes on a tour of India, four guys go with him; two return due to the hardships they face. “As for the other two, it was only because of their devotion for Gora that they did not do likewise, leaving their leader alone.”(297) It is devotion to an individual, and not an ideology, that impels their actions. I will show in the next chapter that this is true not only of literary (semi-)leaders, but also of historical leaders like Mahatma Gandhi.


Ibid., 19-21.

Rege, 45.

The first passage, about the photo frames is as follows:

There was a double photo-frame on the table with Bee’s photograph by the side of Nikhil’s. I had taken out hers.

“If you are annoyed,” I went on, “I must make a shift to fill up the vacancy.”

To-day I have filled it up. This photograph of mine was taken in my early youth[...]My portrait now reposes next to Nikhil’s, for are not the two of us old friends?(73)

The second passage, in which Sandeep attempts unsuccessfully to connect Swadeshi with his desire that Nikhil read his book on sex is as follows:

“I wish Nikhil would read it.” Bee frowned a little as she murmured. “What makes you wish that?”

“He is a man, you see, one of us. My only quarrel with him is that because delights in a misty vision of this world. Have you not observed how this trait of his makes him look on Swadeshi as if it was some poem of which the metre must be kept correct at every step? We, with the dubs of our prose, are the iconoclasts of metre.”

“What has your book to do with Swadeshi!”
“You would know if you only read it. Nikhil wants to go by made-up maxims, in Swadeshi as in everything else; so because knocks up against human nature at every turn, and then falls to abusing it. He never will realise that human nature was created long before phrases were and will survive them too.” (63) In the words of Nikhil’s master: “I have long wondered how you could go on putting up with him. I have, at times, even suspected you of weakness. I now see that though you two do not rhyme, your rhythm has been the same.” (141)

84 “I led her, unresisting, to a seat. But strange! at that very point the rush of my impetuosity suffered an unaccountable check.” (148) Sandeep wonders more than once why he is unable to “press the almost certain into the absolutely assured.” (104)

85 Rege, 42.
"I can suppress the enemy but I have not been able to expel him altogether": Gandhian Sexuality, Gandhian Nationalism

O India! With this mere echoing of others, with this base imitation of others, with this dependence on others[...]wouldst thou, with these provisions only, scale the highest pinnacle of civilization and greatness? Wouldst thou attain, by means of thy graceful cowardice, that freedom deserved only by the brave and heroic?[...]O India! Forget not—that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti[...]Forget not—that thy marriage, thy wealth, they life are not for sense-pleasure[...]Thou brave one, be bold, take courage[...]repeat and pray, day and night, 'O thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness and make me a man!'

The above epigraph is part of a widely quoted appeal that the late nineteenth century spiritual leader, social reformer and nationalist Swami Vivekananda addressed to his countrymen at a time when Indian independence had emerged as an idea without yet being consolidated into an organized political movement of resistance. There are two significant oddities in this address. First, Vivekananda’s comment about the “base imitation” is obviously directed at the anglicized Indians, the brown babus caricatured by the colonizers to provide a gendered rationale for the empire as well as to discursively manage interracial homoerotic intimacies. Yet, the very fact that this impassioned plea is not only directed at but also addressed to the elite babu, that the “O India!” is also the “thou” who is weak and dependent, suggests the author’s awareness that strength can be found where weakness is: the awareness, in other words, of the political potential of the effeminized native elite, and indeed of the use-value of the ascription of “unmanliness” and “weakness” to realize this political potential. Second, the extract suggests a rather paradoxical nationalist desire: on the one hand, Vivekananda asserts that an imitation of “others” (meaning, of course, the British) is “base” and inconsistent with the hope for “civilization and greatness”; on the other hand, he seems to have completely internalized
the British ascription and disdain of native effeminacy, as is evident in his plea. Therefore Vivekananda simultaneously recommends that the project of nation-building evolve its own distinct self-definition, and demands that this definition get rid of the purported "unmanliness" and replace it with a masculinity, the boundaries of which, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, were defined by the British.

These inconsistencies, however, are not altogether inexplicable: indeed, given the fact that the article was written at a time when native cultural codes were delegitimized and replaced with imperial ones, the contradiction is inevitable. As we have seen in the previous chapter, native sexual practices were criticized and even criminalized, and native gender behavior was relentlessly caricatured under colonial rule. In such a context, it is understandable that an incipient nationalism should seek to reject colonial codes without being able to locate, as it were, any outside-of-the-code. In this chapter I will examine how this exteriority was finally identified by the phase of Indian struggle for independence that came to be known as Gandhian nationalism: Gandhi both resignified the concept of strength and masculinity by delinking it from martial prowess, and proudly claimed the feminine principle within men as their succor, not their scourge.

In so doing, he did not invent a tradition, he refurbished one that had been extant in pre-colonial India. Gandhi’s intervention and resignification was not an abrupt radical interruption of Indian nationalism until then: to say that an initial native internalization of British definitions of creditable gender and sexuality was suddenly replaced by an altogether new Gandhian paradigm would suggest hermetically sealed historical boundaries when the reality was, in fact, far more diffuse and hybrid. We noted in chapter three, for instance, that the move to remasculate the native male by strengthening him
physically through akhadas or gymnasiums was attended also by a propagation of the traditional Hindu idea that physical strength was limited, whereas spiritual strength was unconditional and complete. Similarly, we saw that even as homoerotic literary traditions were revised, homosocial units of dedicated freedom fighters became more respectable and more germane to the nationalist vision than traditional heterosexual familial units. Therefore it would be more accurate to say that Gandhi became the living symbol of a nationalist vision that had until then existed in more scattered, less concrete forms.

Gandhi's suitability for this role was facilitated by two facts. First, Gandhi himself was one of the natives who had once desired to become English, who had gone to England to study, adopted English dress, manners and language, but realizing the impossibility of his transformation, had gone native again with a thoroughness that characterized all his actions. Second—and this will be the burden of my argument in this chapter—Gandhi was particularly well suited for the resignification of a native gender and sexuality that had been labeled as perverse by the empire because of his own ambiguous gender and sexuality. While two critics\(^2\) have briefly noted Gandhian opposition to the empire as perhaps related to his androgyny, there is, to my knowledge, no sustained critical work that disinters the unmistakable, if unconscious homoeroticism that always lurks behind autobiographical, biographical, and fictional accounts of Gandhi. There is, in other words, an enormous potential for a new queer critical perspective in understanding Gandhi, and—because his politics and life informed each other—also Gandhian nationalism. In this chapter, then, I seek also to fill a critical interstice in the work on Gandhi, an important task not least because of the historical significance of Gandhi as the leader accredited with mobilizing India into a successful
quest for independence. With his self-proclaimed androgyny, his vocal rejection of
companionate marriage, his open declarations of love for (English and native) men,
Gandhi is important both as the "father of the nation" and as the "eunuch for the nation",
frequently attributed adjectival phrases that I see as correlated.

Most of the autobiographical accounts/quotations of Gandhi in this chapter are
either from his autobiography *The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (translated into
English from the original Gujarati version by Mahadev Desai) or from *The Collected
Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (henceforth *CWMG*), an extensive collection of his letters,
speeches and other writings. In addition to scrutinizing (and drawing my arguments and
conclusions from) Gandhi's own version of his life, I will also include examples from
some fictional works that portray Gandhi, including mainly Chaman Nahal's *The Crown
and the Loincloth* but including occasional references to R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the
Mahatma* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. My decision to study a cluster of novels instead of
focusing upon a single text is based on two reasons. One is pragmatic: despite the central
position accorded to Gandhi in at least two of the above titles, his role in them is, so to
speak, merely titular. Gandhi appears as an idea, and occasionally even as a character, in
several novels, but not long enough to allow a sustained critical reading of his role—the
spotlight is usually usurped by some follower or opponent who invites Gandhi into the
text by occasionally remembering him or his teachings. The other reason is critical: I
want to suggest that my claim (that Gandhi's ambiguous gender and sexuality was central
to his resignification of native effeminacy into ardent nationalism) is not based upon an
individual or idiosyncratic interpretation of his philosophies/actions/relationships, but one
that seems to be shared also by other readers of Gandhi.
Gandhi’s Early Passions:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar, a small town in the west coast of India in 1869. When Gandhi was 13, his parents arranged his marriage with Kasturba bai, and very soon afterwards, despite opposition from his community, he went to England to study law. In 1891, Gandhi returned to India and tried unsuccessfully to set up a practice. He experienced vividly the humiliation of being a colonized subject, and became aware of the gulf that would always separate him and his countrymen from the ruling race. Two years later, he took up a one-year contract as a legal aid to some Indians in South Africa, another British colony. Gandhi’s year-long contract became a two decade stay. In those years in South Africa, Gandhi discovered, through his experiments with various forms of political resistance, the potent weapon of non-violent resistance, which he brought back to India with him in 1915. He soon became the most venerated political leader in the Indian independence movement. A year after India attained independence, Gandhi was shot and killed by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu fanatic who believed that Gandhi was siding with Muslims (instead of with Hindus as he ought to have done) and further that his discourse of non-violence was turning India into an impotent nation of cowards.

Gandhi opens his autobiography with a brief account of his “birth and parentage” and then starts describing his early life. In the very first paragraph of the chapter on “childhood”, Gandhi shows an acute consciousness of his difference from other children. Chronically shy, Gandhi had no companions other than his books, and he never lingered in school after classes. “I literally ran back because I could not bear to talk to anybody,” he says, “I was even afraid lest anyone should poke fun at me.”(4) There seems little
reason why anyone should want to make fun of a child from a fairly wealthy family, and Gandhi does not enlighten us.\textsuperscript{3} The chapter on childhood lasts for five brief paragraphs, before Gandhi turns to the “painful duty” of having to record his child-marriage and his life as a young husband. Gandhi’s marriage, and his relationship with Kasturba is a point at which I want to pause, because I find that it is to this marriage that most of Gandhi’s attitudes toward sexuality and gender-behavior can be traced. Indeed, I would argue (as Rashmi Sudha Puri does and indeed as Gandhi himself admitted) that even his concept of non-violent and passive resistance, his idea that a considerable moral force was latent in meekness, was inspired by wife, who remained, until the end, a reminder of the potency of Satyagraha, or the force of truth.

Gandhi’s account of the early years of his marriage suggests a conflict raging within him from the very start of their “disasters of lustful love,”(10) a torment that cannot be accounted for by his attitude towards and adoption of celibacy, which came much later. One may argue, of course, that it is the adult Gandhi writing in the aftermath of his vow of abstinence who is projecting his shame and anxiety on the sexual encounters of his younger self. But unless the actual actions—and not just the thoughts—that Gandhi recalls are also tampered by his hindsight, his passion for Kasturba seems always attended by some subtle act of cruelty towards her.\textsuperscript{4}

Gandhi frequently emphasizes the fact that he never “went with” a woman other than Kasturba, despite his long years of separation from her. Such abstinence does not seem unusual to him; indeed, Gandhi admits that he jealously demanded a similar faithfulness from his wife: “If I should be pledged to be faithful to my wife,” he says, “she should also be pledged to be faithful to me.”(9) However, Gandhi’s autobiography
suggests a strange inability to consummate chance sexual encounters that is distinct from ideas of morality or faithfulness. We see in at least two instances that whenever there is a potential for infidelity, something interrupts the sexual act, either Gandhi’s own anxiety, or, incomprehensibly, even the very person who took him to some place of “easy virtue.”

Once, for instance, he is taken to a brothel, but despite the fact that “[t]he bill had already been paid”, the young Gandhi finds himself unable to act, until the woman “naturally lost patience with me and showed me the door, with abuses and insults. I then felt as though my manhood had been injured, and wished to sink into the ground for shame.”

Gandhi gives two reasons for his ill-treatment of his wife. One, he says, was his projection of his own sexual anxiety (over, I suggest, his sexual inadequacy) onto his wife. “I took out my anger at her for my own weakness,” he admits. The other was his irresistible dependence upon the counsel of one of his male friends, Sheikh Mehtab, the same friend who took him to the abovementioned brothel and settled his dues there. Gandhi “deplores” his “blind devotion” to this friend, and admits that the company of Mehtab was partially responsible for his attitude towards Kasturba. Mehtab encouraged Mohandas to break taboos: he pushed Gandhi to eat meat, for example, and took him to visit prostitutes. Mehtab seems to have nurtured a desire to alienate Gandhi from his child bride: he continually insinuated Kasturba’s infidelity to her jealous husband, and Gandhi treated his young wife with ever greater harshness.

The strength of Mehtab’s hold on Gandhi has been noted by biographical as well as fictional accounts of Gandhi. Nahal, for instance notes that the young Gandhi was attracted to the strength of his friend, and was completely under his spell:
Sheikh Mehtab said, eat meat to be strong, and he did that. Mehtab said, go with women of the streets to be strong—and once he went and did that. Mehtab said, steal to be strong and he did that too. And yet he remained the weakling that he was, bungling each of his attempts at chivalry. And the comfort of his mother’s embrace too was snatched away from him, for he was handed a small bride to embrace and play with instead. (33)

The link between Gandhi’s confessed attachment to and admiration of his mother, his early arranged marriage, and his slavish devotion to Mehtab has also been noted by Wolpert in his biography of Gandhi:

For a thirteen-year-old (and from all accounts, including his own) ‘mama’s boy’ dealing with the sexual upsurge of adolescence at the same time as the demand for establishing an emotional intimacy with a strange girl, Sheikh Mehtab must have been a godsend. [Mehtab] provided Mohandas with the adolescent haven where young men can be both dismissive and fearful of women and heterosexual love, wherein the vague homoeroticism of masculine banter and ceaseless activity a youth can gradually come to terms with the femininity within and without him. Little wonder that, in spite of the family’s strong disapproval and Mohandas’s own conscious view of their relationship as one between a reformer and a rake, their friendship remained close and lasted for almost twenty years.

What Wolpert downplays as the “vague homoeroticism of masculine banter” was an intimacy strong enough to disrupt—not facilitate—Gandhi’s relationship with “women and heterosexual love.” When Gandhi first went to England after five years of a marriage made turbulent by Mehtab, for instance, he sent his friend money out of an already scanty allowance, but spared no thought, let alone money, for the young wife he had left behind. Upon his return from his extended stay in England, Gandhi sent his wife back to her parents’ house for a year, supposedly (and unconvincingly) because his causeless jealousy was still unabated. How little Kasturba’s presence mattered to Gandhi is further evident in the manner he tells the reader about this new separation from his wife – in one dismissive, incidental sentence in his autobiography. A year later, Gandhi left for South Africa, alone.

Gandhi describes part his early life in Natal under the title “As a Householder”. This is a strange choice of word for a man learned in religious scriptures, who must
certainly have known that “householder” represents a stage in Hindu life in which a man settles down in a household with his wife and (begets) children – this is a fact even a Hindu child would know. But Gandhi’s household lacked the all-important wife of a “household”. Gandhi did not bring Kasturba with him initially because he was in Africa under what was, after all, only a year-long contract. But even after Gandhi understood that his work would not end in a year he wrote to a friend to persuade Kasturba to remain in India for another few years: “she had very little of my company in Natal; probably, she would have less in Johannesburg. However[...]I place myself absolutely in her hands. If she must come, then she may make preparations.” He also wrote to his nephews to “try to convince[...]your aunt[...]that it will be best for her to remain in India.” In Kasturba’s absence, Gandhi lived with an unnamed “companion and help”, who, biographers have concluded, was none other than Gandhi’s old friend, Sheikh Mehtab. The “Householder” chapter in Gandhi’s autobiography is very important because of the light it throws on Gandhi’s passionate relationships with his male friends, and reveals a strange sequence of homoerotic possessiveness and jealousy that culminated in his practice of celibacy, a vow he undertook the same year as the events described in this chapter.

“The companion,” Gandhi says, referring in all probability to Mehtab, “was very clever and, I thought, faithful to me. But in this I was deceived. He became jealous of an office clerk who was staying with me, and wove such a tangled web that I suspected the clerk.” (142) We do not know why the companion became jealous or what Gandhi suspected the clerk of—Gandhi is uncharacteristically reticent here—but the upshot is that the clerk left Gandhi’s household and his office in a temper. A few days after this, Gandhi’s regular cook went on leave, and Gandhi found another young man to replace
him temporarily, “a perfect scamp” who proved a godsend for Gandhi because he helped reveal the true nature of the “companion”. One day, this replacement-cook came “panting” to Gandhi’s office and asked him to return home immediately. “He took me straight to the upper floor, pointed at my companion’s room, and said, ‘Open this door and see for yourself.’ I saw it all.” In a temper, Gandhi knocked “heavily, so as to make the very walls shake,” and discovered his companion with a prostitute. An enraged Gandhi said to the companion: “From this moment I cease to have anything to do with you. I have been thoroughly deceived and have made a fool of myself. That is how you have requited my trust in you?” The companion, in turn, threatened to “expose” him, although he did not say, or Gandhi does not tell us, what there was to expose. This break from his friend elicits from Gandhi an emotion that his year-long separation from and quarrel with Kasturba gave not the least indication of:

I had known that the companion was a bad character, and yet I believed in his faithfulness to me[...]Infatuation had completely blinded me[...]being under the influence of the companion. I should probably have been unable to lead the life of detachment I then began. I should always have been wasting my time on him. He had the power to keep me in the dark and to mislead me.

His lesson learned, Gandhi “made up [his] mind to go home, fetch [his] wife and children, and then return and settle” in Natal with them.(162-5)

It was at this time that Gandhi started practicing celibacy, although he took the vow of sexual abstinence only five years later. It is significant that he links his vow with two men, the “companion” and Raychandrabhai, a jeweler whom he befriended, and with whom he often had discussions regarding the relationship between sexuality and salvation. In the extract above Gandhi describes how his ruptured friendship with the companion enabled, or at least facilitated, the life of detachment that he “then began.” It was only in south Africa, he says, that he realized the importance of being celibate even
within his marriage, and though he is not sure what first made him think in this direction, he recollects that “the predominant factor was the influence of Raychandbhai.”(179) The conversation with Raychand that brought about Gandhi’s adoption of absolute sexual abstinence is itself telling. Gandhi had just been eulogizing the services rendered to a man due to conjugal love, when Raychand suggested that what was praiseworthy was the devotion with which service was rendered, not who rendered the service: “Supposing you had found the same devotion in a male servant, would you have been pleased in the same way?”(179). This cryptic conversation led Gandhi to (rather incomprehensibly) conclude that the servant’s devotion, unbound by duty, was far more praiseworthy than a wife’s, and, in a queer logical leap, he decided that he would make his faithfulness to his wife worthy by abstaining from sexual contact with her. Consider his description of his taking this vow, and note how much easier it seems in his case than it surely should have been: “I Must say that she was never the temptress,” he says, meaning perhaps that he did not feel tempted by her, “It was therefore the easiest thing for me to take the vow of brahmacharya, if only I willed it.”(180)

Gandhi “failed” in his vow only twice (although he claims that he really struggled to maintain it). Thus, after the prolonged separation from his wife, Gandhi had only just begun his life as an actual householder when he made the conscious choice to “live the life of a vanaprastha—of one retired from household cares.”(180) He claims that his relationship with his wife improved only after he had undertaken his vow of celibacy: “The canker of suspicion was rooted out only when I understood the glory of Brahmacharya.” Being celibate meant also that Gandhi would no longer have to battle the sexual inadequacy (which alone can adequately explain his completely baseless
suspicions of his wife’s fidelity) and this may have aided his perception of an improved relationship. The reality was that Gandhi and Kasturba were bound to each other in duty and not in love. “She, like the faithful Hindu wife, insists on following me wherever I go,” Gandhi says of Kasturba, and she herself writes in a letter: “I am not like you modern wives who wish to lord it over your husband[...]Such behaviour ill becomes a virtuous Hindu wife.” After taking the vow of celibacy, Gandhi was never violent towards Kasturba, as he recalls he had been earlier, when, for instance, she would not clean the chamber pots of an office clerk “cheerfully”. He claims that uncontrolled emotions between them were matters long past, and that they were, despite their “wide difference[...]intellectually” companions and tried friends. This wishful thinking notwithstanding, we find him writing about Kasturba much later to his friend Hermann Kallenbach: “She is the most venomous woman I have ever met. She never forgets, never forgives[...]All the charges she brought against me she undoubtedly means[...]Yes, a man who wishes to work with detachment must not marry.”

Thus Kasturba taught Gandhi not only that the meek, with their “matchless powers of endurance” are finally victorious, but also that marriage may be one of the greatest impediments to a selfless service to the nation. So well did he learn this lesson that he developed a doctrine that repudiated the idea of marriage with an almost phobic vehemence. When his eldest son, Harilal, expressed a wish to marry at the age of eighteen, Gandhi not only refused to give him his blessings, but also announced that he was going to disown his son “for the present.” His second son, Manilal, committed what was, in Gandhi’s eyes an egregious crime: he slept with a woman he wished to marry. Gandhi went on one of his penitential fasts, denounced his son publicly, got the girl to
shave her hair, announced that he would not allow Manilal to marry, and then banished his son from his ashram. Nahal shows Gandhi’s conscience troubled by his harshness towards his sons in a scene in which Harilal’s “apparition” appears in front of Gandhi:

“You are not a man but a monster,” said Harilal, raising an accusing finger. “Not a man but a monster.”
“Don’t forget I’m your father!” said Mohandas, taken aback.
“No. I don’t forget that. It is you who have forgotten that I’m your son.”(23)

But Gandhi did indeed abjure both husband-hood and fatherhood when he decided to become “god’s eunuch” by taking the vow of celibacy.

**Gandhi’s Celibacy:**

In *Kali’s Child*, Jeffrey Kripal describes the young boy disciples of Ramakrishna “who, rather than marry, took a vow of renunciation” and thus opted for life in the same-sex (and, at least in Ramakrishna’s view, homoerotic) community of the mystic. Similarly, the editors of *Same Sex Love in India*, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, study the lives of Bhaktas (saints) in medieval India in order to trace the long tradition and tolerance of same-sex relations in India. They find that one common pattern in the lives of “most” major Bhaktas is resistance to marriage, and add:

The resistance to husband-hood is expressed in the lives and writings of many male mystics who left their wives or refused to act as dutiful husbands and fathers. Often they see conjugality and parenthood as selfish preoccupations that obstruct devotion to god and to all god’s creatures. There is a long tradition of male mystics who do not perform the primary duty of a patriarch—to earn and support the family. Rather when wealth is given to them by god or by devotees, they distribute it to others even though their own families are in dire poverty.(63)

This may well have been a paraphrase of Gandhi’s attitude towards conjugality in general and his own family in particular:

It became my conviction that procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service. I had to break up my household at Johannesburg[...]I took my wife and children to Phoenix and[...]the idea flashed upon me that I must
relinquish the desire for children and wealth and live the life of [...] one retired from household cares.

Taken in isolation, Gandhi’s decision to “retire” from husband-hood (and fatherhood) can be seen as the personal sacrifice of a man with an overpowering desire to serve the public. When taken in conjunction with his ever hardening attitude towards marriage as *legitimization of sexual relations*, however, his vow of celibacy and his admonitions against conjugality seem to be functions of a deep aversion, almost a horror of sexual relations between men and women.

Gandhi invariably refers to physical passion as *vishaya*, as something poisonous, and speaks of it in conjunction with serpents and scorpions.\(^{15}\) When his repressed desires find expression in “involuntary discharge[s]” while he is asleep, he examines the occurrences with guilt and horror. Kakar discusses Gandhi’s continual self-flagellation for any evidence or manifestation of sexual desire in himself:

> We can, of course, never be quite certain whether Gandhi was a man with a gigantic erotic temperament or merely the possessor of an overweening conscience [...] His scruples and his desire] fuelled each other, the lid of self control compressing and heating up the contents of the cauldron of desire, in Freud’s famous metaphor, their growing intensity requiring ever greater efforts at confinement.\(^{101}\)

Kakar’s argument seems to proceed from an unexamined acceptance of Gandhi’s oft-repeated confession in his autobiography that “in spite of my faithfulness to one woman I have viewed myself as someone blinded by sexuality.”\(^{(31)}\) I would argue, however, that given Gandhi’s repeated *inability* to be unfaithful, and his self-loathing for sexual acts even within the bounds of his marriage, his sexuality appears not so much “gigantic” as it does baffled: Gandhi’s sexuality was repressed, not because of his heterosexual celibacy but because heterosexuality is the only sexual possibility he seems to have allowed himself, and with its failure, seems to have withdrawn into what Freud has termed “sexual anesthesia.”\(^{16}\) It is important, I think, to consider the possibility that under duress
of social opinion, Gandhi made himself follow a heterosexual ideal unpalatable to him, and this seems to me to lie at the base of the “overweening conscience”\textsuperscript{17} that turned him into so implacable a preacher of celibacy. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Gandhi genders his desire: “But what is present in the body like some hidden poison[...] I can suppress the enemy but have not been able to expel him altogether[...] The enemy will not be able to endure the power of truth.”\textsuperscript{18} It is surely significant that despite recommending an almost phobic avoidance of women (“Never let the eyes follow their inclination—if they fall on a woman, withdraw them immediately”\textsuperscript{19}) when Gandhi describes his desires, the “hidden” enemy is continually gendered male.

In the following paragraphs, I want to underline not only Gandhi’s obvious repugnance for (hetero)sexuality, but also how brilliantly he piggybacked his sexual anesthesia onto the nationalistic cause. He denounced the custom of child marriage for potentially creating a nation full of weakened progeny, he advocated the preservation of sexual energy and its sublimation into a patriotic spirit, he exhorted couples not to have sex except for the purpose of procreation and then suggested that bringing forth children into an enslaved nation was undesirable, he counseled intense physical and social engagements (like spinning) as a way of disengaging from sex, and he asked women to stop being sexually available to men and to instead redirect their love, service and energies outside the domestic sphere into a more public realm.

Apart from the frequently cited climatic reasons, Hindu religion was often posited as the root cause of much of the moral and physical degeneracy of Indians. As I noted in chapter 3, the weakness of the babu, for instance, was explained by, among other things, the custom of child marriage among Hindus. The objection to the custom was perhaps
legitimate, but it was couched in a vocabulary so offensive, so suggestive of an irreversible native decrepitude, that the Age of Consent Act was resisted as being proof of the condescending interference of the British in matters that were personal. This was a very important distinction to a people whose public life had been hijacked and colonized.

As Tanika Sarkar notes:

The household generally and conjugality specifically, came to mean the last independent space left to the colonized Hindu[...]British and Anglo-Indian law had a 'territorial' scope and ruled over the 'public' world of land relations, criminal laws, laws of contract, and evidence. On the other hand, there were Hindu and Muslim laws which were defined as 'personal', covering persons rather than areas, and ruling over the more intimate areas of human existence—family relationships, family property, and religious life.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus British attempts to reform the custom of child marriage was seen as an unwelcome intrusion into the personal space of family and religion, and was summarily rejected and lustily resisted. What Gandhi did was collapse entirely the distinction between the personal and the political: in his own life, he exposed such intensely personal spaces as sexuality, marriage, parenting, dietics, and bodily motions to public debate and scrutiny, and in turn, had few qualms either about advising perfect strangers on these private issues or about turning them into political questions. Thus he often speaks of his own early marriage, notes the many "evils" of such an alliance and remarks on the inevitability of the death of his first child, born to so young a girl as Kasturba then was. Having made a private issue public, he also makes it political, arguing that the "emasculating" of a country under foreign rule was compounded by social customs and religious rituals that urged early marriage without advising sexual restraint: "Thanks to the prevailing ignorance-about this state of affairs, a race of cowardly, emasculated and spiritless creatures is coming into existence day by day. This is a terrible thing indeed, and each one of us needs to work tirelessly to prevent it."\textsuperscript{21}
Gandhi’s issue, however, was not only that marriage allowed and even encouraged sexual intimacy between boys and girls who were much too young, but that it did so at all—Gandhi urged sexual restraint not only upon child husbands and wives, but upon all married couples:

The very purpose of marriage is restraint and sublimation of the sexual passion. Marriage for the satisfaction of sexual appetite is vyabhicharya, concupiscence[... ]if they come together merely to have a fond embrace they are nearest the devil. The only rule that can be laid down in such instances (if a child is not conceived) is that coitus may be permitted once at the end of the monthly period till conception is established. If its object is achieved it must be abjured forthwith[... ]every husband and wife can make a fixed resolution from today never to share the same bed at night, and to avoid sexual contact except for one supreme purpose which it is intended for in both man and beast.  

Thus, while young boys and girls should live a celibate life lest they produce “countless swarms of such impotent children endlessly multiplying.” grown men and women should indulge in sexual union only when they desire progeny because coming together for any other purpose would constitute “a sin against God and humanity.” So set was Gandhi against the idea of sexual intimacy within marriage for the purpose of pleasure, that he spoke out against the need to marry at all: “I believe very few Indians need marry at the present times[... ]A person who marries in order to satisfy his carnal desire is lower than even the beast. For the married, it is considered proper to have sexual intercourse only for having progeny. The scriptures also say so.” Vanita points out in quite another context that the vocabulary of “sin against God and humanity” is borrowed from Christianity, not Hinduism; Wolpert, in a similar vein, suggests that the “scriptures” to which Gandhi refers are probably Catholic—they are certainly not Hindu. Yet, using the vocabulary and scriptures of the colonizing religion, Gandhi succeeds in making an argument in support of a Hindu nationalist cause.

Although Gandhi advocated that men and women practice celibacy except for the purpose of procreation, he was never happy at the birth of a child, which served only to
remind him of the sexual act that had preceded it. For instance, he wrote to his nephew Chhaganlal’s wife Kashi, who had just given birth to a daughter: “What shall I write[...]? If I say that is good, it would be a lie. If I express sorrow, it would be violence. I would only say and wish that you learn to control your senses.” He blessed some newly wed couples by saying “May you have no children.” This too he linked to a nationalist cause:

I have not the shadow of a doubt that married people if they wished well of the country and wanted to see India become a nation of strong and handsome well-formed men and women, would practice self-restraint and cease to procreate for the time being[...]it is our duty for the present moment to suspend bringing forth heirs to our slavery.

Accordingly, he attempted to “save” everybody under his circle of influence from the downfall of marriage, sex and progeny: “All the progeny[...]born now are mean and faithless and continue to be so,” he wrote to his second son Manilal. To his eldest, Harilal, who had expressed an attachment toward one of Gandhi’s favorite disciples, Margaret-Amala, he wrote, “How can I, who have always advocated renunciation of sex, encourage you to gratify it?” and expressed his feeling of betrayal: “you carry on your search for a wife while staying with me.” His most faithful followers, like Vinoba Bhave and Mirabehn remained single throughout their lives, even after Gandhi’s death.

Given Gandhi’s vocal rejection of the idea of marriage, it is understandable that R.K. Narayan, one of India’s three earliest novelists writing in English, should, in his 1955 novel Waiting for the Mahatma, make Gandhi the reason (although not always the direct reason) why the protagonist Sriram cannot marry his love-interest, Bharati, who is part of Gandhi’s entourage as well as his devoted disciple. This is the “waiting” referred to in the title of the novel. Narayan’s treatment of Gandhi’s demands of celibacy from his followers and ashramites is a gentler, watered-down version, yet the novel is clearly cognizant of the fact that the Mahatma disrupted the norm of heterosexual domesticity.
The result of this disruption is sometimes hilarious, as for instance, when Sriram, sitting in the midst of one of Gandhi’s public gatherings, interrupts his admiration of the women around him and his speculation “on what type he would prefer for a wife,” with the recollection of “Gandhiji’s suggestion on the previous day: ‘All women are your sisters and mothers. Never look at them with thoughts of lust.’” Feeling uneasy that Gandhi would be able to spy on his thoughts, he “resolutely look[s] away in another direction, where men were seated.”(29) The men cannot hold his attention, however, and he turns back to look at the women, saying to himself, “So many sisters and mothers. I wish they would let me speak to them. Of course I have no evil thoughts in my mind at the moment.”(30) Despite Bharati’s reciprocation of Sriram’s regard, the two of them wait for five years and two hundred pages before they can find a moment in which they can ask the Mahatma’s permission to bless their union without feeling their request would be “sacrilegious”. Gandhi agrees, and blesses them, saying “You have already a home with thirty children. May you be their father and mother.”(253) This conversation takes place on the eve of Gandhi’s assassination. Ironically, then, his two followers can get married only once the Mahatma is no more.

Brahmacharya was, expectedly, one of the most basic requirements of the men and women who lived with Gandhi in his ashrams, including those who were married. But at the same time Gandhi did not want the men and women in his ashram to be separated:

The ideal is that one Ashramite should have the same freedom in meeting another as is enjoyed by a son in meeting his mother or by a brother in meeting his sister[...]. He is no brahmachari at all whose mind is disturbed if he happens to see a woman or if he has to touch her in order to render service. A brahmachari’s reaction to a living image and to a bronze statue is one and the same.30
What he demanded, therefore, was nothing short of a total loss of sexual response when members of opposite sexes were brought together:

My meaning of \textit{brahmacharya} is this. One who never has lustful intention, who by constant attendance upon God, has become capable of lying naked with naked women, however beautiful they may be, without being in any manner whatsoever sexually excited.\textsuperscript{31}

In his novel, \textit{Nahal} points out this quirk of Gandhi in terms that make him appear almost malignant. He puts a different spin on Gandhi’s tendency to punish himself for the sexual transgressions of his ashramites by going on extended fasts, suggesting that Gandhi’s “punishments” proceeded from a misogyny of which he was completely unaware. In the following passage, apparitions of two girls have appeared in front of Gandhi while he is on the sea, traveling back from Africa to India. They ask Gandhi why he had sheared their hair—the traditional treatment meted out to women who had been widowed—when they had been alive, young, and single:

“What nonsense are you talking? I acted in your interest alone.”
One girl: “But Bapu, you were the one who wanted us to bathe along with the boys.”
Second girl: “You sent us to the bathing spot at the same time.”
First girl: “Each day.” Second girl: “Each day”
Together: “Each day! Each day! Each day! Each day!”
Mohandas covered his ears and shouted out in agony: “I know! Yet I did that not to defile but to purify you. Boys and girls bathing together—What could be more innocent than that? I did it to bring your curiosities to an end. I did it to bring about restraint, not indulgence.”
Both girls: “And why did you punish us! It was the boys who took liberties with us, not we with them.”
Mohandas “The source of evil was in you. Something in you excites the boys, and I wanted to disfigure you.”(16)

The hallucinatory intensity of the repeated accusation “each day” extends Gandhi’s tyranny from one event involving two women to the considerably more extended circle of his influence in early twentieth century India. The historical Gandhi did not believe that \textit{all} women were “the source of [sexual] evil.”\textsuperscript{32} He differentiated between women who were “pure” and those who were not:
Who shall we say is a woman of this kind? It is said that a virtuous woman can be recognized by the grace on her face. Must we then accept all the prostitutes in India as virtuous? For it is their trade to deck themselves up. Not at all. The thing needed for grace is not beauty of face but purity of heart. A woman who is pure of heart and mind is ever fit to be worshipped.\textsuperscript{33}

The Gandhi who is known to have been “shocked by the shameless dress of modern woman,”\textsuperscript{34} also venerated woman as mother and as virgin. He accordingly wanted wives to resist their husbands sexually: “If they will only learn to say ‘no’ to their husbands when they approach them carnally,” he said, and found it problematic that “many do not want to resist them.”\textsuperscript{35} According to him, without virtuous women there could be no virtuous men:

> It is in her power to make the world more livable both for her and her partner, whether as father, husband, if she would cease to think of herself as weak and fit only to serve as a doll for men to play with. Let her transfer her love[…] to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man’s lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent trader.\textsuperscript{36}

By asking women to renounce sexuality, Gandhi believed that he was making available to them for a life dedicated to “national service and the service of humanity” by extending the circle of their love and service from just one man to the whole of humanity.

It is reasonable to conclude that households must have been disrupted and broken by husbands and wives going to different jails, following different nationalist ideologies, and giving up claims on each other to render themselves wholly to the service of the nation. In \textit{Kanithapura}, for instance, women of the village who join the “Gandhi-group” are berated by their husbands for no longer waiting on them as they should. One such husband complains that his wife is not serving his meals on time; another is so incensed that he beats his wife who is in her seventh month of pregnancy. Similarly, in \textit{The Crown}, we are told that some men came to Gandhi because they hoped to escape from their marital squabbles—as though Gandhi were a refuge from domesticity. “Yes,” says Nahal,
“the cycle of marital life for most people was shattered by the movement; they could hardly call themselves wedded to each other,” and later again:

The non-co-operation movement and jail-going had completely upset the family clock of many married households. Here hands were in and wives were out, or wives were in and husbands were out. Husbands were in one prison and wives in another. Husbands were required to offer satyagraha in one city and wives in another. And so on.

According to Gandhi’s secretary and biographer Pyarelal, “Brahmacharya came to occupy the place of honour in Gandhi’s discipline for satyagraha[...] It was the sine qua non for those who aspire to a spiritual or higher life.”37 By naming the non-violent resistance of a colonized, dispossessed people satyagraha, or the moral force of truth, Gandhi introduced a moral and spiritual dimension to a political struggle. He noted that India needed to conserve strength in all realms, “physical, material, moral and spiritual,” and said:

> We cannot gain [strength] unless we husband the one thing which we must prize above everything else. Without this personal purity of life, we must remain a nation of slaves[...] The mind that is so turned as to regard indulgence not only lawful, but even desirable will simply feed itself on the indulgence and will at last become so weak as to lose all strength of will. I do maintain that every act of indulgence means loss of precious vitality so needful to keep a man or woman strong in body, mind and soul. 38

At a time when India was engaged in a struggle for its future, Gandhi suggested that celibacy was an urgent and “a temporary necessity in the present stage of national evolution.” 39 Despite this seeming provisionality of sexual restraint, what Gandhi wanted was, as Alter points out, “nothing less than a nation of sober celibates who would embody an new moral order.” (10) His articles in Young India urged Indian youth to “conserve and sublimate the vital fluid[...] one drop of which has the potential to bring into being a human life,” 40 and made his advice seem a matter not of individual or personal choice, but one of national importance: “Let the Indian youth treasure in their hearts the quotation[...] ‘The future is for the nations who are chaste.’”
Let young men and women for whose sake Young India is written from week to week know I that it is their duty, if they would purify the atmosphere about them and shed their weakness to be and remain chaste and know too that it is not so difficult as they may have been taught to imagine.  

Should young men find it difficult to remain celibate, Gandhi suggested that they take up spinning. This would not only undercut imperial economy by shrinking the colonies as markets for cloth produced by English mills, it would also boost India’s self-sufficiency, and provide a means of keeping India’s youth celibate and single: “Fix your thoughts exclusively on khadi, countless men may be wedded to her and yet she always remains a virgin. Any man who takes her alone a wife will still be an inviolate brahmachari.” So strong does Gandhi’s desire to keep the nation chaste appear that it often seems as though his encouragement (bordering upon demand) that his followers remain constantly busy, that they spin and clean and work in distant villages and seek voluntary arrests rests upon his need to keep them to busy to think about sex:

I do not know that the millions of men who are taking an active part in the war are obsessed by the sex specter. Nor are the peasants working together in their fields worried or dominated by it. This is not to say or suggest that they are free from the instinct implanted in man and woman. But it most certainly does not dominate their lives as it seems to dominate the lives of those who are saturated with the modern sex literature. Neither man nor woman has time for such things when he or she is faced with the hard fact of living life in its grim reality.

And again:

When the mind is disturbed by impure thoughts, instead of trying to drive them out one should occupy it in some work, that is, engage it in reading or in some bodily labor which requires mental attention too.

Koestler makes an important point when she states that

In the Western world Gandhi’s obsession with brahmacharya could have been shrugged off as a harmless personal quirk. In India it struck deep, archetypal chords. There is a hidden message running through Gandhi’s preaching of chastity—hidden that is from the Western reader, but obvious to every Hindu. It relates to the psychological benefits of sexual restraint. According to the doctrines of traditional Hindu (ayurvedic) medicine, man’s ‘vital force’ is concentrated in his seminal fluid. All his powers, both mental and physical, derive from this precious secretion—a kind of elixir of life—variously called bindu or ‘vital fluid’. Every expenditure of ‘vital fluid’ causes physical weakening and spiritual impoverishment. Conversely the storing up of the bindu through continence provides for increased spiritual powers, health and longevity.
In fact, even the *Kamasutra*, the erotic treatise that stands in the west an the example and epitome of eastern sexuality, portrays the successful lover not as someone who is excessively passionate or sexually avid, but one who is able to control his passion and his senses—one who has, in other words, demonstrated triumphant celibacy. Indian scriptures similarly underline the immense potency of human beings who practice brahmacharya, and religious tales are full of heavenly nymphs sent to these celibates as distractions by Gods who are made nervous by their ever increasing power.\(^{45}\) Therefore Koestler is right when she suggests that Indians recognized the spiritual basis of Gandhi’s obsession with chastity, although I would disagree that this was something hidden from the western reader: we must remember that English masculinity, in the late nineteenth century, was expressed not as an excess, but as rigid control; the ideal English gentleman did not venture outside the boundaries suggested by imperial decorum. This, indeed, was defined against “oriental” behaviour, which was characterized, in contrast, in terms of excess. Thus Gandhi’s appeal addressed imperial criticism, but did so in terms that were unquestionably and uncompromisingly Indian.

Through his resistance to the institution of marriage, his advocacy of near-absolute celibacy within marriage, and his insistence that his female followers resist their husbands’ sexual demands, Gandhi questioned and destabilized the idea of a heterosexual familial unit. According to Koestler, Gandhi “used his proverbial fascination for women to persuade them to take the vow, whether their husbands agreed or not, wrecking several marriages in the process, and causing lasting unhappiness in others.”\(^{46}\) Kidwai and Vanita cite the studies of societies of medieval Europe to argue that “in societies where marriage and parenthood were near universal and were arranged by families for young people, a
religious vow of celibacy was almost the only way a person could refuse heterosexuality." Further, they suggest that it was this assumption of celibacy that allowed mystics like Chaitanya and spiritual leaders like Ramakrishna Paramhansa to "express passionate attachments to other men." In the following section, I will suggest that this was also true in the case of Gandhi, and that the state of passionlessness that was postulated by his celibacy also facilitated his assumption of an androgyny that, at least in his mind and theirs, seems to have normalized and de-sexualized his intimacies with other men.

Gandhi's Men:

In Chapter 3, we noted that it was the personal, physical charm of Gora that held his adoring band of male followers to him with such dedication. I will commence this section with the claim that the effect of Gandhi's legendary charisma on his male followers was of a similar nature. What I will note here are only some of the many fictional instances in which Gandhi is portrayed as a magnetic leader whom young men want to touch and feel and be close to, and from whom families attempt unsuccessfully to shield their young men. In The Crown and the Loincloth, for instance, there is Sunil, the married youngest son of a wealthy landowner, who longs to meet Gandhi:

Sunil wanted to be close enough to Gandhi, he wanted to touch him. But there was such an array of big leaders[...]that he couldn’t get closer than within five hundred yards of the podium on which Gandhi sat. [One day Sunil succeeds in meeting Gandhi while the latter is on his morning walk] Even there, Sunil didn’t know how to address himself to Gandhi, he felt shy of him[...]Then one day Gandhi stopped, looked over his shoulder and walked back towards him. He placed his arm on Sunil’s shoulder and smiled, showing him a mouth with many front teeth missing. [Gandhi asks Sunil to tell him something about himself.] Sunil was now in the front, and Gandhi still had his arm around his shoulder.
‘I want to serve you, sir,’ Sunil said.
“You mean serve the motherland.”
‘Motherland and you sir.’(127)
Gandhi’s correction and Sunil’s subsequent reiteration suggests that it is Gandhi whom Sunil wants to serve. And serve he does, with a devotion so absolute that he effectively abandons his young wife, Kusum, and their son, Vikram. Kusum holds Gandhi, “the man who had made and unmade her destiny, who had seized her husband and taken him away from her, who had created a rival for her, in her life,” responsible:

Let alone me, you have not touched Vikram affectionately once in months[...]. If this is what Gandhi and the Congress imply, they are only out to ruin my home, then I want nothing to do with them[...]. Gandhi had made her husband hostile to her and she was supposed to bear with that hostility. (247)

Others besides Kusum are aware of Sunil’s adoration of Gandhi. His father, Thakur Shanti Nath, for example, plays on Gandhi’s name (which, when pronounced with a plosive “d” instead of the softer “dh”, can mean “sodomizer”) “That G-a-n-d-h-i,” he repeated slowly, finding the sound of the name itself funny.” Similarly Kenneth Ashby, an Englishman who is also a family friend, invites Sunil to the races and asks, “Could you be unfaithful to Gandhi for a few hours and wear trousers, a jacket and a tie?”

Nor is Sunil the only son and husband in this novel who has been stolen away by Gandhi: Nahal also describes how “in spite of all his caution, Motilal [Nehru] lost Jawahar to Gandhi.” In order to “chain” his young son to him, we are told that Motilal marries him to a very young and beautiful girl, but Gandhi throws a spanner in the works from the very first moment he meets Jawahar, who is “attracted to him as to a magnet.” A worried Motilal tries to save his son, and therefore has a little talk with Gandhi:

“As a father, I would still like Jawahar to delay the step. Until he is sure of himself.” Gandhi welcomed that. Delay would make Jawaharlal only more eager. And it was a significant climb-down on the part of the father. “How long would you like him to wait?” “What do you say?” “In England when the parents want to part lovers, they ask them to wait for a year. Will a year do?” Gandhi was laughing childishly. Motilal too laughed, though guardedly. “I suppose, yes.”

[...]

“But you won’t object if after a year he still wants to go my way.” Motilal was silent for a while, and then said conclusively; “No.” (324-5)
What is particularly noteworthy about this conversation is the extent to which it is *consciously* reminiscent of scenes in romance-tales wherein concerned guardians attempt to negotiate a temporary separation between two lovers in the hope that it would become permanent. It never does become permanent of course, at least not when the attachment is genuine: a year later, Jawahar has left behind his young wife and has joined Gandhi instead — providing yet another instance of my argument that Gandhi transformed nationalism into a choice between a traditional, heterosexual, familial unit and a new homosocial, monastic order of freedom-fighters, and made the latter seem more respectable.\(^49\)

Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* also describes the attraction that Gandhi held for men: “his voice was so pure, his forehead so brilliant with wisdom, that men followed him,” Rao says, and then describes how Gandhi wins over a Pathan who approaches the Mahatma to kill him with a “sword” that he has hidden beneath his shirt:

\[T\]he Mahatma puts his hands on the wicked man’s shoulders and says, “Brother, what do you want of me?” And the man falls at the feet of the Mahatma and kisses them, and from that day forth there was never a soul more devoted than he. And the serpent that crossed the thighs of the Mahatma, a huge serpent too.(12)

What can we make of this sudden intrusion of a serpent, symbol of sexuality in Christian and Hindu cultures alike, into Rao’s narrative and onto the thighs of Gandhi? The phallic sword of the Pathan adds to the symbolism of the serpent, and underscores the palpable sexuality, or at least physicality of Gandhi (who is, again significantly, compared to Krishna, the sexually mischievous Hindu god) upon his followers. One of these, Moorthy, who later is pivotal in the transformation of the village of Kanthapura, has a “vision” of Gandhi, in which “the very skin of the Mahatma seemed to send out a
mellowed force and love.”(32) Notice the way in which Moorthy’s impassioned state under the physical influence of Gandhi peaks, and then subsides into a post coital calm:

[The voice of Gandhi] went through the fan and the hair and the nails of Moorthy into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered, and then there came a flooding up in rings and ripples[...]and as it broke against Moorthy, the fan went faster and faster over the head of the Mahatma, and perspiration flowed down the forehead of Moorthy. Then came a dulled silence of his blood.(33)

Gandhi speaks, and Moorthy shivers; a fan rotates over the head of Gandhi, and Moorthy perspires. And subsequently, when Mahatma pats Moorthy, “through that touch was revealed to him as the day is revealed to the night the sheathless being of his soul.”(34)

Several biographical and autobiographical writings on Gandhi document historical instance of the passionate attachments between Gandhi and other men. According to one of his biographers, “when he had given up all sexual activity, Gandhi obviously was able to find a certain erotic-aesthetic gaiety in a kind of detached physical closeness to both women and men.”50 I have already noted Gandhi’s intimacies with Sheikh Mehtab and Raychandbhai, and how these interrupted his heterosexuality and culminated in his assumption of celibacy. Gandhi, in his writings, is always very open and voluble in his admiration of men, and seems to develop great regard for them over very short time periods.51 Perhaps the most interesting of the many intimate friends of Gandhi is Charles Freer Andrews, an English priest, who, Wolpert tells us, “defrocked soon after joining Gandhi.”(116) Andrews was one of the Englishmen who “went native” by adopting native customs of food and dress, although he always remained a devout Christian. According to Hugh Tinker, a biographer of the priest, the young Andrew received not altogether unwelcome homosexual overtures from older boys, and his part in these haunted him:

Charlie was never to have a girl friend, and the enormity of this ‘impurity’ [of his homosexual relationships] was to be buried deep in his psyche. Perhaps it was at school
that he subconsciously turned, or was turned away from the possibility of the physical love of a woman. For some years there was an emotional struggle at school, and though as he grew older he mastered the situation, the sense of guilt remained.\textsuperscript{52}

Gandhi and Andrews were intimate friends until the latter’s death. When the latter lay ailing, Gandhi wrote him a letter that, within a few lines, reveals the depth of his feelings for his English friend. What I find remarkable about this letter—besides Gandhi’s bared emotions, his desire to nurse Andrews and to “make love” to him, his analogizing himself with an imagined wife and at once negating the possibility of that wife—is Gandhi’s opening line: note how he jests about Andrew’s “crimes against the laws of God and man,” and how his phrasing echoes the anti-sodomy statute which seeks to punish the crime of “intercourse against the order of nature.”

I shall be good this time and not accuse you of crimes against the laws of God and man regarding health. But there is no doubt that you need a curator euphemistically called a nurse. And how I should like to occupy that post! If you cannot have a nurse like me, who would make love to you but at the same time enforce strict obedience to doctor’s orders, you need a wife who would see that you had your food properly served, you never went out without an abdominal[…But marriage is probably too late. And not being able to nurse you myself I can only fret.\textsuperscript{53}

And this is not the only instance when Gandhi expresses a wish to feminize himself: when Maganlal, Gandhi’s nephew and close associate (and a practitioner of celibacy) passed away, Gandhi got a memorial stone engraved saying that Maganlal’s death had “widowed” him. Similarly, when Motilal Nehru died, Gandhi said in a “message to a newspaper” that he “felt more widowed than Mrs. Motilal Nehru,” and later insisted that in making this statement, he was “not at all exaggerating.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{Gandhi’s (Resignification of) Femininity-in-Masculinity:}

This manifest desire of Gandhi to be a “wife” also shaped his conceptualization of his role as the leader/companion of a nation struggling to free and to define itself. When
he was attacked by orthodox Hindus, he confessed that he felt like “the wife whom her many husbands profess to reject because the poor woman cannot give equal satisfaction to all her lords and masters” even though he was, he said, “a faithful wife, staunch in her loyalty” to all her irate husbands. He compared passive resistance to “the agony of childbirth” and asserted that he wished “to give birth to the ideals of non-violence and truth.” According to Tarlo, Gandhi’s veneration of women as mothers was connected both to his experiments with celibacy and to his desire to be a mother himself. Gandhi certainly was unabashed in his pride in his womanly qualities. He took on the domestic role of a woman: he spun cloth, he oversaw household details such as food preparation, he acted as nurse and administered nature cures to those in his household. He openly made statements such as: “I know you have not missed the woman in me.” To his niece Manu, he declared “I have been a father to many, but only to you I am a mother,” and according to his biographer Pyarelal, he did for her “everything that a mother usually does for her daughter.” Manu even wrote a book titled Bapu: My Mother.

Gandhi’s relationship with another young female disciple, Prema, is particularly instructive of the extent to which he identified with his feminine side. At the beginning of her stay with Gandhi, Prema tells Gandhi of a dream she had, in which she is reclining on his lap and drinking the milk that is flowing from Gandhi’s breast into her mouth. Even though Prema is satiated, and completely soaked in the milk, Gandhi keeps urging her to “drink, drink, drink more.” Gandhi interpreted this dream with a complete and suggestive blindness to the symbolic equivalence of milk and semen, and to the eroticism of a girl lying on a man’s lap. “Dreams can have the quality of purity (satvik) or of passion (rajasik). Your dream is a pure one. It means that you feel protected with me,” he said to
Prema, translating his role in the dream literally into that of a nurturing mother. If Gandhi, with his male acquaintances, sexualized himself into a "wife" who "make[s] love" to her husband, he completely de-sexed himself in his relations with women, saying again and again that he felt not the slightest stirring of lust for "women or girls who have been naked with [him]" and asserting that he have never felt any embarrassment in being seen naked by a woman.  

According to Kakar, Gandhi’s wish to be a woman “struck many responsive chords in his audience,” who saw his feminine strivings in the context of the Vaishnava culture in which he was born. Vaishnavism traditionally posits all the devotees of the Lord Krishna, who alone is male, as universally female, and not only condones the desire of a man to nurture his feminine side, but indeed sees such a desire as a spiritual quest: Hinduism in general raises femininity into a principle that completes masculinity, not, as imperial ideology would have it, devalues it. Effeminism, or the presence of femininity within masculinity, as in the concept of the ardhareshwar (a god who is half male and half female) had no negative connotation in the pre-colonial Hindu society: the medieval Bhakti movements, for instance, were focused on the assumption of androgyny by male devotees. Thus in the indigenous culture, manliness and womanliness were considered equal, “but the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy [was deemed] superior to both, being an indicator of godly and saintly qualities.”

In *The Intimate Enemy*, Nandy argues that colonialism brings about codes which both the rulers and the ruled can share. The main function of these codes is to alter the original cultural priorities on both sides and bring to the centre of the colonial culture subcultures previously recessive or subordinate in two confronting cultures. Concurrently, the codes remove from the center of each of the cultures previously salient in them.”(2)
I would argue that the alteration of codes is not quite as symmetrical as Nandy seems to suggest. For instance, although it is true that the early feminine virtues of Christianity were transformed in the aftermath of colonialism into a rigidly defined masculinity, and although this transformation was in large part due to the demands of colonialism, it wasn’t the cultural code of the colonies (which at best venerated and at worst was value-neutral towards femininity-in-masculinity) that was responsible for the alteration of the codes of the ruling race—the change in them was in quite a contrary direction vis-à-vis in those of the colonized race. On the other hand, native gender aspirations were entirely replaced by an imperial code that, in the words of Nandy, supplanted the “polarity defined by the antonymous purusatva (the essence of masculinity and naritva (the essence of femininity)” by “the antonyms of purusatva and klibatva (the essence of hermaphroditism).” Klibatva, or androgy, according to Nandy, was perceived as “the final negation of a man’s political identity, a pathology more dangerous than femininity itself.” Colonial discourse repeated and reinforced the conception of androgy, negatively described as effeminacy, as something aberrant: in fact as an incomplete, failed version of English masculinity.

According to Judith Butler, the injurious power of this sort of name-calling, which Butler terms “hate speech” works through a system whose repetition consolidates and thereby concentrates its traumatic power. Name calling, then, becomes a mechanism to dominate—when hate speech is addressed to someone, the performer of the speech act means to deny agency to its recipient. Name calling therefore consolidates, with its utterance, the subordinate position of the addressee in a hierarchical social structure. However, this name calling also contains within it a subversive vigor that has the
potential to question—and thereby counter—its own inimical force. An act of name-calling, then, which may seem deleterious or emasculating, may also be enabling: in recognizing the address that means to disallow action by congealing the recipient in a subordinate stratum, the addressee can use the social position that has been thrust upon him to exercise an agency that the speech had meant to refuse. Interpellation, then, may be enabling because it initiates the subject into a temporal and linguistic existence, and thereby provides a platform from which the subject can perform. Nandy also makes a similar argument:

When such a cultural consensus [about the relative value of colonial masculinity and native effeminacy] grows, the main threat to the colonizers is bound to become the latent fear that the colonized will reject the consensus and, instead of trying to redeem their ‘masculinity’ by becoming the counterplayers of the rulers according to the established rules, will discover an alternative frame of reference within which the oppressed do not seem weak, degraded and distorted men trying to break the monopoly of the rulers on a fixed quantity of machismo. If this happens, the colonizers begin to live with the fear that the subjects might begin to see their rulers as morally and culturally inferior, and feed this information back to the rulers. Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all. It handicaps the colonizer much more than it handicaps the colonized. (11)

Gandhi found such an alternative frame of reference for the nation by asserting that “the essence of femininity is superior to that of masculinity,” and by finding a mode of anti-colonial resistance compatible with such a resignification of androgyny. Gandhi drew upon premodern Christianity (he attributed his philosophy of ahimsa to the Sermon on the Mount) and the traditional Hindu spiritualization of androgyny to posit an alternative model of masculinity: he disassociated courage from violence, and rewrote the colonial script by suggesting that courage was, in fact, inherent in femininity: “to call women the weaker sex is a libel [...] is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage?”
Qualities like passivity and pacifism that the imperial ideology had ridiculed as effeminate and unworthy received a new lease of life under Gandhian nationalism and began to undermine a colonial culture that ruled on the presumption of a power contingent upon masculine aggression and violence. Gandhi’s call to overcome the British with love and non-violence posited “womanful” action as the appropriate mode, and womanliness as the ideal subject of the Indian freedom struggle:

I have suggested in these columns that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?66 Gandhi suggested that womanliness was a virtue that men needed to, and could in fact cultivate, mainly through the practice of brahmacharya: “The idea is that a man by becoming passionless, transforms himself into a woman, that is, he includes the woman into himself.”67 The non-violent resistance of Gandhi included the civil disobedience movement, or the resistance to and disobedience of rules and laws of the imperial government, and this again, he said, was “a preparation for mute suffering” and called for a womanly fortitude in him as its leader: “To start civil disobedience in an atmosphere of incivility is like[…] the woman giving birth to a child who suffers the pains, others only help. I, too, wish to give birth to the ideals of non-violence and truth.”68 To Henry Polak, the man with whom he had a deep and lasting friendship following a chance acquaintance in a restaurant, Gandhi wrote: “A series of passive resistances is an agonizing effort. It is an exalting agony. I suppose the agony of childbirth must be somewhat like it.”69 In this way, Gandhi resignified feminine qualities into something precious, a species of unrivalled courage and fortitude that men should aspire towards, not shun. By making the entire basis for the independence movement contingent upon feminine principles, he
transformed the ascription of “effeminacy” into a “soul force” that was much more potent than the “brute force” upon which the British empire rested.

Gandhi coined the term “satyagraha” to differentiate his brand of “passive resistance” from that which “conveyed the idea of the Suffragette Movement in England. Burning of houses by these women was called ‘passive resistance’.” Therefore he disassociated satyagraha from a resistance that seemed to be engendered by weakness instead of strength: “I found that the term ‘passive resistance’ was too narrowly construed and that it was supposed to be a weapon of the weak, that it could be characterized by hatred, and that it could finally manifest itself as violence.” Satyagraha, on the contrary, rested on the non-violent, moral force of truth, and was in no way based upon physical strength:

That however, I will admit that even a man weak in body is capable of offering this resistance. One man can go to jail as well as millions. Both men and women can indulge in it. It does not require the training of an army; it needs no jiu-jitsu. Control over the mind is alone necessary, and when that is attained, man is free like the King of the forest and his very glance withers the enemy.

Satyagraha and its adjuncts of non-cooperation and civil resistance, according to Gandhi, were simply new names “for the law of suffering. The rishis, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness.” Now, as Nandy and Romila Thapar point out, ahimsa is hardly characteristic of Hindu religion, philosophy, or society. Certain Sramanic sects, Buddhism and Jainism enjoined non-violence upon their practitioners, but Hindu history is replete with violence, says Nandy:

[F]ew communities have been more warlike and fond of bloodshed [...] About twenty-five words in an inscription of Asoka have succeeded in almost wholly suppressing the thousands in the rest of the epigraphy and the whole of Sanskrit literature which bear testimony to the incorrigible militarism of the Hindus. Their political history is made up
of bloodstained pages [...] there is not one word of non-violence in the theory and practice of statecraft by the Hindus [...] In the 150 years of British rule prior to Gandhi, no significant social reformer or political leader had tried to give centrality to non-violence as a major Hindu or Indian virtue. (50-1)

However, it is also true that in Hindu philosophy it was the austere and disciplined Brahman who was the masculine counterpart to the warring Kshatriya, who represented the feminine principle. And it is this distinction that Gandhi drew on when he began to redefine manliness in terms thatworstted imperial masculinity:

What do you think? Wherein is courage required—in blowing others to pieces from behind a cannon, or with a smiling face to approach a cannon and be blown to pieces? Who is the true warrior—he who keeps death always as a bosom-friend, or he who controls the death of others? Believe me that a man devoid of courage and manhood can never be a passive resister [...] Such ephemeral civilizations [like the British civilization] have often come and gone and will continue to do so. Those only can be considered to be so imbued [with courage] having experienced the force of the soul within themselves, will not cower before brute-force, and will not, on any account, desire to use brute-force. 74

"Kshama virasya bhushanam. ‘Forgiveness adorns a soldier,’” Gandhi said, making pacifism not only manly, but also soldierly: “I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment.” 75 Although he believed that “violence was implicit in cowardice,” he also said that where there was only a choice between cowardice and violence he would advise violence. “I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour,” he said, “than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.” 76 Ahimsa, according to Gandhi, was a very difficult vow, and only the bravest could really hope to practice it: “If anyone afraid at heart cannot, while remaining unarmed, rid himself of that fear, he should certainly arm himself.” 77

It is important to note that Gandhi continually stressed the distinction between manly and unmanly actions, even as he reversed the definitions that imperialism had
imposed upon each. The very self-ascription of superiority by the British was declared by Gandhi to be unmanly:

In my opinion, there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority[...]. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being[...]. He who claims superiority at once forfeits his claim to be called a man. 78

Indians, according to Gandhi, had themselves set up the foundation of the empire by being “unmanly and cowardly” enough to resort the courts of British law. Only a disobedience of these laws would oust the British from India. Gandhi used the very terms of imperial discourse to encourage Indian civil disobedience, suggesting that manliness demanded a resistance of the laws that had been imposed upon them by a government they neither wanted nor accepted.

A man who has realized his manhood, who fears only God, will fear no one else. Man-made laws are not necessarily binding on him[...]. If man will only realize that it is unmanly to obey laws - that are unjust, no man's tyranny will enslave him[...]. Passive resistance, that is soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How, then, can it be considered only a weapon of the weak? Physical-force men are strangers to the courage that is requisite in a passive resister. Do you believe that a coward can ever disobey a law that he dislikes? 79

A disobedience of imperial laws, he said was the right of every Indian, and no citizen dare give up this right “without ceasing to be a man.” 80 Civil resistance, in this sense, was not only a refusal to cooperate with the British, but also implied, a refusal to accept submission to a political identity that had been imposed upon a nation; it demanded the forging of a new political self-definition. Gandhi declared that if any Indian submitted to British laws, “we do no think he deserves the name of man.” 81 And if, after civil disobedience, the imperial government reacted with some harsh reprisal, the resisters must not be afraid: “If we give way to this fear, we shall become incapable of any manly
effort," Gandhi said. He blamed the British for corrupting them with the values of a
civilization that rested upon the use of force:

If you give the matter some thought, you will see that the terror was by no means such a
mighty thing[...]the present peace is only nominal, for by it we have become emasculated
and cowardly[...]Macaulay betrayed gross ignorance when he libeled Indians as being
practically cowards. They never merited the charge. Cowards living in a country
inhabited by hardy mountaineers and infested by wolves and tigers must surely find an
early grave. Have you ever visited our fields? I assure you that our agriculturists sleep
fearlessly on their farms even today; but the English and you and I would hesitate to sleep
where they sleep. Strength lies in absence of fear, not in the quantity of flesh.\textsuperscript{83}

This was another reason why Gandhi promoted the value of non-violent resistance.
Armed opposition would Europeanize India, and if Europeanization was the aim, there
seemed little sense in wishing to first oust the British.

Further, the shrewd politician that Gandhi was, he realized that arming a nation as
vast as India was going to be difficult, if not impossible: "The English are splendidly
armed; that does not frighten me, but it is clear that, to pit ourselves against them in arms,
thousands of Indians must be armed. If such a thing be possible, how many years will it
take?\textsuperscript{84} He understood also that the imperial government would feel morally justified in
crushing a violent rebellion, whereas a peaceful non-cooperation would force them to
hold back an unnecessary show of force. Before launching the civil disobedience
movement, he said: "Can you show me an example in history where the State has
tolerated violent defiance of authority for a single day? But here you know that the
Government is puzzled and perplexed."\textsuperscript{85}

In \textit{The Crown and the Loincloth}, Nahal asks, "how could you hold a nation by the
sword? You could destroy by the sword, maim by the sword, keep mouths shut by the
sword, but could you change hearts by the sword?"\textsuperscript{(28)} He also makes the Gandhian
argument about the cowardice implicit in violence in the scene in which General Dyer is
rehearsing the Amritsar massacre of 1919. Dyer meets Sunil, the character we have
discussed earlier, and Sunil refuses to divulge the information that the General wants from him, and unresistingly agrees to be whipped. Nahal plays the scene so that the reader admires the courage of Sunil, despite the fact that he is the one getting whipped. Dyer on the other hand, comes across as impotently angry, and clearly threatened by the unyielding and non-violent Sunil:

Dyer could see the man was not a peasant. There was a cultivated air about him, and his beating indicated breeding: he also spoke such perfect English. That was all the more dangerous, from Dyer’s point of view. That meant he was one of those petty leaders who had pledged themselves to Gandhi.(87)

Dyer remembers the insult to which he had been subjected by Indians, and clearly feels a deep sense of shame at being defeated by the natives in a show of physical strength:

[An Indian], taking hold of [Dyer’s] carriage almost by force, he drove away. That was too much for Dyer, that kind of swindle—it went against his British grain, which believed in fair play. So he jumped on to his pony, caught up with the tehsildar in the town and ordered him to locate the carriage. And what happened then? The whole town fell on him with sticks and brickbats. He was by himself, and there was this crowd, pushing him up against the wall and belabouring him. He brought some of them down (he had not earned his boxing gloves for nothing) yet how many and for how long?[...] The adventure in an Amritsar street was equally harrowing. It was a fight between his soldiers and a few shopkeepers over the sale of a certain item, and Dyer was not directly involved. But he couldn’t possibly allow his loyal soldiers to be cheated by the civilian natives, and he had jumped into the fray. Only to find himself once again cornered and besieged—not by greater skill, not by better strategy, by the sheer handicap of the terrain.(84)

It is clearly these emotions of shame and anxiety about his own powerlessness vis-à-vis the strength and “breeding” of the natives and of Sunil that make Dyer practice his marksmanship immediately after his encounter with Sunil, and it is these too that, in Nahal’s novel, lie at the heart of his violent decision to fire at a large crowd of unarmed, peaceful protestors. The narrator adopts Gandhian philosophy and suggests that non-violence be given a chance, “[a]nd where else could there be a better opportunity for that than here in India, which was the spiritual hinterland of the world?”(62)

Non-violence was given a chance by nationalists. No revolution can be absolutely bloodless, of course, and there were many incidents of bloodshed, of colonial reprisals
and native counter-reprisals. Gandhi withdrew his call for civil disobedience following several such incidents, and at such moments he came under the censure both of supporters who believed that isolated incidents of violence were not cause enough to call a halt to a movement that was, given its magnitude, very restrained, and of detractors who were wary of Gandhi’s androgyney, and who saw this vacillation as the impracticable wish of an “effete and fossilized” man. These critics denounced Satyagraha as a creed that was inducing a dangerous quiescence upon the nation and was thus killing the “very martial instinct of the Hindu race.”

We denounce your doctrine of absolute non-violence not because we are less saintly but because we are more sensible than you are [...] I want all Hindus to get themselves reanimated and re-born into a martial race. Manu and Shri Krishna are our lawgivers and Shri Rama the commander of our forces. Let us learn the manly lessons they taught us and our Hindu nation shall prove again as unconquerable and conquering a race as we proved once when they led us.

One such skeptic, Nathuram Godse believed that the longer Gandhi would live, the more he would “emasculate” the Hindu community and destroy the Hindu nation, and driven by this logic, shot Gandhi to death a year after India finally became independent.

What enabled this notion of “masculine Hinduism” to take such firm root that it soon gained ascendency as the most acceptable definition of nationalism in India? How does one explain the apprehension, evidenced by political and cultural practices in India, that the nation’s masculinity is under siege, and that it needs to be spectacularly staged in international and local contexts if India is to be consolidated as a nation? The next chapter brings my project to conclusion by tracing the sediments of a colonial anxiety in postcolonial narratives of non-normative sexuality and gender, and by locating, in contemporary political and cultural practices in India, a continued grappling with ideas about masculinity and its role in building and in sustaining the modern nation.
Endnotes for Chapter Four:

1 The Vivekananda Centre at London has a website of Vivekananda’s speeches, many of which are interestingly similar in tone and message to the epigraph I have quoted above, http://www.hinduism.fsnet.co.uk/namoma/sayings_swamiji/mThus_spake_vivekananda.htm


3 Chaman Nahal picks up on Gandhi’s difference and attributes Gandhi’s peculiarity to his androgyny: “He knew his mother Putlibai was fond of him but part of that fondness was only her pitiful attempt to protect him. The relatives wouldn’t stop comparing him with his other brothers or cousins. They did that playfully enough, but Mohandas was aware of the sting. ‘Now, Putlibai, this son of yours, who has he taken after?’ […] ‘Muniya could pass for a boy as well as for a girl. Now isn’t that something?’ His mother, too, knew of the sting[…] And she was more tender towards him than towards Laxmidas and Karsandas, his older brothers, or his sister, Ralianbehan. She never scolded him the way she scolded the others, and when he hid himself in the large house to play his pranks, and she found him after some search, she heaved a sigh of relief and pressed him to her bosom. ‘Why are you always hiding in corners? Why don’t you go and play with the other boys?’ she asked him. Mohandas made no answer, but his mother knew why.” See Chaman Nahal. *The Crown and the Loincloth*. (New Delhi: Vikas, c1981), 32.

4 In fact Gandhi’s reactions are reminiscent of Flory’s attitude (which I have noted in my study of *Burmese Days* in chapter two) towards the women he beds.

5 While attending a conference of vegetarians at Portsmouth, Gandhi stays with a friend at the house of a woman of easy morals. It is important to note that it is this male friend, no paragon of morality himself, who reminds Gandhi of his vows to his mother. “My condition” says Gandhi, speaking of his narrow escape from a sexual incident, “was that of a wild animal who has just escaped the hunter.” The portrayal of a woman he had been sharing light banter with (even if some of the talk was of dubious morality) as someone for whom he could have become an unwilling prey, is startling. It is understandable if he blames himself for his potential for lapsing into lasciviousness, but the vocabulary of his description suggests a betrayal of something more than the vows of moral uprightness that he had taken in front of his mother.


7 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 3, 353-54. (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* online at http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html). The monetary argument against Kasturba’s coming to South Africa that Gandhi advances in letters he writes to his relatives, soliciting their help in persuading his wife to remain behind for two to three years, namely that the savings he could make in South Africa would enable her and the
children to lead an easy life in India, neither jibes with the realities of running a household alone nor with Gandhi’s character and temperament.

8 See, for instance, Wolpert, 40.

9 Kakar notes that Gandhi decided upon abstaining from sexual intercourse upon the death of his very close friend, “Raichand”. This circumstance, says Kakar, “must have contributed to Gandhi’s resolve to renounce sexuality [...] To give [up his genital desires] was an offering made at the altar of Raichandra’s[... ]departed soul.” (94) Gandhi and Raychand talked regularly, and though very little documentation exists of the subjects of these talks, from the scattered references in Gandhi’s writings, it seems as though one of their most recurrent topics of conversations was the relationship of sexuality to salvation. See Kakar, 93.


12 CWMG, 6, 181.

13 Ibid., 43, 330-2.


15 See Kakar, 100.

16 Sedgwick, 188.

17 Kakar’s phrase, 101.

18 CWMG, 36, 378.

19 Ibid.


21 CWMG. 12, 136.

22 Ibid., 43, 53.

23 Ibid., 9, 375.

24 Vanita is discussing the reaction of Sita’s husband in the film Fire, when, upon seeing his wife with Radha, he mutters “What I have seen is a sin in the eyes of God and man.” Wolpert, 59.

25 CWMG, 9, 375.

26 Quoted in Alter, 11.

27 CWMG, 9, 375.

28 Ibid., 60, 410.


The phrase is Nahal’s, 16.


Ibid.

Ibid., 189.

Ibid., 196.

*CWMG*, 71, 249.


Ibid.

*CWMG*, 35, 305.

Ibid., 36, 162.

Quoted in Alter, 19.


See discussion in Kakar, 120.

Koestler, 235.

Kidwai et al, 96.

“The rival” could refer either to Gandhi, or to the relentlessly sexualized women with whom Sunil has brief affairs.

Another example of a son whose family resists and resents his coming under the influence of Gandhi is Sriram, who, in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, finds his granny fiercely resistant of his desire to join Gandhi. When Gandhi tells him to tell her “that I like to have you with me,” Sriram is filled with dread because he remembers “the terms in which Granny referred to the Mahatma.” (79) What these terms are never quite mentioned, but it is obvious that they are not very complimentary.

In Kidwai et al, 254.

For instance, when he first leaves India for London, he meets a Mr. Mazumdar on the ship, and says of him: “I was very much surprised at the liberty which Mr. Mazmudar took with me on the first night. He spoke to me in such a manner as if we were very old acquaintances. He had no black coat so I gave him mine[...]From that night I liked him very much.” (*CWMG*. 1, 9) Similarly, he met and made friends with Albert West, and later with Mr. Polack after chance meetings in restaurants, and struck a very intimate and long lasting friendships with them.

Quoted in Nandy, 47.

*CWMG*, 17, 176.

Ibid., 51, 265.

Ibid., 58, 362.

Ibid., 26, 158.

Ibid., 57, 48.

See Koestler’s discussion of Gandhi’s relationship with his niece, 236.

*CWMG*, 94, 132.

Kakar, 127.

In fact, early Christianity was also characterized by “feminine” virtues like meekness, mildness, and martyrdom.

Nandy, 53.
“By non-violence I do not mean cowardice. I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence[...]. I am not pleading for India to practise non-violence because she is weak, but because she is conscious of her power and strength.” (CWMG, 27, 9).

This phrase was used to describe Gandhi by his opponents, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who at the time had also become disenchanted with the absoluteness of Gandhi’s philosophy of ahimsa, nevertheless criticized those who used it. See Alter, 139.


PART III

POSTCOLONIAL CONTINUATIONS
CHAPTER FIVE

"We have to prove that we are not eunuchs": Negotiations of Gender and Sexuality in Postcolonial India

In May 1998, India conducted its second series of nuclear tests after a gap of over two decades. Following these tests, Bal Thackeray, an influential Indian politician, issued a widely broadcast and extraordinary justification of the country's stand on nuclear testing. "We have to prove," he said, "that we are not eunuchs." This statement is significant not only in view of the continued influence of Thackeray's politics on the rise of militant nationalism in India, but more importantly because his declaration blurs the distinction between sustaining the sovereignty of a nation and validating the masculinity of its citizens. Further, the statement is indicative of contemporary socio-political culture in India, where an anxiously masculine Hinduism has gained ascendancy as the most acceptable definition of Indian nationalism. I hypothesize that the uneasy relationship between nationalism and masculinity, or nationalism and normative sexual expression in present-day India is the result of a conflict between, on the one hand, the acceptance of a persuasive and pervasive convention (the commonplace modern belief that the ability to mobilize normative sexual and gendered citizen-subjects is crucial to the task of creating and sustaining the modern nation), and on the other, an awareness of the failure of this belief in the past (the paradoxical historical creation of an independent Indian nation through an orchestration of non-normative gender and sexual identities.)

Debates about sexuality, citizenship and/or nationhood tend to be centered on the assumption that heterosexuality and standard gender behaviors are the necessary
responsibility of subjects, in return for which they get the right of citizenship. This theory has provided the dominant interpretive framework that underwrites critical readings of colonial histories and postcolonial national formations. The assumption that only normative gender/sexual behaviors of citizens aid the formation and consolidation of a nation has underwritten critical readings of histories and cultures of nations (Mosse, 1985; Nagel, 1998), including those of postcolonial nations (Banerjee, 2005). The creation of the Indian nation poses a historical challenge to this assumption: as we have seen in the preceding chapters, queer subjectivity was vital to the constitution of a national identity in India.

My argument that queerness was implicit in the constitution of India will allow me to examine current socio-cultural practices that seem to have emerged as a response to that history. In this chapter, I will examine the anxiety that surrounds masculinity in postcolonial India, paying close attention to the ways in which politics and literature mediate the memory of India’s queer national beginning, alternately invoking and exorcising it. My aim is to locate, in contemporary literary and political practices in India, a continued grappling with ideas about masculinity and its role in building and in sustaining the modern nation. I will examine how and to what ends writers and politicians (who, as Rushdie says, fight over the same territory) assert and contest links between masculinity and nationalism. In so doing, I follow the rise of masculine Hinduism as the most unobjectionable current definition of Indian nationalism. Even this masculine Hinduism, I suggest, reveals a protracted engagement with a colonial memory: there are, for instance, undeniable similarities between the power wielded by charismatic present-day politicians like Bal Thackeray because of their ability to herd young men into political units (like the
Shiv Sena) and Gandhi’s similar historic influence over a “young India”. Over the course of this chapter, I will also attempt to understand why the “masculine” nationalism in India also seeks to be “Hindu” by definition, keeping in mind the historical humiliations suffered by the effeminate babu over accusations of unmanliness and sexual perversion (which, as I have discussed in chapter three, were paradoxically based, at least in part, upon evidences like the (bi)sexual privilege of Mughal rulers, and the homoerotics of the Urdu ghazal.)

I will begin this chapter at the point I closed the previous one, when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, and his doctrine of nonviolence began to lose its grip upon the newly independent Indian nation. My reading of Stanley Wolpert’s *Nine Hours to Rama*, a novel plotted around the conspiracy to assassinate Mahatma Gandhi will contextualize the rise of Hindu nationalism in India, and will take account of the representations of masculinity and sexuality in the text which, I will suggest, resulted in the book being banned in India. Given the politics of the novel, it is surprising that there is so little work on it, and none at all in the context of Indian nationalism/gender/sexuality: my chapter will attempt to address this critical gap. Next, I will focus on how Gandhian nationalism began slowly to be replaced by a more militant version, the predecessor of the present-day combative Hindu nationalism and the context behind the emergence of an insistently and anxiously masculine national subject in India. In the third section, I will trace how these anxieties percolate into the contemporary Indian novel, and I will study one such text intent upon “imaginatively ‘figuring’ the national subject”3, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, to examine the extent to which apprehensions about manliness and sexual normativity inform this ur-text of intersections between nations and
individuals/citizens. Then finally, in my concluding section, I will discuss the ways in which current political practices in India seem to perpetually respond to the memory of the Indian male’s emasculation and effeminization under the British rule.

Gandhi’s efforts to repair the native self-perception of effeminacy under the imperial rule—by equating manliness not with martial prowess but with spiritual strength, and by resignifying effeminacy into a feminine principle that men ought to aspire to—were philosophies that began to wane towards the mid 1940s. As I have demonstrated in chapter 3, the Indian response to the British charge of effeminacy was twofold and chronologically overlapping. One response was the Gandhian nonviolent resistance; the other was a movement launched by Hindu reformists to re-masculate and physically strengthen Indian men. I will trace the latter response in greater detail later in the chapter, but for now I just want to note that the desire on the part of Hindu reformists to develop the manliness of their “depleted” race was never replaced by Gandhi’s theories of ahimsa: Gandhi was just more successful in mobilizing a large majority of Indians to unite behind his vision of a nonviolent independence movement. Each time Gandhi withdrew his call for a hartal or for civil disobedience following some incident of violence, he was criticized by supporters and detractors alike for being too much of a stickler for his absolutist definition of ahimsa. Gandhi had taken over as the spearhead of the resistance movement against the British from Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whose martial-nationalist politics had been sharply divergent from his own. Therefore any disappointment with Gandhi was naturally accompanied by a looking-back towards the militant and forceful era of Tilak’s extremist politics. William Gould notes that, “[b]y the mid 1940s there were indications of ambivalence towards, and sometimes outright
rejection of Gandhian nonviolence."\(^6\) Especially after 1945, perhaps as a consequence of the second world war, there were many public denunciations of ahimsa. However, Gandhi was still leading the Congress, the political party negotiating independence with the British empire, and he was still spearheading the Indian mass movement against the foreign rule. Therefore, the muted disapproval of Gandhi’s politics of quiescence exploded only after India achieved independence in 1947.

The partition of India, which was followed by the worst religious riots between Hindus and Muslims that the country has ever seen, was, in part, responsible for the feeling that Hindus needed to arm themselves and be battle-ready. Hindu leaders argued that “the sermon of ahimsa has emasculated the Hindu nation[...] We do not need Gandhi’s advice.”\(^7\) (Ironically enough, Muslim leaders reproduced a similar rhetoric, claiming that Gandhi’s nonviolence was “a way of getting Muslims to show a similar cowardice to Hindus.”\(^8\)) Nathuram Godse, the man who killed Gandhi about a year after India attained independence, had this to say in defense of his violent crime: “I firmly believed that the teachings of absolute ahimsa as advocated by Gandhi would ultimately result in the emasculation of the Hindu community and thus make the community incapable of resisting the aggression or inroads of other communities, especially the Muslims.”\(^9\)

I want to begin by studying, in the following section, *Nine Hours to Rama*, a novel that describes the nine hours before Gandhi’s death from the point of view of Godse, the novel’s protagonist. I want to open with this novel for two reasons. One is that it contextualizes the philosophies of several contemporary Hindu political organizations and parties, and provides a great pretext to discuss the rise of the Hindutva brand of
nationalism in postcolonial India. The second, and, for my purposes, the more significant reason has to do with the fact that this novel was banned in India in 1962, the year it was published. The alleged reason for the ban—Wolpert has stated that he was never given any reason why his novel was proscribed—is that the novel insinuates the security around Gandhi had been half-hearted and neglectful. I find, however, that not only does *Nine Hours* not imply slipshod security, on the contrary it shows the desperation and dedication with which the people responsible for Gandhi’s safety tried to protect him, and how Gandhi, with his implicit belief in ahimsa, constantly put himself in the way of harm. I suspect, then, that the real reason for the ban is related to the portrayal of the masculinity and sexuality—both significantly awry—of the men in the novel, most of whom are based on, or are composites of, real Indian nationalist leaders and/or public figures.

In this context, it would do well to remember the move to ban Jeffrey Kripal’s *Kali’s Child* in 1995, as well as the ban on Deepa Mehta’s 1998 film *Fire*, both of which are relevant despite the fact that they came so many decades later. Kripal’s book, as I have mentioned earlier, sought to restore and reinterpret certain passages that had been bowdlerized from the English translation of the central text of Ramakrishna Pramahamsa’s tantric tradition. Kripal demonstrates very convincingly the homoerotic bent of the 19th century mystic’s desires, and does so in a tone that is never anything but compassionate and respectful. Yet, following an inflammatory review of the book in a Calcutta newspaper, there was a ban movement against *Kali’s Child*. Interestingly, it was Shabana Azmi, who was soon to play the role of one of the two lesbian sisters-in-law in *Fire*, who championed Kripal’s book. The ban movement was ultimately unsuccessful, but it is
important to explore the context in which the book appeared, in order to understand why it caused such consternation. One reason was of course the year of the book’s publication: following the 1992 demolition of Babari Masjid (which I will study in the last section of this chapter), right-wing Hindu parties like the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), with their visions of a masculinist nationalism, were coming into their own: in fact, the first time the BJP government came into power was in 1996. Further, the subject of Kripal’s book was, significantly the guru of Vivekananda, whose rhetoric of manliness the proponents of Hindutva borrowed so liberally from. It seems too that the compelling nature of the evidence presented by Kripal, a white man, made his crime that much more egregious. Immediately then, the memory of imperial denigration of native religious, cultural, and sexual practices was re-evoked, and a self-perpetuating myth of Kripal’s plot to condemn and morally impugn an important spiritual leader, a figure who was, in many ways, the fountainhead of modern Hinduism, began.

Deeza Mehta too was a “foreigner”, and her being Canadian was frequently cited by detractors as one reason why her portrayal of a “perverse” sexuality was (or ought to be) unacceptable to Indian society. The ostensible reason for the ban on Fire was that it depicted lesbianism within an Indian family, and this was seen as obscene, perverse and immoral. The real protest however, was against the portrayal of Indian masculinity in the film. The male protagonists—if they can be called that—in Mehta’s film are enfeebled, degenerate, and less than admirable. Worse, they seem to be shockingly lacking in manly attributes: the older of the two brothers (whose wife enters into a homosexual relationship with his younger brother’s wife) has adopted the Gandhian philosophy of celibacy, and is shown as impotently unwilling or unable to satisfy the sexual desires of his wife. All his
energy and devotion is dedicated to his male “Guru”, in whose company he is shown to spend most of his time. The younger brother is similarly incompletely masculine: he is regularly used as a sexual object by a Chinese woman, and is helplessly unable to defend himself or to retaliate when he is verbally attacked by her father, who hurls racial abuses at him. I suggest that, much like in the case of Kripal’s book and Mehta’s film, the ban on Wolpert’s novel was ultimately motivated by a discomfort with the non-normative masculinity and sexuality of its Indian male characters, especially since it was portrayed by a foreigner.

*Nine Hours to Rama:* 

The novel begins with Nathuram Godse (known as “Natu” in the book) and Godse’s co-conspirator, Narayan Apte (here called “Vishnu Apte”) trying to retain a restroom in a railway station so that they may stay invisible and undetected for the nine hours that remain until the time of their planned assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. There has already been one failed attempt at Gandhi’s life, and one of the men involved in this abortive attempt, Pahwa (based on the historical Madanlal Pahwa) is now in the custody of the police. For this reason, the already tense atmosphere that must precede any plans of assassination, has become that much more menacing and edgy. The novel follows two timelines: one details the hours that elapse as the time for Gandhi’s death draws nearer, and the other, in a series of flashbacks set in colonial times, depicts the events in the lives of the various characters that have led them to the present moment and to their involvement in the plan to kill Gandhi. As I have noted before, in this novel, most of the characters associated with the assassination plot have some basis in history. In some
cases, the men are syntheses of historical figures who were accused in the Gandhi assassination case – and many of whom were found guilty in the criminal investigation following Gandhi’s death. The character Vishnu Apte, for instance, seems to be a cross between Narayan Apte, who was executed by hanging along with Nathuram Godse, and Vishnu Karkare, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the conspiracy. Similarly, Dhondo Kanetkar (also know as “Guruji” in the novel) has an ideology and a life-history that greatly resembles Vinayak Damodar “Veer” Savarkar’s. Therefore, when the masculinity, male friendships and sexual relationships of these historically inspired characters are depicted as questionable in the novel, it is not unreasonable to assume that *Nine Hours* was banned because it was perceived as attacking or undermining the manliness and sexual normativity of the Indian male not just on a individual/fictional plane, but also on a national/historical one.

Consider, for instance, Purushottamdas Katuk, the leader of the group involved in the assassination plot. Katuk grew up without any education, but nurtured his physical strength, until “[I]earn to toughen your fists and your fists shall make you free,’ became the practical ethic of his life.” Following the ideology of Hindu revivalists, who in turn had borrowed their self-conception from orientalist discourse, Katuk would be insistently “working out in [a] gym, wrestling on the pounded dirt floor,” while other young men around him “grew thin and pale poring over past examination questions and answers.” Katuk spouts the idiom of militant Hindu revolutionaries, declaiming that the reason why his countrymen have been in bondage for so long is because “most of us are still weaklings,” too busy “wasting [our] youthful energy and time on such nonsense” as English “poetry”(114). Therefore, Katuk takes his exams not in poetry but in wrestling.
However, physical strength does not seem sufficient to ensure masculine normativity: as soon as we become convinced of Katuk’s prowess, Wolpert disrupts the discourse of manliness with a patently homoerotic moment. In the following passage, Katuk is being tested for his strength and masculinity by the leader of a Hindu revivalist organization:

“Are you a weakling?”
“I can take care of myself,” Katuk said, not without a surge of pride.
“That remains to be seen,” the old man said[...]. Katuk had not been warned before, but was told now that[...] he was ready to take his final examinations[...]. The first exam was in wrestling[...]. Katuk stripped down to his loincloth and took his time about massaging the oil onto his body. He knew it was a test all right, though he had no idea of what the reward for passing it would be. But he liked to wrestle. He liked the feel of another man’s body in his arms. He even enjoyed the pain when he was losing.(117)

The reader’s gaze, and that of the “examiner”—who, we find later, insists upon a vow of absolute celibacy from his male “disciples” before he agrees to initiate them into his organization—is directed towards the near-naked body of Katuk. And then Wolpert proceeds to make him massage oil (slowly!) into his well worked-out body. Hanging over everything, is the idea of a “test” and the unknown but tantalizing “reward”, not to mention the sadomasochistic pleasures of wrestling and the “feel of [a] man’s body” in another man’s arms.

This is not an isolated incident either. Katuk can hardly meet another man without making careful note of his physical attributes. When Katuk first meets Dhondo, for instance, this is how Wolpert describes the militant revolutionary’s appraisal of the Savarkar stand-in in the novel: “[The messenger] had no muscular development to speak of, Katuk noted. He looked somewhat feminine, in fact, for his black hair was quite long, his facial features delicate, and his eyes rather misty behind luxurious lashes”(121). Similarly, later, when the first attempt to assassinate Gandhi fails, and one of the members of their group, Pahwa, is arrested by the police, Katuk feels anger, apprehension and disappointment, which are understandable enough, but also a passion for his
colleague which is inexplicable until we take into account a homoerotic, and perhaps even actually homosexual, possibility between the two men:

Pahwa was his special disciple. Pahwa of the melancholy eyes, the soft full lips, the firm hairless body, was his alone[...Katuk was]wondering if they had marred his face, if they had raised long purple welts on his soft body, wondering how harsh the torture had been. Visualizing those tender bruises, those pain-seared spots all over Pahwa, he felt mixed with revulsion a tingling pleasurable sensation, a warm stirring inside of himself. He imagined his fingers caressing those blood-filled bubbles of flesh. (110)

It is significant that so many of these violent nationalists and would-be-assassins have been so feminized and homoeroticized in this novel. Besides the relationship between the wrestling (wrestler?) loving Katuk, the feminine looking Dhondo, and the soft-lipped Pahwa, the other close male friendship in this novel is between Natu and Apte, the two men upon whom the task of carrying out the assassination has fallen by a drawing of lots, and this relationship too is equally loaded with erotic possibilities. The characters of the two conspirators are significantly divergent. Natu is intent upon proving his masculinity—we will shortly see that he is carrying a bitter colonial memory of stigmatized manliness that he seems obsessed with, a stigma that he now wishes to wash away through his violent act—whereas Apte is clearly uncomfortable in his role as a killer, too afraid to proceed and equally frightened to back out. If there is anything that is holding up Apte in the face of the horrible deed he has signed up for, it is a desire to retain the good opinion and friendship of his friend, Natu, for whom, we are told, he feels "more than admiration[...what he felt] was closer to reverence"(35). In the middle of his worst panic, Apte can feel solaced by the thought of his friend, and the very memory of being in Natu's presence inspires him to display a bravery he does not really feel. For instance, there is a scene near the beginning of the novel, when characters and relationships are still being set up, where Apte feels as though he is being followed by a spy of the government, which has somehow got wind of their plans:
Yet all [Apte] could think of when he sensed that he was being followed was to return to the comforting presence of his dearest friend, the one person in this hostile city with whom he felt safe, whom he trusted entirely, whom he would not hesitate to follow into a wall of fire, or into a raging sea, for as long as Natu was there the worst hazards could be overcome, and even if they could not be, there was at least the overriding comfort of being able to show Natu that he, Vishnu Apte, was also unafraid.(16)

What Apte feels is clearly powerful. There are many ways to describe his emotion, ways that are innocuous, and that defuse the homoerotic possibilities of Apte’s blind admiration: friendship, or hero-worship, or the deference of a subordinate. However, as George E. Haggerty points out in his study of eighteenth-century Men in Love, when love between men is given a voice and friendship is described in terms that are so excessive as to make them interchangeable with romantic or erotic intimacies, “[i]t would he a mistake to dismiss this love as ‘simple friendship,’ not only because in certain cases [...] it is definitely more, but also because there is no such thing as the ‘simple friendship’ the phrase implies.”

In the exchanges between Apte and Natu, the vocabulary is certainly laden with erotic promise. Notice, for instance, the undertone of Apte’s reproof to Natu when the latter neglects to do something that Apte has suggested: “Why will you not listen to your Vishnuji, Natu?”(39), he asks. The “your” articulates a loving surrender along with a strange possessiveness, as though Apte were remonstrating not with an accomplice but with a lover. Similarly, later, when Apte wants to withdraw from the conspiracy, Natu becomes furious and threatens to kill him. “Do it, Natu,” Apte whispers, “his arms numb at his sides, offering no resistance whatsoever. ‘Kill me now—it will be easier like this—with you.’” But of course Natu is unable to kill his friend, just as earlier he had been unable to kill a woman he is sexually involved with. Natu actually makes explicit the connection between his female lover and his male friend: “It was the second time today he had been unable to fire [...] out of sentiment [...] sentiment, more than any other
consideration, had prevented him first from shooting her, and now it had saved Aptel"
And Apte, although a coward, is more afraid of being hated by Natu than he is of killing,
or of being killed. "[H]e did not want Natu to hate him more," Apte thinks at the
beginning when he is afraid that he has led the police to their hiding place; and then later
again, when Natu threatens to kill him, "Kill me," he says, but "Please do not hate
me"(352).

It is not only the emotional vocabulary that Wolpert uses to describe the
exchanges between the two men that marks their intimacy as unusual, but also the fact
that there is a definite "womanliness" that underlies the character of Apte, and an
anxiously insistent manliness that defines Natu. The first time we meet Apte, he has been
sent on the female errand of arranging for food for the two would-be assassins. Even
more damningly, he is persistently teary-eyed and "simply too frightened and nervous"
for a man who plans to kill in a few hours. When Natu, angry, tells him to pull himself
together,

Apte lowered his head. He tried not to cry, but he could not help himself. It was unmanly,
he knew, but he could not fight back the tears which ran from his eyes as though they
were shallow tanks in a monsoon deluge. He felt the sick, gnawing shame of his own
inadequacy sharper even than the dull, deep fear which had enveloped him since he had
drawn the broken matchstick.(37; italics mine.)

Later, when Natu finds his friend once again overtaken by fear, he asks in disgust: "Are
you a woman to tremble so?" and then the following strange exchange takes place
between them:

"I cannot stand pain. Natu. I have never been able to stand physical pain, as far back as I
can remember! Sometimes my father would beat me, and it was awful, it was like—
like—"
"Like love, Vishnuji?"
"What?" Apte's tearful eyes blinked incomprehendingly.
"Was the pain you felt like being in love? Natu asked, draping one arm around his
friend's neck.
"What do you mean, Natu?"
"Haven't you ever loved a woman, Vishnuji?"
“Of course—my mother.”
“Not that way.”
“I have slept many times with women, Natu. I have always told you about them.”
“No, not that way.”
“Tell me, Natu, how do you mean?”
“I was only fooling, Vishnuji. Women are all the same.”
“My mother was different. Natu.” (350)

First, there is Natu’s strange line of questioning, the queer question asked with his arm around Apte’s neck about whether Apte has ever loved a woman, though it appears from Apte’s reply that Natu knows all the details of his friend’s romantic history. Then, there is Apte’s amazing reply about his mother, and his insistence on the distinction between his love for his mother and the fact that he has “slept many times” with women. Apte does not seem to be able to comprehend, or even imagine, the romantic, heterosexual love that Natu is implying by “No, not that way,” as though the concept of loving a woman not his mother were alien to him. And almost immediately, Natu too gives vent to the deep misogyny that he displays through much of the novel even when he is in the midst of his heterosexual interactions with women.

For reasons that become clear in light of the non-normativity that Wolpert’s novel is clearly emphasizing, Apte, the fictional character, is made to remain a bachelor, although the historical Apte was a happily married man. *Nine Hours*’ Apte fits the profile of the homosexual whose mother maintains an unusual attachment with her son, and “adds blackmail and humiliation aimed at his masculine qualities.”15 We are told that once, a long time ago, Apte had tried to assert himself by refusing to get married, although, so many years later, he sometimes still “wondered if it was really an assertion of his own will as much as the acceptance of what he inwardly suspected to be his mother’s true desire” (290). Apte’s suspicion, we find when we revisit the past, is accurate for the most part: for unstated (but in the light of the homosexual undertone of his
character, understandable) reasons, Apte has been uncomfortable about his betrothal right from the beginning, and his mother eagerly encourages, even manipulates him, to back out of the proposed wedding. The day before his wedding, Apte’s “devout” mother leaves alone to visit the temple, and Apte follows her to the top of the “breastlike hill.” Then suddenly, faced by his mother’s question about why he is looking so troubled, “not knowing what made him say it, but sensing as he did so that it was the truth he had been afraid to admit even to himself since the day of his betrothal,” he tells his mother that he is not ready to get married.

They stood on the rampart ledge facing the plain far below, his arm pressed firmly against her flaccid breast...“Are you sure you do not desire the mundane life of the householder?” she asked. “I am sure,” he answered eagerly.” “Let me say that when my son was born,” she said, closing her eyes as though in prayer, “the Goddess told me he was not meant for ordinary things!...The life divine,” she whispered “is reserved for the few. Marriage has no place in it.”(291-5)

Then, as though to drive home the point that she does not think married life is meant for her son, Apte’s mother lets slip the fact that the match that has been arranged for him is to a lame girl. Apte begins to see his bride in visions, “the bride who had almost trapped him, her body twisted hideously out of proportions, her face scarred, her lips burned away to reveal jagged teeth, while from her mouth, instead of a tongue, the heads of many serpents emerged, spitting poison”(298). Apte’s wordless dislike of women thus finds an outlet and a reason, and he continues to remain childishly attached to his mother.

Until one day, when, while Apte was discussing, interestingly enough, “religion and politics” with his mother, his father “ barged in on them unexpectedly, found her pressing his hand to her heart, and fumed: ‘How long are you going to keep clinging to your mother’s bosom like an imbecile?’”(302). Put to work in his father’s press against his will, Apte soon joins the “organization” (probably the RSS or the Hindu Mahasbha, but more on that later) thus “assert[ing] his manly independence, liberating himself entirely,
though covertly, from patriarchal domination.” But because of his inadequate masculinity, he can never be his own man, and now he cowers in the presence of their leader, Katuk, who, it seems to Apte, “was his father” (300).

As though there were any doubt remaining about the (homo)sexuality of Apte, or about the emotional and erotic undertone of his relationship with Natu, Wolpert throws in the following exchange:

“And I assure you Katuk and Shankar will tear you limb from limb if that is what has made a woman of you!”
“But you will not hate me, Natu?”
“Why do you continue questioning me like an idiot?”...
“You are the one true friend I have known all my life, Natu—besides my mother,” Vishnu said, refusing to move away.
“I have no friends,” Natu said.
“You have saved my life more than once, Natu. You are my friend, whether I am yours or not.”
“Oh, shut up!”
“Natu, together—you and me—”
“So that is what you are thinking, eh?” He did face him now, though from the tears and the swelling around his eyes he could not help wondering if it was not a ‘her’ he stared at.
“You actually think I would join you? You think because I would not waste a bullet on your Muslim-loving flesh—” (353)

The physical proximity between the two men (with Apte “refusing to move away”), the insistence of one upon a friendship and an intimacy that the other—at least at this particular moment—refuses to reciprocate: all this leads to a strange manifestation of homophobia in Natu. From wondering if Apte “was not a ‘her’” one moment, Natu suddenly bursts into an invective in which he contemptuously refers to Apte’s “Muslim-loving flesh”, although what he is thinking about and seems revolted by is obviously Apte’s “man-loving” flesh. This easy conflation of the two is an instance of the desire to disavow any demonstration of non-normativity as alien and “Muslim”, which was soon to blow up into the resolutely masculine Hindu nationalism of late twentieth-century India. But at the same time, Natu’s reaction is also burdened by the memory of “the frigid numbness and the burning shame” of his emasculating encounter with the British. His
one desire since the time of his rejection by the British-Indian army has been to prove, to himself and to others, his considerable prowess and indubitable masculinity. Now, already skeptical of himself because he has been unable to shoot either his mistress or his friend, Natu wants to vehemently reject any suggestions that he could be associated with Apte in any way—in friendship, in love, or in his cowardly desire to surrender his responsibilities as one of the chosen assassins—except in a violent act.

When Natu was still a young boy, his friends would talk about their ambitious about their futures, and Natu would pretend that he too wanted what the rest of them did: houses and animals and servants and wives. But we are told that Natu secretly thought of wives as trouble-makers, and that what he really wanted was to be an officer in the army. This aspiration had first become rooted in him when, as a young boy, he had come across three soldiers, “all of them as big and beautiful as gods, and surely as strong.” Natu watched them “in naked wonder, with so much love and sheer surprise in his eyes” that they stopped to talk with him, and one of them even knelt and messed up his hair “with a godlike hand at least four times the size of his father’s.” The comparison of the soldiers with “gods” is a recognition of the power of the British over all Indians; that Natu’s father’s hand appears much smaller than theirs to the boy is an indication of the fact that he recognizes the power differential. Therefore what Natu feels is the desire to participate in the potency of the British, to partake of the strength which allows them to ride around looking so self-assured and god-like:

Then he decided, though he could not articulate it yet, that it would be to follow after them for all time, to march in their gold-strewn path wherever they might lead, to wear the brass and shining leather straps they wore, to carry the short stick they carried like the scepter of a king, and be strong and brave enough to laugh out loud like a god. It was all he ever really wanted from that day till the dawn of his seventeenth birthday. (78)

What happens on his seventeenth birthday, is that he decides to go and enlist in the army,
because he is now old enough to do so. So far as he knows, age is the only requirement he had thus far failed to meet. Natu first goes to his mother to take his leave:

"Today I will become a soldier," he said. She searched his eyes a long time for some indication that he was joking but she knew him too well to misread the earnestness of his voice. At last she whispered, incredulously, "But our family has never produced soldiers."

"Yes, I know that, and I have thought of it, and for a while because of that I had decided against it, but now I know it is in my blood, Matabai, and I cannot help it. Someday I will become a general, and then you will be much proud of me."(74)

Natu’s mother’s initial reaction, that her son might be “joking” indicates the extent to which a self-perception of inadequacy and powerlessness had penetrated the Indian psyche. That their family has never produced soldiers seems sufficient index of the fact that it would never produce one.

How then, does Natu feel that it is “in his blood” to be a soldier? I suggest that Natu’s militancy stands in the novel for a growing strain of militant Hindu nationalism that sought to eradicate and revolt against the doctrine of nonviolence propagated by Mahatma Gandhi. What Natu is turning against, when he is turning towards the army, is his father, a Gandhian figure in the novel. The previous year, Natu had been married to a twelve-year-old child-bride, and unable to bridle his lust, he had consummated his marriage. He had started a hemorrhage inside the girl, and she had died within a week of their marriage. We will remember, in this incident, overtones of Gandhi’s own youthful lust for his child-bride, and his subsequent life-long commitment to educating people about the dangers of child-marriage and of indulging one’s lust/sexual appetite. In Nine Hours, Natu’s father takes on the role of the disapproving Gandhi, refusing to speak normally to his son even a year after the death of the little girl whose death his son had caused, not forgiving him for the “crime of lawful lust”(80).

The old man, “rigid in his bearing as in everything else[...]calmly confident of the
primacy of his role,” expectedly, forbids Natu from joining the army, reminding him of his duties as a Brahmin. But Natu, still starry-eyed with his dreams of becoming a general, defies his parents and goes off to enlist:

He stood straight and firm, the way he had practiced standing at attention, though no one seemed to notice him in the muggy low bungalow. Finally the officer stared at him flatly and asked in a dry nasal tone, “What have we here?”
He smiled, then quickly erased it from his countenance, and saluted as he had often practiced when alone in his room. The officer neither smiled nor returned his salute and instead of getting firmer his knees seemed to melt entirely.
[Then the recruitment officer asks him what caste he belongs to, and as soon as he learns that Natu is a Brahmin] “Sorry,” the officer barked, “no openings.”[…]
He did not understand. An icy numbness spread across his forehead[…]
“I want to enlist,” he said.
“Are you hard of hearing?” the nasal voice asked. “I told you there’s no room.”
“But surely somewhere in such a huge army—”
“No, not for your kind,” the officer said. His grin revealing two front teeth capped with gold, a mask more hideous than that of Kali, Goddess of Death, with her tongue drenched in blood and her necklace of skulls. “We learned in the Mutiny what Sepoy Brahmins do with our guns, boy! There’s not one of you ain’t born with a knife in your heart waiting to bury it in one of us! Now get out of here.”
“I have come to enlist,” Natu repeated, because he could not believe this officer truly meant what he said.[…]“I must join the Army! Today I am old enough! I am fit, you will see! Give me your test.”(87-8)

Not only is he not given a test, he is ignominiously thrown out. In chapter three, I talked about how the rejection that ambitious Indians faced from the British and their common caricaturization as effeminate induced a coming-togetherness that led to the growth of a nationalist feeling among them. That is precisely what happens in the case of Natu, who carries the “frigid numbness” and “burning shame” of his humiliation like a burden ever afterwards, even after the British leave India, trying constantly to proclaim his strength, ability, and masculinity, and knowing that “the only way [he] could say it would be with a knife—or a gun”(203). But the pretense of manliness is not completely convincing or even reasonable, as Natu’s mistress perceptively points out:

Natu, can’t you see how incredibly ridiculous you are—all of you grown men playing this child’s game of secret society?[…]as long as the British were here[…]You were a patriot then, everyone who fought for our freedom was[…]—but now? What are you fighting for now, Natu? Whom are you hiding from now? This is your own country, Natu, yours and mine—it belongs to no foreign power anymore[…]What are you running from, Natu? Are you afraid? Is that why? Are you so much of a coward—?(310)
Natu slaps her for her pains, shaming himself even further, and therefore needing to redeem himself even more urgently. The upshot is that he succeeds in shooting at and killing Mahatma Gandhi.

The answer to “What are you fighting for now?” so far as Natu and the organization to which he belongs is concerned, was never just limited to obtaining freedom from the British rule. Their concerns are perhaps best exemplified by their leader, Dhondo, based on the legendary Veer Savarkar. At the time of Gandhi’s death, Dhondo is an old and ill man; “unaccustomed to illness, he despised it, as he did frailty of any kind”(225). He has grouped together a dedicated bunch of followers—all of them unmarried men—and his vision is to turn the nation that has been enslaved into a nation of warriors. Dhondo is contemptuous of pacifist political leaders like Gandhi, who, he believes, “used the tactics of false pride, of loquacity, of whatever devious disguise they found nearest at hand, to hide the simple fact of their moral cowardice”(263). Cowardice, according to Dhondo, is “the curse of our race,” and his life’s mission is to convince his countrymen that the enslavement of Hindus the Christians was quite contrary to what their respective religions taught them:

Our religion is that of the strong, Christianity of the meek and weak! Simply because the Christians grew strong enough, and we became foolish enough to allow them to make slaves of us, that does not mean we should ever forget our God-given destiny to conquer and rule our own motherland, or trade the dharma of the warrior for that of the slave.(225)

Dhondo even goes head-to-head with Gandhi at a conference when Gandhi starts talking about his philosophy of nonviolence:

Surely you cannot be serious in comparing the Sermon on the Mount with the message of the Bhagwad Gita? The former calls for turning the other cheek, while our scripture is a stirring battle cry, if it is nothing else! No, let me finish please! What, after all, is the very setting of the dialogue? It is Kurukshetra the field of war! Arjuna, our hero, has lost his courage when he sees his own relatives, his own guru even, arrayed in the front line of chariots massed against him, he lays down his arms and cries out, “I cannot fight them!”
What does the Lord Krishna tell him? "You are a warrior, Arjuna," he says, "therefore, your highest duty is to fight!" Our ancestors, remember, were conquerors the Christians' were slaves! (266)

Dhondo’s recourse to an ancient Hindu religious text to counter Gandhi’s message of “ahimsa dharma” or, the duty of nonviolence with a justification of violence is a fictional rendition of a though-process that had historically been motivating Indian nationalists to adopt martial tactics for many decades. In the following section, I will examine the initial phase in which Gandhi’s ideology of non-violence began to be replaced by the militantly religious philosophy of Hindutva, although it was not until the 1980s that it found full expression.

**The Philosophy of Hindutva:**

The call to action of the Mahabharata was reassuringly religious, orthodox, Hindu—and was therefore seen as being authentically Indian. According to Jyotsna Rege, “the nationalist turn to the Gita on the part of Hindus has been cited as the single most important factor in the shift from religious reformism to cultural and political nationalism.” Gandhi’s predecessor Tilak had, as a matter of fact, used the teachings of the Bhagwad Gita (a part of the Mahabharata) in his speeches as early as 1896 to justify violent uprising against the British to achieve swaraj or self-rule. Nationalists like Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda also drew upon the Gita in their rousing messages to their Indian audiences, and many of them embarked on writing translations of or commentaries on the text.

However, the message of the Gita allowed for many different interpretations, even mutually conflicting ones. Gandhi, in contradistinction to militant nationalists, read the Gita as an allegory of the war between good and evil, and suggested that the message of
Krishna (quoted above in Dhondo’s argument with Gandhi in *Nine Hours*) was essentially that it was the duty of every individual to serve selflessly and to renounce any desire for “the fruits of action.” As Ranajit Guha says in another context, the Gita became the ur-text that allowed the formulation of a composite ideology that combined British notion of duty with Hindu religious ideas about unquestioning obedience—and Gandhi, I suggest, used the combination to his advantage. And he was the first one to do so; as Ashis Nandy has claimed, “[i]n the 150 years of British rule prior to Gandhi, no significant social reformer or political leader had tried to give centrality to non-violence as a major Hindu or Indian virtue.” But Gandhi had to work hard to convince Indians of his interpretation of Hinduism as the right one, because after all, as historians like Romila Thapar and Peter Van Der Veer have pointed out, nonviolence is not a foundational teaching or virtue of Hinduism. The concept of nonviolence is related to the Hindu rejection of animal-sacrifice or slaughter—and thus the widespread adoption of vegetarianism among Hindus.

The outburst of Dhondo is almost a reiteration of Swami Vivekananda’s statement that it was the British who had actually followed the teachings of Indian religious texts, and had consequently excelled in their manly pursuits, while Indians, by foolishly following the teachings of Christianity, had fallen into a passive and feminine subjecthood. “[T]he older I grow,” Vivekananda said, “the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel. Do even evil like a man! Be wicked if you must, on a grand scale.” But Vivekananda had also expanded the notion of physical strength to include the prowess of “muscular” spirituality, and in the previous two chapters, I have described how Gandhi changed the focus of masculinity by concentrating
upon the spiritual and feminine dimension of strength/resistance. Savarkar sought to negate what he saw as the harmful effect of Gandhi upon "the Hindu race":

The teachings of the so-called satyagraha creed sought to kill the very martial instinct of the Hindu race and had succeeded to an alarming extent in doing so[...]I made it my duty[...]to give a fillip to military awakening amongst the Hindus by addressing thousands and thousands of Hindu youths.  

The orientalist conceptions about Indians as effeminate found acceptance in Savarkar's philosophy, though his dream was to reinvigorate Hindus into becoming a warrior nation. Savarkar, "like a good sportsman" conceded British superiority so far as their military tactics were concerned, and blamed the "idle, effeminate, selfish, and treacherous" native men who were responsible for failures such as the revolt of 1857. Using this vocabulary, Savarkar began to formulate the idea of a Hindu nation. Hindus, according to Savarkar, constituted a nation because they were bound by common blood, and "the tie of a common heritage we pay to our great civilization—our Hindu culture." He claimed a Vedic golden age for Hindus that reached far back in Indian history, not only before the invasion of the British, but even before the Mughal arrival in India. With the advent of Muslims, this golden age was interrupted and the original glory of Hindus could be recovered only by returning to the principles of warrior Hindu tradition. Thus, Savarkar began claiming a new "other" for the Hindu nation: the British, though they ruled India, were an admired opponent, an empire "the like of which history has scarcely recorded," but the responsibility for weakening India was laid at the door of the Muslim invasions and their many centuries-long rule over India. 

The word "Hindu" first appeared as only a geographical definition, referring to the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, in the land across the Sindhu or Indus river. Gandhi used this broad definition of what constituted the Hindu to explain his attachment
to Hinduism: there was enough room within it, he said, for Christianity and Islam.\textsuperscript{29} Therefore although religiously colored nationalism was not necessarily exclusivist at that time, Savarkar sought to make it so. In order to imbue the Hindu identity with prohibitive boundaries, he started emphasizing the term Hindutva, claiming that Hinduism was a "word of alien growth" and that Hindus should not allow their "thoughts to get confused by this new fangled term."\textsuperscript{30} In 1922, he wrote a treatise, "Essentials of Hindutva", and then elaborated upon his ideas in 1928 in another treatise "Who is a Hindu?" Savarkar defined a Hindu as someone who regarded the land from Indus to the Seas as Pitrabhumi (Father land) and Punyabhumi (Holy land): therefore, as R. R. Puniyani points out, by implication, Muslims with their Holy land in Mecca and Christians with Holy land in Jerusalem were already excluded from this definition.\textsuperscript{31} By equating religious and national identities—an Indian is a Hindu and vice versa—the Hindutva ideology sought to put other Indian religious communities outside the nation.

Savarkar saw World War II as an opportunity for Hindus who had been emasculated by centuries of subjugation under foreign rule to acquire experience in the use of firearms, a basic knowledge that had been denied them through legislations that prohibited gun-ownership to Indians. He reminded young Hindu men of their obligation to join the Indian army to fight for their country and to resist Islamic contamination of the Hindu army, making the slogan "Hinduise all politics and Militarise Hinduism!" his battle-cry. And it was really then, after 1945, when the British relinquishment of India changed from a distant struggle into a near certainty, and Hindus and Muslims each began to suspect the other of harboring violent sentiments, that Gandhi's lessons about ahimsa and satyagraha began to collapse under the weight of movements like Hindu
sangathan (unison) and shuddhi (purification), which began to be seen as “the sine qua non for eradicating the evil effects of years of emasculated existence of the Hindus and infusing manliness into them.”

Nationalist poets took up the idea of the mythical golden age—which became the vision of Rama Rajya that the rightwing BJP used to rise to power in the last decade—and wrote rousing verses, such as: “Buzdili chorke maidan mein ana hoga, hinduon ab tumhe kuch karke dikhana hoga...Nasal viron ki ho viratva dikhana hoga. Vir ho dhir ho har baat mein zyada sabse, sangathan shuddhi se bal apna jatana hoga. (Forsaking cowardice, you will have to come to the field. Oh Hindus, now it is time for you to do something. You are the descendants of the brave and you have to show bravery. In everything you are braver than everyone else, you have to establish your prowess through Sangathan and Shuddhi.)

Hindu reformists even co-opted Gandhi in the service of their new iconography of Hinduism. He was frequently compared to Shivaji, a legendary maratha warrior, and even to the Hindu deity Krishna. There is even a record of poems that compared him to Rama, the Hindu deity who not only represents the victory of good over evil through the means of war but is, besides, the repository of the Hindu concept of dharma (duty). There is also a debate about whether Gandhi’s last words, when Godse’s bullets struck him, had indeed been, as history tells us, “Hey Rama.” Gandhi is known to have confessed to his associates his wish of dying with the name of the god Rama on his lips, and one of his practices was to chant Ramanama during his evening prayers. But there are sources (like Gandhi’s former aide, V. Kalyanam) who insist that Gandhi merely gasped when he died. The apocryphal story of his last words feeds in to the validation of the idea that even Gandhi was partial to the Hindu religion, and that it is his idea of Rama Rajya that parties
like the BJP draw on. Further, as the historian Vinay Lal points out, the very fact of
dubbing Gandhi “the father of the nation” and thus turning him into a resolutely
masculine figure “points to the signal triumph of the masculine in the political domain.”

This notion of history, that alternate, convenient ones are created according to
differing agendas is one that Salman Rushdie plays with in his celebrated novel,
Midnight’s Children. In my study of Rushdie’s novel, I focus on the unusual degree to
which the text is concerned with masculinity, and I suggest that Midnight’s Children is
symptomatic of the anxiety about manliness that is pervasive in the postcolonial nation.
The protagonist Saleem Sinai’s mutilated body, I argue, symbolizes an inadequate,
tortured manliness, the inheritance of an anxiety that I have, thus far, been tracing.

Midnight’s Children:

Since its publication in 1981, Midnight’s Children has been variously described as
“the big bang of modern Indian fiction”\textsuperscript{35} “the political reawakening of Indian English
fiction”\textsuperscript{36} and “a watershed in the post-independence development of the Indian English
novel.”\textsuperscript{37} The story of a protagonist whose birth at midnight on August 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1947, the
exact moment when India was granted independence, ties him to the nation so completely
that the destiny of one reflects and affects that of the other, fired imaginations worldwide.
For instance, by knitting the destiny of an individual with that of a post-colonial nation in
such a way as to collapse the distinction between the private and the political, Rushdie
was in many ways, the linchpin of the Jameson-Ahmad debate about whether all third
world literature, irrespective of the story it attempts to relate, can be circumscribed within
the category of a “national allegory.”\textsuperscript{38} Similarly, several of Bhabha’s most influential
ideas about the interrelatedness of nations and narrations can be traced to Rushdie's novel. The publication of *Midnight's Children*, then, "opened new worlds of possibility for re-imagining and representing enabling relationships between individual and nation. [...] It reconceptualized the dichotomy between personal and national identity into a way that made a new kind of social engagement possible."³⁹

Using a novel as a means of imaginatively figuring and forging the national subject was not radical: as Rege has pointed out: "the Indian English novel of the past century and a half [has been] a private staging-ground for the middle-class nation-building project, a place where the nation has been imagined and reimagined, the national subjects cast and recast, the national narrative constructed, and the nationalist discourse deployed."⁴⁰ Before independence, critics suggest, the Indian novel in English plotted itself around social and political reforms, and attempted to articulate a coherent nationalist vision for India. After 1947, however, there was a period of atrophy: the narrative of nation-building became an ideological straitjacket in which, as Gayatri Spivak says, writers began to depict a "miniaturized world of nostalgia remote from the turbulence of post-colonial identity."⁴¹ It was in this context that Rushdie's novel was published.

*Midnight's Children* too spoke of the making of the modern citizen-subject and the modern Indian identity for the nation, but it did so in a way that refused to essentialize or homogenize this identity into a unitary model. "[A]t the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world," Saleem Sinai tells us at the very beginning of the novel, and adds that by this accident of his birth, he was "mysteriously handcuffed to history."⁴² And although Saleem's centralization of his role, his insistence
that most of the significant events that took place in India can be traced back to incidents in his own life, seems monstrously univocal, as the novel progresses, we find that there is a heterogeneity of voices, individuals and histories that interrupt Saleem’s linearity. Unitariness does not seem possible for the new national subject: as Saleem says at the very end of the novel, “it is the privilege and the curse of midnight’s children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into that annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes”(533). Saleem’s story is just one amongst thousands of others, and however much he tries to put himself at the center of his own history, his efforts are always doomed to failure. Even in the story of his own family and his birth, in the prophecies about him, in the letters addressed to him, Saleem is not the only subject because there is always his “twin” Shiva whom the prophecies and letters also speak to. The day India became independent was also the day it was partitioned; the story of Saleem’s birth, therefore, cannot be told without the story of Shiva’s.

Stuart Hall suggests in his study of the role of the national narrative in constructing cultural identities that one of the main discursive strategies by which nations are created is by imagining a pure, original culture and folk.43 This concept of a nation is disrupted in *Midnights Children*. Everything in this novel leaks into and mingles with other things: histories, emotions, languages, festivals, legacies—until the idea of being “authentic” or “original” (which is also the argument used by right wing political parties to validate the idea of the “Hindu nation”) becomes a patent falsehood. A Muslim protagonist and a Hindu antagonist, Saleem and Shiva, but which of the two is the more “authentic” child of the midnight? According to Edward Said,

To take account of this horizontal, secular space of the crowded spectacle of the modern nation[…]implies that no single explanation sending one back immediately to a single origin is adequate. And just as there are no simple dynastic answers, there are no simple
Thus, for Saleem and Shiva, the question of origins is not simple. Saleem, is not really the child of his Muslim parents and Shiva is not actually Hindu. The babies have been switched at birth—mixing up their destinies and identities forever—but the explanation of their parentage is not as simple as a mere interchange of families. Saleem’s biological father is an Englishman, William Methwold, and his mother is a poor Hindu woman, Vanita. And this is just at the literal level: metaphorically, Saleem continues to create numerous pasts and legacies for himself by insisting on giving birth to a bewildering array of mothers and fathers through the course of the novel: “[H]e, too, was one of that endless series of veterans to whom I alone had the power of giving birth”(295). Padma, the reader stand-in in the novel is, horrified at Saleem’s mixed origins. “What are you telling me?” she asks, “You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?” But as Saleem says in another context towards the end of the novel, nothing about him is purely his own: “I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I’ve seen done, of everything done-to-me”(440).

The past is inescapable, although the desire to recreate it to fit in with our conception of ourselves is a human enough temptation. The idea of the Vedic golden age, or the Rama Rajya, that was, and continues to be foundational to the philosophy of Hindutva, is a manifestation of such a desire. Rushdie refers to this harking back to the past in his description of the formation of the new nation state, and describes the growth of regionalism and the re-turning of the nation’s leaders to religious texts like the Mahabharata in the newly independent and supposedly secular India:

According to Mary, the country was in the grip of a sort of supernatural invasion. “Yes, baba, they say in Kurukshetra, an old Sikh woman woke up in her hut and saw the old-time war of the Kurus and Pandavas was happening right outside! It was in the papers
and all, she pointed to the place where she saw the chariots of Arjun and Karna, and there were truly wheel-marks in the mud! Baap-re-baap, such so bad things: at Gwalior they have seen the ghost of the Rani of Jhansi: rakshasas have been seen many-headed like Ravana, doing things to women. (280)

Kurukshetra is of course the venue of the war described in the *Mahabharata*, the text adopted by militant nationalist leaders like Savarkar as proof of the essential warlike nature of Hinduism. Similarly militant is the reference to the Rani of Jhansi, who fought in the revolt of 1857, and about whom an Englishman is supposed to have said that the mutiny produced one man and that one man was a woman.  

The idea that demons like Ravana, once vanquished by the Hindu deity Rama, were once again “doing things to women” was also a call to action for militaristic Indians to replay a mythical history and once again defeat the evil enemy. Of course, this time around, it was Muslim men who were seen by Hindus as being the enemy against whom women needed to be protected. Thus, Rushdie says, “In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our past” (131).

[The past of India rose up to confound her present; the new-born, secular state was being given an awesome reminder of its fabulous antiquity[...]] so that people were seized by atavistic longings, and forgetting the new myth of freedom reverted to their old ways, their old regionalist loyalties and prejudices, and the body politic began to crack. (281)

When the nation begins to crack, so does the body of Saleem Sinai. The partition of India, and the subsequent fragmentation of the country into warring factions is not, in Rushdie’s novel, merely a historical event. It is an abiding trauma—and abiding not just in the sense that the past never dies. The fractured body politic becomes manifest in Saleem’s own rapidly fragmenting body. Kavita Daiya argues that literature that is occupied with describing the decolonization and independence of India, articulates a critique of nationalism through the representation of violence and displacement experienced by its heterosexual male and female subjects, by the couple and the patriarchal family. In the process, these narratives make visible how both male and female bodies become sites subject to intimate violence and displacement.  

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I would argue that in this particular case, it is not so much that Saleem’s marked male body is engaging a critique of nationalism, as that it is commenting on the anxiety generated by the demands of masculinity made on the male citizens of a postcolonial nation, especially one with a history of gender and sexuality as fraught as India’s has been. As Graham Dawson has stated, just as masculinity has had a role in imagining the nation, “so too has the nation played its part in constituting preferred forms of masculinity.”

By approving efficacious performances of gender and sexuality and repressing non-functional ones, the State ensures the emergence of a dominant form of masculine identity. Saleem is faced with the task of living up to a manliness that is, in postcolonial India, increasingly aggressive (consider the hero-ization of the violent Shiva by the state), but finds himself unequal to its violent demands and consequently feels increasingly unworthy and unmanly, until at the end, he is left “castrated” and impotent.

“It is a fitting thing to mention before I launch into the tale of Nadir Khan—I am unmanned” (38), Saleem confesses. A disproportionately large number of men in this novel either are, or become impotent—an issue I will discuss in greater detail later. Saleem’s narrative is littered with references to “the useless cucumber hidden in [his] pants,” his dysfunctional “other pencil,”(137) and his slumbering manhood.

I can’t leak into her, not even when she puts her left foot on my right, winds her right leg around my waist, inclines her head up toward mine and makes cooing noises; not even when she whispers in my ear, “So now that the writery is done, let’s see if we can make your other pencil work!”(38)

Saleem’s impotence threatens to put him beyond the pale of love: once, when he happens to use the word in connection to his and Padma’s relationship, she explodes with a “violence which would have wounded” Saleem had he, now that he has gone through far worse brutality, still been vulnerable to the menace of words—but which he is unable to
respond to or defend himself against. "‘Love you?’ our Padma piped scornfully, ‘What for, my God? What use are you, my little princeling,’—and now came her attempted coup de grace—‘as a lover?’” (138)

Despite her sharp words, however, Padma valiantly attempts to rescue Saleem’s masculinity, taking charge of him as so many women before her have done. Padma goes to a holy man, searches for “the herbs of virility” (222), mutters supposedly magic words over them and feeds them to Saleem, with the result that he develops a violent fever, and nearly dies. In this discussion of aphrodisiacs, Rushdie might be nodding in the direction of the obscenity controversy of pre-independence India. From around the beginning of the 20th century, advertisements for aphrodisiacs began to flood mainstream Indian newspapers. At a time when the masculinity of the nation was under siege, these advertisements offered hope of succor and, as Charu Gupta points out, attempted to “allay fears of effeminacy and impotence” that had gripped the nation under the colonial rule. That the cure attempted by these aphrodisiacs was more than just medicinal is indicated also by the fact that one of the most frequently used icons in advertisements for them was the lion, which was a symbol of British masculinity and prowess. The imperial powers recognized the metaphorical content of the advertisements, and decided to “take action to purify the tone of advertisements in the public press.” Subsequently, several newspaper editors were prosecuted for publishing “obscene” advertisements.

Padma’s attempts, then, while they are certainly directed towards getting Saleem’s “other pencil” to work, are also aimed at reassuring him (and herself) about his masculinity. However, her administrations harm more than they help, and Saleem remains impotent and pathologically convinced of his passivity: “I’ve been the sort of
person to whom things have been done" (272). The idiom of passivity has long had negative connotations in the Indian context. The main reason for this is the emphasis of religious texts like the *Mahabharata* on action, or *Karma*, and the frequency with which this language has historically been employed in Indian socio-political contexts. But also, as we have seen in the first chapter, even so far as homosexuality is concerned, the active partner is considered admirable, it is only "the person to whom things are done" who is looked down upon. In this regard too, then, Saleem's manliness is inadequate and suspect.

So is his sexuality, for that matter. All of Saleem's relationships are abortive, and perhaps the reason is that his women are far more competent and potent than he is. His first crush, as a young boy, is on Evie Burns, a violent girl, who massacres cats and knives an old woman, and is understandably contemptuous of the sniffling Saleem. Then he falls in love with his foster sister, the incendiary Brass Monkey, who sets fire to shoes, hires the help of "beefy" girlfriends to beat up a boy, and wrestles bloodily with Evie Burns. Falling in love with his sister makes Saleem forever incapable of loving anyone else, though the muscularly-armed Padma and the supercompetent Parvati certainly do try to raise him out of his quiescence. And then the most potent female of all, Indira Gandhi, described as "the only 'man' among 'women'" in the Indian cabinet by political observers, completes his unmanning and castrates him.

As critics like M. Jacqui Alexander have pointed out, biology and reproduction are at the heart of the nation. The "citizenship machine" is located in the reproductive impulse: "the prerequisites of good citizenship and loyalty to the nation are simultaneously sexualized and hierarchized into a class of good, loyal, reproducing
heterosexual citizens, and a subordinated, marginalized class of noncitizens." Gayatri Gopinath argues as much when she says that good citizenship "depends on the family as a reproductive unit through which the stability or gender roles and hierarchies is preserved." Saleem belongs to the subordinated class of non-citizens because of his inability to reproduce. We find him impotent when he is with Padma. Later we discover that he is also unable to consummate his marriage, with Parvati, another of a series of competent women who guide Saleem's life.

I had spent our nuptial night with my eyes shut tight and my body averted from my wife's[...]. Parvati anointed her body with unguent oils imbued with erotic charm; she combed her hair a thousand times with a comb made from aphrodisiac deer-bones; and (I did not doubt it) in my absence she must have tried all manner of lovers sorcery[...] But no matter how much she did for me, I was unable to do for her if the thing she desired most.(478-80)

Just as the reformist self-conception of masculinity borrowed from and reiterated orientalist vocabulary, and thus discursively constructed itself as effeminate and insufficiently virile, Saleem too brings on his impotence by inventing a falsehood about his masculinity because he does not want to marry Parvati. In other words, he manufactures his own impotent destiny, though he is warned that "[t]o lie about one's manhood is bad, bad luck. Anything could happen"(464).

This lack of fit between Saleem and the women in the novel is very different from the symmetry that exists between Saleem and his male companions. There is, for instance, Sonny, with whom, Saleem claims, he was "born to be friends." I have talked earlier about Eve Sedgwick's description of the homoerotic triangle, and how societal prohibitions often force men to route their desires for each other through women. It is significant therefore that Sonny falls in love with Saleem's sister and uses Saleem as his emissary of love. Saleem, in turn, also sends his love proposal to Evie through Sonny. Neither heterosexual grouping works out, of course, but in the process of impressing Evie
with his bicycle riding skills, what happens is a coming-together of Saleem and Sonny: they crash, with their bicycles, into each other, and Saleem finds that the two of them fit together “as snugly as carpenter’s joints” (140).

I was flying up and over handlebars towards Sonny who had embarked on an identical parabola towards me CRASH bicycles fell to earth beneath us, locked in an intimate embrace CRASH suspended in mid-air Sonny and I met each other, Sonny’s head greeted mine...Over nine years ago I had been born with bulging temples, and Sonny had been given hollows by forceps: everything is for a reason, it seems, because now my bulging temples found their way into Sonny’s hollows. A perfect fit. Heads fitting together, we began our descent to earth, falling clear of the bikes, fortunately, WHUMMP and for a moment the world went away (214).

Similarly, later in the novel, when Saleem gets lost in the Sunderbans along with three other men, they have bizarre sex, apparently with female phantasms, “abandon[ing] themselves to caresses which felt real enough, to kisses and love-bites which were soft and painful, to scratches which left marks, and they realized that this this this was what they had needed, what they had longed for without knowing it.” and every night, all four men come “to an incredible united peak of delight” (422). The “united” orgasms of four young men in a forest, where they have retreated into atavistic, pre-civilized instincts and desires has a strong homoerotic undertow, and the fantastic explanation seems, as it does in several other instances, a function of Saleem’s crumbling mind, which seeks for comforting logic to explain or to explain away situations that are unusual or uncomfortable for the narrator. The homosexual explanation becomes even more convincing when we consider the fascination evinced by Saleem’s three male companions with his sexuality. Ayooba, for instance, finds Saleem “insufficiently virile,” which is strange given the fact that Ayooba is jealous of the visits that “the only female in the camp, a skinny latrine-cleaner” pays Saleem. “Like a brinjal, man,” Ayooba “complain[s]” about Saleem’s private parts to his two colleagues, “I swear—a vegetable!” (403). Then, as though their verbal fascination were not enough, the three
men conspire to run electricity from a urinal into Saleem’s penis. Further, in the aftermath of the Sunderbans and their “united peak of delight,” the boy-soldiers begin to worry about what others would think of them: “Think of what the Brigadier – and that Najmuddin – on my mother’s head I swear I didn’t – I’m not a coward! Not!...And...the hair! Is this military haircut? This, so-long, falling over the ears like worms? This woman’s hair?”(424-5). The halting, fractured dialogue, the incomplete “I swear I didn’t” (didn’t what?), the rejection of cowardice before any accusation is made, the comparison to “woman’s hair”: all these point towards an anxiety about masculinity that is exacerbated by the fact that the men, by getting lost and becoming AWOL, have also revealed themselves as insufficiently militaristic.

The hair worming over the ears is also the trademark of Nadir Khan, the first husband of Saleem’s foster mother, whose marriage ends because he unable to consummate it. Nadir is constantly described in a vocabulary that marks him as unmanly: he is called, for instance “that spineless one”(49) and “that fat soft cowardly plumpie”(52), and his voice is described as “soft, cowardly, embarrassed”(55). While he is underground with his wife, Nadir, instead of making love to her, plays “the old men’s game”(61) of hit-the-spittoon. This game, in which men try to aim expectorated streams of betel-juice into a spittoon, comes to stand in the novel for impotence. This impotence too has a colonial history: at a time when the violence of imperialism is bloodying India, “old”, helpless men send streams of red beetle-juice shooting across streets. As the Rani of Cooch Naheen says: “Let the walls be splashed with our inaccurate expectorating! They will be honest stains, at least!”(61). The spittoon which symbolizes the unmanning of colonization subsequently becomes a legacy. Just as men unable to fight had earlier
used the spittoon as a substitute for the blood they were unable to spill, Nadir uses it as a substitute for the seed he is unable to spill into his wife. (Later, when Saleem cannot rouse his manhood, he too points the reader towards the imperial provenance of his impotence: “Despite Padma’s many and varied administrations, despite everything she tries, I cannot hit her spittoon”(38)).

Although Nadir cannot consummate his marriage, the narrator tells us that he is “attacked constantly”(46) by erections when the man to whom he acts as a secretary, Mian Abdullah, starts to hum. Mian Abdullah’s hum seems to have this effect on many men; Abdullah starts to hum, and men for miles around him get erections—which is the reason, Padma laughs, why he is so popular with the men. Padma, usually not very easy to convince, easily believes Saleem’s story about this erection-inducing power of Mian Abdullah’s hum, and accepts it literally, instead of seeing it as a metaphor for the leader’s ability to rouse men, which is perhaps how Saleem intends it: “Well,” she says, “if he was such an energetic man, it’s no surprise to me”(46), as though energy were a sufficient explanation of Mian Abdullah’s strange power. Abdullah and his hum are perceived as being so threatening that a conspiracy is hatched to kill him, and he meets a violent death, but not before humming at such a high pitch that windows shatter and his murderers become painfully erect.

I have mentioned earlier that an unusually high number of men in this novel are impotent. Besides Saleem and Nadir Khan, there is, for instance, Saleem’s uncle Hanif Aziz, whose financial failure as a filmmaker is responsible for his being “unmanned.” We have seen in chapter 3 how the Indian self-conception of manliness was contingent upon a particular relationship to property, and that the acceptance of to the British ascription of
effeminacy by the native elite was based also upon their financial dispossession under colonial rule. In Rushdie’s novel too impotence accompanies and stands in for many other kinds of losses. Like Hanif, Saleem’s father also becomes suddenly impotent when his factories are shut down by the Indian government. “Amina! Come here, wife!” he shouts, “The bastards have shoved my balls in an ice-bucket!” (153). This freezing of Aziz’s assets is literal and metaphorical:

[Although Amina lay every night with her husband to warm him, although she snuggled up tightly when she felt him shiver as the icy fingers of rage and powerlessness spread upwards from his loins, she could no longer bear to stretch out her hand and touch because his little cubes of ice had become too frigid to hold[...]since the day he had cried out, “the bastards are shoving my balls in an ice bucket!” and Amina had taken them in her hands to warm them so that her fingers got glued to them by the cold, his sex had lain dormant, a woolly elephant in an iceberg. (154, 200)

It is not until Ahmed Sinai’s financial well being is restored that he is able to perform sexually again.

Yet another in this series of impotent men is Doctor Narlikar, who is ecstatic when Ahmed confesses his lack of “interest in you-know-what.”

“Bravo!” doctor Narlikar cried, “Brother Sinai, damn good show! You—and, may I add, myself—yes, you and I, Sinai bhai, are persons of rare spiritual worth! Not for us the panting humiliations of the flesh—is it not a finer thing, I ask you, to eschew procreation—to avoid adding one more miserable human life to the vast multitudes which are presently begging our country—and, instead, to bend our energies to the task of giving them more land to stand on? (200)

Narlikar’s plan is to reclaim land from the sea by using concrete tripods. Ironically, however, one day the doctor comes upon one of his tripods being worshipped as a Shiva-lingam, the Hindu symbol of procreation:

Technological miracle had been transformed into Shiva-lingam; Doctor Narlikar, the opponent of fertility, was driven wild at this vision, in which it seemed to him that all the old dark priapic forces of ancient, procreative India had been unleashed upon the beauty of sterile twentieth-century concrete. (201)

Once again then, the past of India rises up to confound its present, and Narlikar, like so many other men in this novel, becomes a casualty of violence.
The overwhelming number of impotent men in *Midnight's Children* is undoubtedly an index of the anxiety about masculinity that permeates the post-colonial Indian nation. There is, besides, a tendency amongst the characters in the novel to use of the vocabulary of manliness to discredit or to shame others. The women are especially prone to this propensity. The Reverend Mother, for instance, long before she becomes the Reverend Mother, criticizes her would-be husband for giving in to the attempts of an old boatman to drive him out of town in these words: “What kind of talk is this? What are you—a man or a mouse?” (26). And many years later, in an echo of the past, Masha Miovic goads Saleem into performing perhaps the only intentionally violent act of his life. Saleem would much rather have just shrugged off the boys who are bullying him, but Masha’s contempt puts him in mind of his grandmother’s statement (not to mention his violent nemesis Shiva) with the following result:

[M]y knees drive into Glandy’s groin; before he’s dropped, a similar genuflection has laid Fat Perce low. I turn to my mistress; she applauds, softly. “Hey man, pretty good.” But now my moment has passed; and Fat Perce is picking himself up, and Glandy Keith is already moving towards me...abandoning all pretense of manhood, I turn and run. (268)

After she has become the matriarch, the Reverend mother continues to use a similar idiom to shame or encourage the men around her. When she is furious with her husband for having allowed their daughter to marry the impotent Nadir Khan, she lashes out at him: “Whose crazy fool scheme, whatitsname, to let this coward who wasn’t even a man into the house? Who was the weakling, whatitsname, yes, the white-haired weakling who had permitted this iniquitous marriage?” (64). Then later again, when she tries to rouse her second son-in-law, Ahmed Sinai, after the closedown on his factories renders him literally and metaphorically impotent, she says: “This is no time to hide in bed[...] Now he must be a man, whatitsname, and do a man’s business[...] be a man, my
son – get up and start again!”(157). Not far behind the Reverend Mother is her daughter, Amina Sinai, who can shame an entire mob of angry and violent Muslim men about to attack a Hindu man: “Wah, wah!,” she applauds the crowd sarcastically. “What heroes! Heroes, I swear, absolutely! Only fifty of you against this terrible monster of a fellow! Allah, you make my eyes shine with pride[…]if you want to kill, kill the mother also and show the world what men you are!”(83-4).

The women are far from being alone in taking recourse to this orientalist vocabulary of masculinity. The commonest abuses that the men aim at one another are aimed at discrediting the manliness of their opponents: “eunuchs from somewhere”, “sodomizers of asses!”(94) and “sons of transvestites”(167) are some such phrases flung around by the men. Saleem describes Indira Gandhi’s son, whom he holds partly responsible for his castration as a man with “curly hair and lips-like-women’s-labia”(493). Another telling example is that of Saleem’s cousin Zafar, whose enuresis is a constant source of shame to his father, General Zulfikar: “Get yourself organized! Good for nothing!” Zulfikar shouts at his son, “Who behaves in this damn way? Cowards that’s who! Damn me if I’ll have a coward for a son”(328). The damning moment for Zafar arrives on the night the generals have gathered to plan a coup:

General Zulfikar had just begun saying, “If you permit, sir, I shall map out tonight’s procedures,” when his son wet his pants. In cold fury my uncle hurled his sun from the room; “Pimp! Woman!” followed Zafar out of the dining chamber, in his father’s thin sharp voice; “Coward! Homosexual! Hindu![…]Zulfikar eyes settled on me. There was a plea in them. Save the honor of the family. Redeem me from the incontinence of my son. “You, boy!” my uncle said, “You want to come up here and help me?” Of course, I nodded. Proving my manhood, my fitness for sonship, I assisted my uncle as he made the revolution.(332)

Zafar’s condition renders him unfit for being a son, and as soon as he is of age, he is sent to the army by his father: “I want to see you prove you’re not a woman”(335). The coup
itself is described not just as a militaristic dethroning of the prime minister, but as a process of unmanning that approaches sodomitical violence:

Naked overweight man stumbling from his bed. His eyes, asking: *Are you going to shoot me?* Sweat rolls down ample belly, catching moonlight, dribbling onto his soo-soo; but it is bitterly cold;[...]my uncle’s pistol is extracted from his mouth. “Turn. Quick march!”[...]And gun-barrel pushed between the cheeks of an overlaid rump.(333)

The central symbol of martial masculinity in the novel is, of course, Saleem’s “twin”, Shiva, the other child born exactly at midnight. Now if the timing of Saleem’s birth ties him so closely to the destiny of his nation, so must Shiva’s. But their lives and ideologies are so different, it is difficult to explain how one nation can have impulses so very divergent. Bhabha’s theory about the relatedness of nation and narration comes in handy here: according to Bhabha, nationalism is ambivalent by definition, and this ambivalence becomes manifest in the national narrative. Bhabha uses Tom Naim’s term, “the modern Janus,” to describe the dualism of the nation. This dualism, the “radical ambivalence of the Indian nation”57 is manifest in *Midnight’s Children* through the divergent characters of the novel’s “twins”. “Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim,” the narrator Saleem says, “understand our rivalry and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live”(432). Saleem stands for democracy, secularism, and even Gandian nationalism (he prays and fasts, for instance, when Parvati falls ill), while Shiva, with his name of a Hindu deity, stands for the forces of regionalism that threaten to disrupt Saleem’s pacifist nationalism.

Shiva and Salim. Salim and Shiva. To Shiva, the hour had given the gifts of war (of Rama, who could draw the undrawable bow; of Arjuna and Bhima; the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united, unstoppably, in him! And to me, the greatest talent of all—the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men.(229)

The *Mahabharata*, Rama and his bow, the prowess of Arjuna and Bhima: all these are obvious cultural references to the iconography of Hindu right-wing political parties.
Shiva stands for this rising ideology of Hindutva, which took hold partially because of a growing feeling among the Hindus of the nation that parties like the Congress were ignoring their interests and misusing democratic principles to win minority votes—this was at a time when the violence colonialism had done to the “effeminate babu” was still being repaired by Hindu reformists. Shiva too grows into his anger and violence because of all the disposessions that are heaped upon him:

[Gr]adually, down the years, we watched his eyes filling with an anger which could not be spoken; we watched his face close around pebbles and hurl them, ineffectually at first, but dangerously as he grew, into the surrounding emptiness[...]. When Lila Sabarmati’s elder son was eight, he took it upon himself to tease young Shiva about his surliness, his unstarched shorts, his knobly knees; whereupon the boy whom Mary’s crime had doomed to poverty and accordions hurled a sharp flat stone, with a cutting edge like a razor, and blinded his tormentor in the right eye.(146)

So Shiva begins increasingly to associate his sense of validation with the use of force, until his one rule is that everyone “does what I say or I squeeze the shit outta them with my knees!”(253).

Shiva’s plan is to run the midnight’s children like a gang where he and Saleem and the joint bosses. Saleem’s principles, however, are more democratic and peaceful. After unsuccessfully trying to win Shiva over to his ideology, Saleem decides to bar him from the “lok sabha” (parliament) of his mind. Thus politically disenfranchised, Shiva declares war: “you just try and stop me!” he says, and Saleem knows he cannot stop this new violent philosophy from emerging, because Shiva is “the god of destruction, who is also most potent of deities[...] whom no force can resist”(254). And indeed, Shiva is unstoppable. In complete opposition to the impotent Saleem, Shiva is so virile that “at the height of his philanderings, there were no less than ten thousand women in love with him”(470), and he was the father of thousands of children all over the nation. But Shiva too, for all his virility, can still not escape the taint of unmanliness: he learns “that a man
may possess every manly attribute and still be despised for not knowing how to hold a spoon[...] Major Shiva, unmanned in the company of the rich.”(471-73)

For Saleem, Shiva is “the name of [his] guilt,” and he slowly grows into everything that makes the “has made us who we are”:

Shiva-the-destroyer...He became, for me, first a stabbing twinge of guilt; then an obsession; and finally, as the memory of his actuality grew dull, he became a sort of principle; he came to represent, in my mind, all the vengefulness and violence and simultaneous-love-and-hate-of-Things in the world; so that even now, when I hear of drowned bodies floating like balloons on the Hooghly and exploding when nudged by passing boats; or trains set on fire, or politicians killed, or riots in Orissa or Punjab, it seems to me that the hand of Shiva lies heavily over all these things, dooming us to flounder endlessly amid murder rape greed war—that Shiva, in short, has made as who we are.(342)

Through Shiva’s gratuitous violence, Rushdie problematizes the violently masculine nationalism of present-day India. And he makes the connection between the two evident when he says:

Is it just my cracking memory, or am I right in thinking it was that 18th, perhaps at the very moment at which deserts of Rajasthan were being shaken by India’s first nuclear explosion? Was Shiva’s explosion into my life truly synchronous with India’s arrival, without prior warning, at the nuclear age?(468)

I opened this chapter with a reference to India’s re-arrival in the nuclear age almost a quarter-century after the tests that Rushdie’s narrator is referring to in the quote above. In the following section, I will examine socio-political phenomena like the nuclear tests that seem to have surfaced in contemporary India as a continuing response to India’s queer colonial history.

**Conclusion—The Inheritance of a Loss:**

In *The Intimate Enemy*, Nandy argues that colonialism does not end with the attainment of political freedom because colonization is never merely political: it is something “which begins in the minds of men [and therefore] must also end in the minds
of men.” Even after political dominance has ceased, the effects of colonization, “the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains, and losses from suffering and submission,” continue to lie embedded deep within the psyche of those who were once colonized. The worst brutality effected by colonialism, according to Nandy, is “that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter.”58 Fanon described such a psychological colonization as a desire on the part of the colonized to be “elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards,”59 and Nandy calls it an “identification with the aggressor.”60 This, perhaps, explains why so many socio-political moments and ideologies in post-colonial India continue to pay homage to the imperial culture against which they originally emerged.

The emergence of militant Hindu nationalism in the constitutionally secular India is one of the most overt manifestations of the continuing effects of the country’s colonial past. Some political commentators believe that the commitment of the Indian government to secularism has been overstated from the very beginning and that, for instance, the Congress, despite insisting on its secular credentials, has always been an overwhelmingly Hindu organization at the grassroots level. Others argue (and I agree) that the Congress caused its own decline by playing to majoritarian sentiments, first pandering to Muslim sentiments in the Shah Bano case,61 and then attempting to balance the favor shown to Muslims by (allegedly) ordering the opening of a disputed religious site in 1986.62 This still unresolved controversy, known as the Ramjanmbhumi–Babari Masjid issue, is perhaps the most visible moment that marks the rise of militant Hindu nationalism as a viable political ideology in India, the moment when Hindus began trying to reclaim their
glorious (mythical) past, starting with a disputed tract of land in Ayodhya, and went head-to-head with the Muslim community, leading to decades of religious violence in India.

In 1949, the year Gandhi was assassinated, idols of the Hindu deity Rama were reported to have “miraculously” appeared in the Babri Masjid, a mosque in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya, which the Mughal emperor Babar built in 1528 after demolishing a Rama temple. The fledgling Indian government declared the site “disputed” when Hindus and Muslims both filed civil suits to reclaim their religious site, and locked the gates to the mosque. Meanwhile, for over three decades, the Congress had been unable to restore economic well-being to the dispossessed middle-classes in India—we have already seen how periods of financial privation are also the times when the question of “manliness” rears its head most insistently—and dissatisfaction with the Congress began to increase, first over the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, and then, when the sympathy wave that followed her assassination had passed, over the Shah Bano case, in which Rajiv Gandhi was criticized for yielding to Muslim sentiments for the sake of minority votes. In 1984, a district judge in Uttar Pradesh, allegedly following directions from the Congress government (which wanted to reassure Hindus that it was not playing for minority votes), ordered the opening of the disputed structure to Hindus. In 1986, the Congress again turned a blind eye when the VHP conducted Rama Shila Puja (ceremonial worship of the idol). Three years later, the VHP intensified its activities and laid the foundations for a Rama temple on an adjacent tract of land. Thus, as the influence of Congress declined, right wing parties like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, of which VHP was an offshoot) and the BJP became progressively more influential. The
Ramjanmabhumi issue was pivotal in their rise to power. The idea of “reclaiming” a piece of the Hindu past, of restoring the tract of land to its rightful/original inhabitants gained popular acceptance, to the point that in 1992, the mosque was demolished by Hindu “volunteers.” Widespread communal riots in the country followed the demolition of the Babari Masjid.  

I have described earlier how religion became embroiled with nationalism in the word “Hindutva” and the phrase “the Hindu nation,” and that the idea of a return to a past that preceded not just colonialism but more importantly, Muslim invasions of India, was central to the ideology of this religious nationalism. Romila Thapar states that the contemporary definition of Hinduism is “an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic uniform religion.” This wasn’t always the case: before Savarkar, Hindu India was posited as a mere geographical reference. But the term became increasingly more exclusivist and circumscribed over the years. The reason for its shrinking was laid at the door of the new “enemy within,” the Muslims, and the Hindu nation was portrayed as being intrinsically tolerant but now erupting in rage over a long series of humiliations. The idea that it was the advent of the Muslims that interrupted the golden age of the Hindus found a visible symbol in the Babari Masjid and the “release” of the temple was seen as a first step towards undoing the cultural collapse of the Hindu nation. Therefore a call to the nation’s Hindu men to rouse themselves is also invariably accompanied with a reminder of their historical humiliations:

Are Hindus cowards then? Are they forever going to take things lying down? Have centuries of Muslim conquests, rape, looting, forced conversion, razing of thousands of temples, imprinted so much on India’s psyche, that we can only endlessly produce Vijay Amritraj’s; talented, nice, but unable to fight, to win, to defeat the opponent? But India has to stand up now. Its very existence is threatened. There are forces, which are actively working to disintegrate her. The fact that these forces happen to be Muslim-at the moment at least—does not mean that they cannot be fought [...].COME ON INDIA: Stand up and fight. [...].What is needed now is a firm hand, which as a clear vision of India's
The rhetoric of Hindu nationalism emphasizes that the violence being urged has a historical, and even a religious basis. For instance, Lal Krishna Advani, the leader of the VHP (and a crony of Atal Bihari Vajpayi, the BJP leader) quotes Doctor S. B. Mukherjee, the founder of the Jan Sangh, a party seen as the political predecessor of the BJP, as a means of validating the aggressive stance of right-wing ideologies: “a pacifism that refuses to take up arms against injustice[...]does not represent the real teaching of India[...]Let us not forget that valor was greatly esteemed by the sages and free rulers of India in olden times.” He then goes on to add:

[W]e must never, never forget our own history—both our proud martial tradition of defending ourselves against external aggression as also our sad tradition of excessive pacifism[...]Indian sages and philosophers never suggested that cowards and weaklings[...]can be the torch bearers of India’s great tradition of suraksha [protection].

On a similar note, one of BJP’s election manifestos read:

The post-Independence tendency to reject all ancient Indian wisdom in political life led to all pre-Independence values and symbols—be it the idea of spiritual nationalism expounded by Swami Vivekananda, or the concept of Ram Rajya articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, or the soul-stirring “Vande Mataram” song composed by Bankim Chandra—being discarded as unsecular and unacceptable. The BJP rejects this attitude and idea of disconnecting from the past. The past is inseverable from the present and the future.

Note the reference to the validating historicity of the “ancient wisdom”, the use of the pacifist Gandhi in connection with BJP’s drastically different and militant conception of Ram Rajya, not to mention the idea that secularism implies a rejection of all these formulative and foundational aspects of the Indian nation.

Further, as the juxtaposition of “proud martial tradition” and “sad tradition of excessive pacifism” implies, even as the right-wing political rhetoric attempted to rouse the Hindu male, it also simultaneously sought to rekindle apprehensions about Indian
masculinity, which colonization had drubbed so deep into the erstwhile babu’s psyche. For instance, one of the pamphlets that the VHP brought out during the Ramjanmabhumi campaign in 1990 read: “Ek Hindu ka Nara Hai—’Hum do, Humare do’ Jabki ek Muslim ka Nara hai—’Hum Paanch, Humare Pacchis.’” (A Hindu has the [family planning] motto of ‘Us Two and Our Two,’ whereas a Muslim’s motto is ‘Us Five and Our Twenty five.’) This belief, that in time Muslims would manage to outbreed Hindus was commonly held in India, primarily because of the Muslim personal laws which allow a Muslim man to marry four wives, whereas Hindus cannot be polygamous. The BJP was able to bring this commonly held but never articulated belief into the public domain.

In the course of her research for her book Make Me a Man, Sikata Banerjee interviewed leaders and activists in the Shiv Sena, who talked with her about “the prodigious sexual appetite of the Muslim male.” According to Banerjee, her respondents told her that the Muslim birthrate was higher than the Hindu one precisely because of this “sexual appetite”, and that the reason Koran allowed a man to marry four wives was because four women were needed to satisfy a Muslim man. The stereotype of the Muslim sexual insatiability allows for the construction of the Muslim male as a violent killer and rapist, against whom Hindus must protect their nation – and their women. This provides justification of violence against Muslim men as a necessary evil, even a duty: just as, for instance, the demolition of the Babari Masjid was justified as a revenge against those who brutalized “Bharatmata”, India as the mother goddess, thus transforming the mosque into a symbol of Muslim aggression. The construct of the hyper-virile Muslim male is thus simultaneously a manifestation of Hindu anxiety about manliness, and also an opportunity for rescuing it.
The irony is that though the Ramjanmabhumi issue was used in postcolonial India as a call to action to the Hindu male, Ram was a discredited and discarded icon in colonial times. Hindu revivalists rejected “Ram and his rabble” for being “effeminate, ineffective pseudo-ascetics, who were austere not by choice but because they were weak.” On the other hand, Rama’s mythical opponent, the demon Ravana was admired for, among other things, his “masculine vigour [and] accomplished warriorhood.” According to Nandy,

The previously rejected hyper-masculine raksasi qualities of Ravana became now the heroic qualities of a demon-king representing true, adult masculinity; and the many-faceted, open personality of Rama, on whom successive generations of Indians had projected their complex concepts of goodness, became a non-masculine, immature, effete godhead, representing a lower—perhaps even false—concept of goodness.\(^4\)

Around the Ramjanmabhumi issue, however, the iconography of Rama began to change in keeping with the rhetoric of aggressive Hindu masculinity. The Rama of the earlier era was androgynous, unmasculine, radiated serenity and always appeared in a domestic setting with his wife, brother and devotee. But in the aftermath of the mobilization against the Babri Masjid, Rama appears as a warrior, heavily armed, astonishingly muscled, and solitary. The post-Ayodhya Rama is “[a]n apocalyptic leader[…]silhouetted against a purple sky, his torso and legs uncovered, his hair and loincloth flowing against a raging storm. This is Rama the dispossessed, radiating a mood of elemental anger.”\(^5\)

With such a deity to lead them, it is no wonder that the aggression implicit in the Ayodhya issue was not only justified, but even lionized. Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena leader has this to say about the volunteers who demolished the Babri Masjid, and who return there in triumphant rath-yatras (chariot-rides that seek to duplicate the victorious and glorious return of Rama after slaying his enemies):

How does our Shiv Sainik appear as he is marching towards Ayodhya? Like the roaring lion spreading terror, with the gait of an intoxicated elephant, like the assault of a rhino.
which reduces to powder a rocky mountain, like the maneuvers of a leopard: Our infinite blessings to these Hindu warriors who are marching towards Ayodhya.  

In several other recent instances of violence against Muslims, the vocabulary employed follows similar lines. For instance, the 1997 Kargil war against Pakistan was posited as a source of great (Hindu) national pride: “[F]or the first time in five hundred years[…]the Kshatriya spirit was revived in India. Once again, what the Bhagvad Gita had preached became alive: that violence is sometimes necessary to protect one’s children, women and borders.” Similarly, the VHP leader Ashok Singhal described the 2002 communal violence in Gujarat as proof of Hindu awakening and resurgence. In fact, Hindu leaders in parts of Gujarat that were peaceful are said to have been sent bangles by MLAs of the ruling right-wing party to taunt them for their lack of “mardangi”, or manliness. The memory of the shame of being labeled “effeminate” is still painfully alive: parties like the Shiv Sena, which subscribe to the philosophy of Hindutva, show contempt for other men by referring to them as women, and discredit other political parties as congregations of women who wear saris and bangles. Banerjee reports being told by a male Shiv Sena leader that in the aftermath of a communal riot in Mumbai in which many Hindu women and children were killed, that his wife said to him, “I should offer you bangles now. What are we? In our own country Hindus are being burnt.”

An attempt to answer the question of “what are we?” was also the motivating factor behind India’s execution of its second series of nuclear tests in 1998, in Pokharan, Rajasthan. In May of that year, test explosions of five nuclear devices was carried out under the code name Shakti, which means, significantly, “strength”. At the time the nuclear tests were conducted, the government in power at the center was the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of political parties led by the BJP, and the prime
minister was the BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Following the tests, Vajpayee officially declared India to be a “Nuclear Weapon State,” thus putting to rest several decades of speculation about India’s nuclear capabilities. Subsequently, a number of nations worldwide passed economic and technology-related sanctions on the country, but India remained unapologetic. Several non-NDA parties joined in applauding the Indian government for conducting nuclear tests, which they saw as a show of national courage against the attempts of countries like the U.S.A. to keep India out of the ranks of the first world nuclear power club. Brajesh Mishra, former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and National Security Adviser declared: “I have always felt that you cannot in today’s world be counted for something without going nuclear.”

The VHP announced that Hindus had finally “awakened” as a consequence of these nuclear tests, and began to voice a demand that India be declared a “Hindu State” formally and constitutionally. Of all the right-wing parties, perhaps the most vocal and enthusiastic support of BJP decision to conduct nuclear tests came from the Shiv Sena. Sena chief Bal Thackeray applauded the explosions as demonstration of the fact that India was not a nation of eunuchs. There was, according to the Shiv Sena, an upsurge of nationalism throughout India following the Shakti series of tests: “Those who have suddenly woken up to the Buddha’s message of peace will do well to remember that this nation also has a glorious history of valor. Remember Mahabharata?”

“Nuclearism[…]promotes what are conventionally known as ‘masculine’ values: lack of compassion, eagerness to retaliate, violence, and brutality,” read an article in The Hindustan Times in the aftermath of the Gujarat violence, “No wonder, Hindutva has a compulsive and obsessive fascination with ‘manhood’ and ‘virility.’” The reporter has
got it the other way around: it is because Hindutva is compulsively fascinated with manhood and virility that nuclearism becomes part of its weaponry. That militarism has been elevated to the position of a religion in India, is implicit in VHP’s announcement that it would build a temple to a new national goddess, “Atomic Shakti” and carry Pokhran’s radioactive sands in a ceremonial rath-yatra to each corner of India.\(^\text{86}\)

It is not surprising that a nation trying so hard to prove its masculinity should develop a strain of homophobia that, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, was not visible in pre-colonial India. Ruth Vanita says in *Queering India* that in “twentieth-century Indian fiction published in India, same-sex desire is almost always imbricated with notions not only of gender but also of ‘Indianness’ and ‘foreignness’.”\(^\text{87}\) The construction of homosexuality as an evil introduced in India by the British or in some arguments, by the Muslims, is a phenomenon that is rooted in the same colonial national past that has impelled the rise of militant Hindu nationalism in India. Homophobia, in contemporary India, is justified in an idiom that is very similar to that used by Hindutva, which constructs masculine aggression as a strategy of national defense. For instance, in 2001 there was a case, known as the “Lucknow 4” case, still unresolved and pending in the courts, which redirected legal attention towards the anti-sodomy statute in section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (whose imperial legacy I have discussed in the first chapter). In July 2001, the Lucknow police conducted a raid on a park frequented by homosexual men, and there arrested an outreach worker of the Bharosa Trust, a NGO working on HIV/AIDS prevention with the MSM (men who have sex with men) community. Subsequently, the police raided the offices of Bharosa and Naz Foundation, seized supposedly incriminating materials, sealed the offices, and arrested three other members
of the staff. The men were charged not only under the anti-sodomy statute, but were also accused of “criminal conspiracy”, and the police stated that their actions comprised “threats to national security.” Homosexuality is therefore described as anti-national, and because of the imbricatedness of present-day Indian nationalism and Hinduism, also anti-religious. Criticism of the film Fire, for example, repeatedly referred to the “wounds inflicted on the body of Hinduism by its imbrication with non heterosexual sexuality.” And this rhetoric is not at the supra-individual level alone either. It is not uncommon for Indian homosexual men to make claims like “inside the park I am a gay. Outside the park, I’m a good Hindu,” as though being gay and being a good Hindu were mutually exclusive categories.

The irony is that despite their militant and homophobic ideologies, despite resolutely contesting the queer beginnings of India, despite de-legitimizing Gandhian principles, right-wing parties are also sites of homosociality, Gandhian celibacy, and social structures that closely resemble the ones Gandhi used in his resignification of effeminate masculinity. The RSS, for instance, emphasizes male celibacy, and though married men (Grihastha) may join the Sangh, they are considered on a lower footing than the “virile but celibate” Pracharakas. In fact, the RSS is modeled on the “Hindu Joint Family” with the queer difference that all its members are male. A similar homosociality is also encouraged in the Shiv Sena, where men construct “mutual loyalties and affective ties” during the long evenings they spend together in the local shakhas (branches) where they come “simply to talk, read, or just sit around.” It is in such paradoxical continuations and contestations that we can find evidence of post-colonial India’s attempts to navigate the gap between the nation as a masculinized space
engendered by masculine hopes (as Cynthia Enloe describes it) and the memory of its long engagement with non-normative versions of gender and sexuality.\textsuperscript{93}

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how negotiations staged around definitions of gender and sexuality continue to inform current socio-political practices and literary (con)texts in India. I have argued that the promulgation of masculine Hindu nationalism in contemporary India is haunted by the recollection of a time when the anxiety of preserving the empire as well as the desire of contesting it was positioned by conceptions of masculinity and heteronormativity. My project has involved reconstructing key colonial events and individuals within a new, queer analytic framework, and, in the process, challenging traditional interpretations that have hitherto colored our understanding of these. Nation-formation in India, I have suggested, was contingent to a large degree upon mobilizing and resignifying non-normative sexual/gender subjectivity. The offensive interpellation of effeminacy, I have argued, inaugurated a nationalist subject who countered the ascription paradoxically by claiming it. Thus I have suggested that queer subjectivity was vital to the constitution of the Indian nation. In saying this, I have made an argument for the importance of homoerotic narratives as sites where powerful directing influences on native social reform movements, political mobilizations, and nationalist ideologies are located. Further, I have questioned the frequently reiterated idea that nation building is contingent upon the formation of normative sexual subjectivity by noting historical challenges to, as well as examining contemporary navigations of this idea. Finally, I have underlined how important it is to understand India’s colonial history in order to fully comprehend literary, political, and religious discourses in present-day India.
Endnotes for Chapter Five:

1 See CNN report at http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/asiapcf/9805/12/india.nuclear.on/

2 Young India is the title of one of the weekly journals that Gandhi started and published hundreds of articles in. Gandhi's autobiography, The Story of my Experiments with Truth, first appeared in serial form in this journal.


4 The novels I am studying in this chapter have been written by diasporic/non-Indian authors. That these texts can still speak to and instantiate what I have described as the national awareness of a queer past is a function of their conscious subject matter (both novels, after all, attempt to recreate and fictionalize Indian history and historical events) as well as their authors' knowledge of the contemporary cultural and political context in India, which is so overtly and anxiously masculinist in its vocabulary (Rushdie and Wolpert, apart from being novelists, are also heavily invested in, and write about, Indian politics).


8 Gould, 243.

9 This quote is from Godse’s response in court to the charges filed against him following the assassination of Gandhi, online at: http://www.nathuramgodse.com/index.php?MayItPleaseYourHonour=2

10 Later, Stanley Wolpert’s biography of Nehru, A Tryst With Destiny, created another furor because it briefly mentioned Nehru’s supposed adolescent experiments with homosexuality.

11 Ironically though, as I have pointed out in my introduction, Mehta’s Canadian citizenship was used to explain both why Mehta portrays lesbianism in an Indian family (by Hindu right-wing protestors who claimed homosexuality was a foreign/imperial import) and, simultaneously, to suggest that Mehta was ignorant of the rich homosexual past of India (by Indian queer theorists who claimed that homophobia was an imperial import.)

12 Geeta Patel, in her essay in Queering India describes how at the first screening of the film Fire, a woman from the audience stood up and objected to the film on the grounds that men in the film are “unsatisfactory depicted; the film violates Indian manhood,” and that this was the most vocal and frequently raised criticism of Mehta’s film. See Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society. Ruth Vanita (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2001), 222.

17 *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* 37, 171.
19 Romila Thapar points out that “ahimsa as an absolute value is characteristic of certain Sramanic sects and less so of Brahmanism. The notion appears in the Upanishads, but it was the Buddhists and the Jains who first made it foundational to their teaching, and their message was very different from that of the *Bhagvad-Gita* on this matter.” See “Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu identity.” *Modern Asian Studies.* 23, 2 (1989). Peter Van der Veer argues, like Thapar, that the Hindu concept of nonviolence “derives from a theologically grounded opposition to animal sacrifice. In that sense it is the ideological basis of vegetarian practices but not of a general pacifism. Non-violence had a place in Hindu discursive traditions as a rejection of the violence of animal sacrifice, which resulted in the adoption of vegetarianism among some groups. However, the idea that Hindus would be religiously prevented by a doctrine of “nonviolence” from pursuing their interests by a violent means is Gandhi’s construction of Hindu spirituality”(219). See *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain.* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 71.
20 Gandhi recruited vegetarianism too in his resignification of non-violence as more manly and altogether a far greater virtue than militarism. He claimed that despite their meat-diets, Kshatriya princes were “very weak owing to debauchery,” and that by contrast, Indian shepherds, who were vegetarians were “finely built [men] of Herculean constitution.” Any shepherd, Gandhi said, “with his thick, strong cudgel, would be a match for any ordinary European with his sword.” Like the shepherds, Gandhi also praised the Bhayas: “They subsist on wheat, pulse, and greens. They are the guardians of peace, they are largely employed in the native armies.” Even as warriors, then, the vegetarian Bhayas are constructed as guardians of peace. See *CWMG,* 1, 24-5.
21 Nandy, 51.
22 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda: http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/
24 Savarkar used this phrase to refer to a supposed Hindu collectivity willing to concede to and learn from the present glory of the English while remembering their own glorious history. See Banerjee, 51.
25 Ibid., 53.
26 See the UCLA historian Vinay Lal’s website: http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/History/Hindu_Rashtra/veer.html
27 Banerjee, 51.
28 See Thapar, 222. According to William Gould, the term ‘Hindu’, “although a confusing and ambiguous term, as has been already stated, was also a broad description
for an identifiable human collectivity, which possessed a specific sense of geographical location.” (See Gould, 36).

29 See Gould, 38.
30 Lal: http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/History/Hindu_Rashtra/veer.html
32 Gupta, 232.
33 Gould, 52, 73.
39 Rege, “Victim into protagonist,” 349.
40 Rege, Colonial Karma, 4.
48 Joane Nagel also argues, like Dawson, that one form of masculine identity always becomes dominant in every social culture milieu: “Whatever the historical or comparative limit of these various definitions and depictions of masculinity, scholars argue that at any time, in any place, there is an identifiable “normative” or “hegemonic” masculinity that sets the standards for male demeanor, thinking and action.” See Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers (Oxford University Press, 2003), 247.
49 The anxious masculinity of this novel is exacerbated by the threat of the “omnicientent” woman to men who are less than manly. Salim’s manliness, for
instance, declines as he is passed on from one potent woman to another. Like Salim, Narlikar too is overwhelmed by women more potent than he is: “Having been a bachelor and misogynist all his life, he was engulfed, in death, by a sea of the giant, noisy, omnicompetent women” (203). In the case of Ahmed Sinai, it is his able wife who holds him together, especially when his financial affairs are falling apart; therefore when she suddenly disintegrates, “Ahmed Sinai, observing helplessly, found himself, all of a sudden, unnerved, adrift, unmanned” (380).

The symbolism of the lion and the unicorn of the British crown is unmistakable. In this context, it is also interesting to note that the symbol of the Shiv Sena, one of the main bastions of the philosophy of Hindutva, is a tiger.

For more on the aphrodisiac issue, see Gupta, 72-80.

According to Shivananda Khan, “the act of sexual penetration is not so much a definer of identity, but one of phallic power. For many Indians, the ‘penetrator’ maintains a sense of ‘manliness,’ while the ‘penetrated’ will be seen as a ‘not-man.’” See “Culture, Sexualities, and Identities: Men Who Have Sex with Men in India.” Gay and Lesbian Asia: Culture, Identity, Community. Gerard Sullivan and Peter A. Jackson (eds). (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2001), 99-117.

Saleem’s relationships can also be read as the threat of supercompetent women to a nation focused on validating its manliness.

Mentioned in Banerjee, 134.


Rege, “Victim into protagonist,” 356.

Nandy, 3.


Nandy, 7.

The Shah Bano case is (in)famous for leading to the passing of legislation that exonerates Muslim men from any responsibility for maintenance for their ex-wives in the event of a divorce. Shah Bano was a 62 year old Muslim woman who, divorced by her husband, and lacking any means of support, approached the courts for securing maintenance money from her husband. Her case finally reached the Supreme Court of India after seven years had elapsed, and the ruling was in her favor. Orthodox Muslims protested the judgement, claiming their personal laws (which are different for Hindus, Muslims and Christians) had been infringed. Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, yielded to Muslim protest, revoked the judgement, and cited his gesture as a “secularist” one. See H.A. Gani. Reform of Muslim personal law: The Shah Bano Controversy and the Muslim Women Act. (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, c1988).


63 Van der Veer, 3.
65 Thapar, 8.
67 I have borrowed this phrase from Gandhi, who used it in an altogether different context: Gandhi’s “enemy within” was his lust/sexual desire.
70 Quoted in Banerjee, 95.
71 http://www.bjp.org/manifesto/chap1.htm
72 Quoted in Gupta, 5.
73 Banerjee, 105.
74 Nandy, 20, 22.
80 Banerjee, 149.
81 For a study of India’s Shakti series of nuclear tests, see Amitabh Mattoo (ed.) *India’s Nuclear Deterrent: Pokhran II and Beyond.* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1999).
82 Online news article: http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/nov/10nuke.htm
83 See Bidwai, “From Pokhran to Gujarat.”
84 Quoted in Banerjee, 173.
85 Bidwai, “From Pokhran to Gujarat.”
86 “Power without legitimacy.” *Frontline*. 19.7 (March/April, 2002).
90 Quoted in Khan, “Culture, Sexualities, and Identities,” 106.
92 Banerjee, 133.
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