

The folklore surrounding Jijabai has been appropriated by women belonging to the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, one of the women's wings of the Hindu nationalist movement in India, to position themselves as subjects in a gendered nationalist history of the Hindu nation. Samiti women deify Jijabai as an "enlightened mother", worthy of emulation, who fought for the Hindu nation through her son Shivaji, by inculcating in him values, ideology, strength and patriotism.

Shivaji was a 17th century Hindu chieftain who has now become an icon of Hindu nationalism. Through stories about Jijabai, Samiti women propagate a revisionist history of the Hindu state and, more importantly, establish a role model for women in the movement today. New recruits are taught that they must aspire to become like Jijabai, facilitating a cultural and political renaissance in India by moulding the new generation. While these ideas resonate with the ideology of Hindu nationalism, the stories about Jijabai can also be read as "hidden transcripts"¹ that contain a challenge to the movement's construction of female subjectivity.

Several scholars have suggested that the anonymity and ambiguity of folklore makes it an ideal vehicle for voicing resistance to dominant power structures and providing alternative visions of the world². It is worth examining not only how female subjectivity is imagined in the folklore about Jijabai, but also how these stories suggest "alternative self perceptions and alternative vantage points on their social world"³ that disrupt the constructions of gender propagated by the nationalist movement as a whole.

Folklore is a powerful means through which cultural ideals are translated and disseminated. Kirin Narayan contends: "A story is a 'cognitive instrument,' a means of

HER STORY

Symbolic Power of Jijabai

Folklore of Hindu Nationalist Women in India

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making sense of the world"⁴ and as such it is "an expression of deep-rooted cultural themes."⁵ Nationalist folklore is a powerful means through which subjectivity is constructed for those belonging to the nation, both through the ideals embodied in the stories and through the insertion of individuals within larger historical trajectories, or "mythico-histories", to

are clearly situated within the family as the guardians of Hindu nationalist traditions, values, morals and ideology whose primary responsibility is to cultivate these ideas in their children. Sarkar contends that for the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, "motherhood is remarkably emptied of its customary emotional and affective load and is vested with a notion of heroic political instrumentality". And there are many references to mothers who rear their children to die for their motherland¹⁰.

This construction of female subjectivity resonates with the image of womanhood generally upheld by the Hindu nationalist movement. In many a speech, Sadhavi Rithambara, a female ascetic who is an important spokesperson for *Hindutva*, has claimed that Bhagat Singh's mother wept at his deathbed not because she had lost her only son, but because she had no other son who could take up his fight.

There are also significant moments of dissonance that suggest an alternative subjectivity for Samiti women. Paola Bacchetta explains this dissonance by arguing that the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh "leaves little space for women-actors to exist and so the Samiti, in order to craft a Hindu nationalism which women can relate to, is obliged to exit the realm of the Sangh's discourse at some points"¹¹. Bacchetta argues that this dissonance is central to



Jijabai

borrow a term from Liisa Malkki*. Malkki defines mythico-history as "a process of world making" concerned with "the ordering and re-ordering of social and political categories, with the defining of self in distinction to the other, with good and evil"⁷, in order to constitute "a moral order of the world"⁸.

Tanika Sarkar⁹ has argued that women's roles within the movement

understanding the expansionary power of Hindu nationalism. I suggest that it is also important to see this as embodying a potential challenge to the ideology of the movement that has transformative potential. Stuart Hall asserts that “there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding” and “any already constituted sign is potentially transformable into more than one connotative configuration”¹². The symbolic power of Jijabai resides in her multivocality because even as she represents the “space for women-actors” in her traditional role as a mother, she also embodies a challenge to the constructions of gender by the movement.

I am not arguing that Samiti women have intentionally coded these stories with transgressive messages, or for that matter that the women did in fact read transgressive messages into them. Following Victor Turner, I suggest that we should think of these stories as containing within them an alternative vision that has the potential to transform¹³. As Bachetta has pointed out, the intention may simply have been to create a history that women could use to define their own roles in the movement. My purpose is to suggest, following Mankekar, that we must not assume that audiences “unproblematically accept the subject positions created by dominant ideologies” but, rather, we must pay attention to the “fissures intrinsic to hegemonic discourses”¹⁴. As Mankekar argues, responses of viewers to texts such as television or, in my case, folklore, “are refracted by the discursive contexts in which they live” and are thus always “negotiated readings” shaped by local conditions¹⁵.

Three Virtues for Women

According to Payal Gupta, a 29-year-old woman who has devoted her life to the Hindu nationalist movement, there are

three virtues that the Samiti upholds and impresses upon its members. The first is *kartitva*, or the ideal of responsible administration, exemplified in the figure of the Queen of Indore, Ahilyabai Holkar. The second is *netritva*, or leadership, exemplified in the legendary figure of the Queen of Jhansi, Rani Lakshmbai. The third is the ideal of *matritva*, or enlightened motherhood, as exemplified in the figure of Jijabai. Jijabai is considered a model mother because she taught her son Shivaji all the proper Hindu values and inspired him to fight against the oppression of Hindus by Muslim rulers.

There has been very little scholarship on Jijabai and most references to her are contained within larger histories about her son, Shivaji, who is projected not only as the first freedom fighter against Muslim rule, but also as the founder of the Hindu nation in India. Hindu nationalist histories tend to focus on the accomplishments of Shivaji and usually simply mention Jijabai as a woman with a vision who taught Shivaji the right values that later

guided him in his fight for Hindu sovereignty.

In contrast, the folklore that shapes Samiti women’s understanding of history projects Jijabai as a visionary who played an integral role in the shaping of the Hindu nation. Many women in the Samiti told me proudly how they had managed to convince the government to put out a postage stamp featuring Jijabai holding a young Shivaji in her arms. When I went to meet Payal Gupta in the Samiti *karyalaya* (office) in West Delhi, which was also her home, I noticed that on the wall near the entrance there was a shelf with pictures of gods and *Mausiji* (Jwakshmbai Kelkar, the founder of the Samiti) and also a picture of the stamp of Jijabai with Shivaji as a child. Aparna Sharma, a woman in her 50s who is one of the leaders of the Delhi Samiti, told me with pride in her voice that Vajpayee himself had attended the function organised by the Samiti to launch the stamp.

This privileging of Jijabai by the Samiti must be juxtaposed against the supremacy accorded to Shivaji by the movement and actually in almost all

Hindu nationalist accounts of history. A story about the birth of Jijabai’s resolve suggests that, according to the Samiti, she was the leader of both the men and the women of her time:

Jijabai was Chatrapati Maharaj Shivaji’s mother. She was born in 1597. Since childhood Jijabai saw the atrocities committed by Mughals against Hindus, their temples and Hindu women. She saw screaming women being abducted during the day. One day during her childhood she was standing on the terrace with a female friend (*saheli*). She saw a man urinating on the wall of the Shiva temple. She became very angry. She complained about this to her family. But everyone remained silent. An elderly person



Chhatrapati Shivaji

said: “Daughter, he is a Muslim. He is a government worker. We cannot say anything to him.” Her soft heart was filled with distress seeing all this and she wondered whose victory are these Hindus struggling for? Why couldn’t this event show them the way to independence? Who would motivate them? Nobody was prepared to give her the answers to her questions.¹⁶

In this story Jijabai stands alone as the visionary who must teach others to respect themselves and fight against the Mughals. The Hindus in the story are presented as weak and cowardly because of their silence, while Jijabai is constructed as the self-conscious agent who must take matters into her own hands, a theme that is critical to the Samiti’s own interpretation of self. Several members of the Samiti asserted that the existence of violence against women today testifies to the fact that men cannot defend women effectively and that women must learn to defend themselves, by increasing their physical strength and also by ensuring that they help promote the right values in their families and change the nature of society. As an elderly *pracharika* of the Samiti called Taiji by other members told me, the change must start at home, with what a mother teaches her child.

Projection of Muslims

In this tale, the alleged barbarity of Muslims is codified in the act of urinating on the wall of a temple, and in the claim that they committed atrocities not only against Hindus in general, but against women in particular. This image articulates widespread Hindu nationalist constructions of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims throughout history¹⁷.

Neera Gupta, an elderly woman who is one of the leaders of the Samiti, told me this story in the context of a

larger statement about what she saw as the humiliation of Hindus at the

hands of Muslims throughout history—a juxtaposition that makes the connection between folklore and Hindu nationalist versions of history abundantly clear. An important part of this historical narrative is the projection of Muslims as sexual predators, a theme that is recurrent in the stories about Jijabai, as well as other Hindu nationalist folklore about historical figures such as Akbar, the Nizam of Hyderabad. Neera Gupta also told me the following tales in the context of a conversation about why

Nizam passed by and took a fancy to either of them, they would be whisked off to the harem where he already had a hundred other women whom he was now bored with. They immediately went and hid. Neera added, “When Sardar Patel chased the Nizam out of there in 1953, they found about 400 women in the harem.” Neera continued that the Nizam was not the only one who was like this. She said that even Akbar, who everyone praises, used to hold a Meena Bazaar (market) for women only and would pick anyone he wanted. He, too, had several women in his harem. This



purdah (veiling) is more common for women in North India than in the South. She said that the reason for this among both Hindus and Muslims is that North India was always at battle against the Muslims. She said that because Muslim men would just take off with “whatever pretty woman they saw wandering around”, *purdah* had to be strictly maintained. She narrated how once, when she was a young girl, she had gone with her mother to visit Hyderabad, before Partition in the early 1940s. They had gone to the market when suddenly they noticed that people had begun rushing around and closing shop windows. They asked someone why this was happening and he said, “the Nizam is coming.” Then someone told them to get off the streets saying that if the

story was elaborated in much greater detail by a Sadhavi during a *boudhik* session at a three day Samiti training camp for girls between the ages of about 12 to 18 years that I attended in New Delhi at the end of December 1999. The Sadhavi said:

“The Meena Bazaar was only for women. A rule made by Akbar. He used to dress himself and his courtiers as women and go and then try to trick the women into going with him. Once while this was going on, Rana Pratap’s niece was there and Akbar managed to get her to follow him. However, she was too clever for him. Kiranmayi attacked him with a dagger like Durga with one foot on his chest. Akbar begged for forgiveness calling her ‘Ma’. She forgave him,

but made him promise to stop the Meena Bazaar” (interview 26.12.99)

Versions of this story were also related by two men of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Aditya Sharma, a senior member of the Delhi VHP who is in charge of overseeing the activities of Durga Vahini, informed me that all the Muslim kings engaged in forcible conversions and committed atrocities on Hindu women. He said that even Akbar, who is considered “broadminded”, organised a monthly Meena Bazaar. When I asked him what this was he said:

Meena Bazaar is a sort of monthly *haat* (market). So every month, all beautiful Hindu ladies were made to visit that *haat*. Akbar used to choose out of them. And those most beautiful ladies were forced to become part of the harem. Once Akbar tried to molest a Rajputani. He, in some veiled way, took her into a corner. And when she came to know that it was Akbar, she attacked him, pinned him down, took her *kataar* (dagger) out and was going to kill him when he begged her mercy and told her, ‘you are my mother’. That is the story. A well known one. *Kavi* (poet) Dinkar has drafted it into a long poem. So none of them was at all tolerant. It was only a difference of degree. Aurangzeb was a bigot of the highest degree, but others were also not much better. Some difference of degree was definitely there. In Shah Jahan’s time, there is this episode of Haqiqat. He was a small child. He was asked to become a Muslim, and when he refused, he was executed in Lahore. I am fortunate enough to be an original resident of his locality. He belonged to Sialkot and his home is still there. Was there, now I don’t know. His parents appealed to the provincial

governor. Then they came to Dilli. Appealed to Shah Jahan. He refused. So the small child of hardly ten or eleven years was executed openly, publicly. No one was better in that regard. Everybody was bad. Both these religions—Islam and Christianity—are basically political religions. Hindus have never gone with the *Veda* in one hand and sword in the other. By and large they have not fought any wars outside their own region, (interview 30.11.99).

On the Bodies of Women

I quote at length from my interview with Aditya Sharma because his words provide an insight into Hindu nationalist understandings of history as told in a series of vignettes about various emperors. These stories are part of the broader context in which the stories about Jijabai must be situated. In these stories, Muslims are both unjust and cruel rulers as well as sexual predators who lust after and wrong Hindu women. Many of these stories locate the conflict between Hindus and Muslims on the bodies of Hindu women and suggest, as does the following tale about Jijabai and Shivaji, that, to quote another tale, “A woman is like a mother; to dishonour her is to dishonour the nation.”¹⁸

One day a singer was telling the story of the brave Rani Padmini through his songs. In the middle of the story Shivaji got up to leave, so his mother asked him the reason why he was leaving. Shivaji said that he found himself incapable of listening to the horror of the event. His mother replied that the Muslims carried away his own aunt (*buai*) and that in this country mothers and sisters are constantly bearing these atrocities, whereas “you can’t even listen to them?” In this way, his mother inspired Shivaji

to free mothers and sisters from these atrocities and take revenge¹⁹.

In this story, the horrors of Muslim rule are constructed upon the territory of the female body, signalling a trend seen in India²⁰ and other parts of the world,²¹ wherein nationalist discourses are articulated through gendered imagery in which women become the pre-eminent symbols of nationalist identity and honour. As several scholars have argued,²² it is through gendered imagery that both the violations of national honour, as well as the need to avenge that honour, are articulated.

In this tale, Shivaji is presented as lacking the courage to even listen to these stories about the plight of Hindu women. Again it is Jijabai, through her ability to bear the pain and burden of these stories, who must guide her son to rightful action. Also key is the idea that these women were family. It is Shivaji’s father’s sister who is carried off by the Muslims.

The horror of the event is personal, not simply part of a more anonymous historical record. This personalisation of history is something I heard time and again in different contexts from different people when I asked them what motivated either them, or others, to join this movement. Urvashi Gupta, a woman in her 50s who is a member of *Matri Shakti* and *Durga Vahini*²³, told me in a passionate tone:

During the partition of India, the atrocities committed against Hindus were terrible. Husbands and fathers were forced to watch as their wives, daughters and mothers were raped in front of them and the pretty ones were just carried off. Women were maimed and their breasts were cut off in front of their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons. It is people who remember this history that have become members of the VHP.

There are many people who have joined the VHP because their families were directly affected by this history (interview 22.11.99).

Personalised History

The personalisation of historical narrative becomes a powerful tool through which folklore is both legitimised as well as shrouded in an aura of factuality. The stories are powerful because they reinterpret events, experiences, and figures that already lurk in the pools of collective memory, as part of Hindu nationalist “mythico-histories”²⁴. These are an intricate tapestry of common knowledge with Hindu nationalist elaborations. The stories about Jijabai may have been conceived by Hindu nationalist ideologues, but they build on an already existing Maratha idealisation of motherhood through the figure of Jijabai. It is common knowledge that Shivaji fought the Muslim rulers, though the elaboration of that “fact” into a specifically Hindu nationalist construction of Shivaji as a “freedom fighter” struggling to free the Hindu “nation” from Muslim “despots” may not be factually correct. Additionally, discursive devices like the provision of exact dates, the year of Jijabai’s birth, or events like the Partition, or commonly known historical figures such as Akbar or Shivaji, also contribute to the aura of factuality that is conveyed through these stories. Particularly for those who may not have an alternative perspective on history, these stories become a convincing vision of the past and the relationship between Hindus and Muslims through history.

The Fiercely Loyal Wife

The stories powerfully articulate the Samiti’s constructions of women’s roles within the family. Jijabai represents the model wife whose loyalty is to her husband’s patrilineage and the values it upholds. This is eloquently conveyed in the following story describing an encounter

between Jijabai and her father, Sardar Lakhuji Jadhavrao:

Lakhuji Jadhavrao Sardar was the first army commander to receive a post in the Nizam’s empire. Jijabai was married to Shahji, the son of Maaloji. Shahji and Jadhavrao did not get along. Jadhavrao was aligned with the Mughals while Shahji was aligned with the Marathas. One day Jijabai was captured by the Mughals. Now she was in her father’s captivity. Jijabai was about to become a mother. Upon seeing his daughter’s condition, Jadhavrao said: “Daughter, why are you



putting yourself through so much suffering? Let us immediately go to my house in Sindhkhed and I will make arrangements for a nursemaid.”

Jijabai was a brave wife. How could she accept such a solution? She fearlessly replied to her father: “You want to take revenge on the Bhonsle family. I am standing here before you; why don’t you take revenge on me? Since the day of my marriage, when I became a part of the Bhonsle family, my ties with your family have ended. I am a brave wife of the Bhonsle family. I love the bread (*roti*) that I receive at my husband’s house, more than those cooked in your house as well as more than all the diamonds and pearls at your house. I will not go to your house.” When Jijabai

was voicing her defiance (*hunkar*) she looked like a vision of Durga *mata*. Jadhavrao saw no reason to remain there and moved away.²⁵

This story powerfully evokes the patrilineal ideology that is central to Hindu nationalist constructions of the national community²⁶ in which a woman’s connection to her natal home is severed upon marriage²⁷. Sarah Lamb argues that while this severance may be ideologically critical to patrilineal discourses, in practice people do indeed maintain these ties with their natal homes.²⁸ In this story, calling on patrilineal discourses of kinship, Jijabai’s rejection of Muslim rule is metaphorically conveyed through her rejection of all the values, arid ties to her natal home. She asserts that all ties with her father’s house, and the values therein, were broken on the day that she was married. Now she belongs to her husband’s family and has adopted their values, particularly their vision of Maratha sovereignty that, as a good wife and virtuous daughter-in-law, she too must share.

Significantly, in this version of the story, Jijabai’s heroism is conveyed through her staunch defence of her husband’s family and her rejection of the comforts of her father’s home for the austerities required by her commitment to the values and struggles of her husband’s home. Her father’s immorality is conveyed through his own commitment to the Muslim rulers that enables him to walk away from his daughter and allow her to experience the hardships of prison despite the fact that she is pregnant. Of great significance is Jijabai’s transformation into a vision of the Goddess Durga, the embodiment of *shakti*, or female power.

Women as Goddesses

This again resonates with the Hindu nationalist ideal expressed by both men and women that virtuous

Hindu women are like goddesses. According to Sadhavi Rithambara, “God has given a mother such an elevated position. When people say, Sadhaviji do something for women so that they can even get ahead of men, I say, you are fools for putting women on the same plane as men when they have been given a place that is even higher than that of gods.”²⁹

In a recent paper, Susan Wadley provides an interesting discussion about the qualitative differences between the *shakti* of Durga and Kali, which suggests that while Durga often represents heroic, virtuous power that is restrained, Kali often represents uncontrolled and often destructive power.³⁰ The fact that the Samiti has equated Jijabai with the more domesticated version of *shakti* exemplified by Durga is perhaps significant given the context of Hindu nationalist discourse where women’s energies, anger, power and sexuality are always harnessed for the production and reproduction of the nation.

Enlightened Motherhood

Jijabai is a model of enlightened motherhood—a virtue that the Samiti would like all its members to aspire to. Neera Gupta explained this to me saying that the Samiti’s goal was to organise Hindu women and teach them the values of their own culture so that they could pass these on to their children. As several women told me, women must model their lives on Jijabai and just as Jijabai taught her son the values and courage to fight for Hindu sovereignty, they too must teach their children these values. As one story explicitly states, these are values embodied in the great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Jijabai went to great lengths to ensure that Shivaji grew up in an environment conducive to building his character. Although Shahji, her husband, lived in

Bangalore, with his permission, she moved to Pune and lived under the guardianship of Dadaji Khond Dev because she felt that the luxurious lifestyle in Bangalore would not be conducive to building Shivaji’s moral and physical strength. Jijabai’s shaping of Shivaji’s character began when he was still in her womb, as suggested in the following description of Shivaji’s birth:

The pregnant Jijabai prayed to the eternal Bhavani Ma to give her a good (*suputra*) son. On April 10, 1627, in Shivneri fort, the (*pratipalak*) protector of cows and Brahmins, the founder of the Hindu (*rajya*) nation, the great king Shivaji was born. Even when he was in her womb, Jijamata taught Shivaji. Her objective was that this boy must become the protector of cows and Brahmins and the motivating force of the Hindu *rashtra*. For this reason she made sure that there was a proper (*sanskarprad*) cultural environment in the house, conducive to the young Shivaji’s character formation even while he was still in her womb.³¹

Men’s vs Women’s Version

Jijabai’s legacy was not simply to teach her son the Hindu values that would inspire him to become a great leader and king. Most Hindu nationalist versions of history construct Shivaji as the paradigmatic national hero, radiating courage, strength and righteous commitment to the Hindu nation. If any mention of Jijabai is made, it is simply to say that she was a good mother who taught him the right values.

The story presented in the RSS guide about Shivaji is quite different from the image portrayed in the Samiti accounts and in fact does not even mention Jijabai. The various vignettes about Shivaji are found in a pamphlet called *Sangh Utsav*,³² or festivals celebrated by the Sangh.

The one in question celebrating the legacy of Shivaji is *Hindu Samrajaya Dinotsav*, or the festival celebrating the establishment of the Hindu empire.

The section begins by describing the socio-political context in which Shivaji rose to power, detailing the various atrocities of Muslim rule that are the cornerstones of *Hindutva* histories. It discusses how people had given up practicing their religion and culture and had forgotten their gods and had accepted foreign rule. Then it makes a comparison between that historical period and the current state of affairs in India saying: “Even today we are in the same state”, and then bemoans the fact that “Hindus have begun sending out new year’s cards in January, and that on a child’s birthday even Hindus cut a cake and the invitation cards are now printed in English and not in our mother tongue.”³³ Then it points out how “in just such terribly hopeless circumstances”, Shivaji established his strong and independent nation.³⁴ The next sentence directs us to spend some time thinking about how Shivaji’s success was possible.

After this the vignettes start. The very first story contrasts with the Samiti version of the same event. In the RSS account, Shivaji, realising the gravity of the social situation when he is only 11 years old, organises his friends for the cause of *Hindutva*. In the Samiti version of this event, it is Jijabai who realises that this battle for *Hindutva* cannot be fought alone and therefore trains not only the young Shivaji, but also his young friends in the values of Hindu sovereignty and in the arts of war. Below I quote at length from the RSS *shakha* guide to illustrate the qualitative difference between the Samiti’s and the RSS versions of the same event—the killing of Afzal Khan by Shivaji.

All of Maharashtra trembled with fear because of Afzal Khan’s record of atrocities and the strength of his army. Having taken

the vow to capture Shivaji alive, Afzal Khan left Bijapur with a great army. The temples that fell along his path were being destroyed. Even the god of Shivaji's lineage, Tulja Bhavani's temple was demolished by Afzal Khan. There was lamentation from all directions. In that terrible situation Shivaji's far-sightedness came to use. He took his small army and made his base in the impenetrable and impassable fort at Pratapgarrh. There he waited for his enemy to come to him because he did not want to fight his enemy's grand army on the battleground with his own small army. Shivaji waited for the appropriate time with great calm and strength. Afzal Khan saw that Shivaji was not coming out of the fort. Was it possible that he was afraid? Afzal Khan brought his great army through the impassable mountainous jungle with a view to surrounding the fort. Shivaji wanted just this, that Afzal Khan should leave the battleground and enter the mountainous jungle. According to his plan Shivaji baited Khan by talking about reconciliation. He suggested, "I want to come to some compromise with you. I am willing to come with you to your king. I will even be willing to serve your king". With the help of these lures Shivaji was able to get Afzal Khan to agree to a place and time for a meeting. Afzal Khan was very strong and very proud. He thought that he was catching Shivaji in his net. That is why he agreed to all the conditions and came to meet Shivaji. Even then Afzal Khan had some doubts in his mind, but Shivaji had complete faith in his own victory. Afzal Khan was killed and his grand army was also destroyed. Shivaji gained an unprecedented victory and at the same time attained great respect.³⁵



The story goes on to describe how this incident gave Shivaji international fame and how people began to consider him even greater than Napoleon, Julius Caesar and Hannibal.³⁶ Samiti accounts differ radically from this view because they suggest that it was Jijabai and not Shivaji who was responsible for the birth of the Hindu nation. Jijabai not only inspired Shivaji in his struggle, she guided him every step of the way to victory through her brilliant strategising and unfailing commitment. This sentiment is powerfully conveyed in the following story:

Once Shivaji and Jijamata were playing *chausar* (chess). Shivaji asked, "What are the terms for victory?" Through the window Jijamata pointed to the green flag fluttering atop the fort at Kondana and said, "On my victory the colour of that flag should change". And Shivaji did fulfil these inspiring terms for victory.³⁷

This story was told during a *shakha* (branch meeting) in Sultanpuri, one of the new resettlement colonies on the outskirts of North-West Delhi. The colony is mainly occupied by people of the formally untouchable Balmiki

caste who had been resettled from slums in central Delhi in one of the various attempts to “clean-up” the city during the Asian Games in the early eighties. This *shakha* was the first attempt of the Samiti to assert a presence in this colony.

The fact that communities are coded by colour rather than religious affiliation, (saffron for Hindu and green for Muslim) is particularly significant because this is a new audience with uncertain political affiliation. In the printed version, this story is part of a much larger story where the protagonists are named. It is significant that Aparna Sharma, who told this story to the women of Sultanpuri, chose this story rather than any other, perhaps more powerful, story about Jijabai’s role in Shivaji’s life. Aparna’s version of the story is as follows:

One day when Shivaji was a boy, he was sitting with his mother. From where they were sitting they could see a hill upon which was flying a green flag. His mother said to Shivaji that when he grew up he would have to fight so that the flag on top of the hill would be our saffron flag and not the green flag of the foreigner’s *raj*.

Now to get back to the printed version, the story continues:

Jijabai not only inspired Shivaji but she also gave him lessons about strategy. When Afzal Khan attacked Shivaji with a large army, then Jijabai advised him that Afzal Khan would not fight by the rules because Jijabai could not forget that Afzal Khan had killed Sambhaji by fraud. It is by following the advice of mother Jija that Shivaji killed a powerful enemy like Afzal Khan. In this way many moments of trial occurred, but Jijamata did not allow any of these moments to put out the coals of self-rule.³⁸

In these stories it is Jijabai, not Shivaji, who is constructed as the

cultural icon in contrast to the Hindu nationalist construction of Shivaji as our archetypal cultural hero. Samiti folklore portrays Shivaji almost as a pawn in Jijabai’s strategic victory over the Muslims. Men in general are portrayed as weak, immoral or fickle. While Jijabai’s father is clearly both weak and immoral, Shivaji is represented as vacillating in his commitment to the fight for the Hindu nation. And in the many “moments of trial” it is Jijabai, not Shivaji, who preserves those vulnerable incipient “coals of self rule” through her cunning strategy and exemplary commitment.

Resisting Within Tradition

Gloria Goodwin Raheja asserts that “resistance and tradition may not be at odds with each other”.³⁹ In the Samiti, stories about Jijabai are used to convey constructions of women’s subjectivity that restrict their agency to their roles as mothers and suggest that it is through their sons that their aspirations are most fully realised and their contribution becomes most meaningful. This construction of female subjectivity resonates with widespread Hindu nationalist constructions of women’s subjectivity. However, even as it reinstates these “traditional” constructions of womanhood, the folklore about Jijabai also provides an alternative vision of gender. In this representation men are portrayed as weak and lacking commitment, while women, as in the case of Jijabai, are depicted as the true agents of history. Thus, even as it endorses the revisionist history of the Hindu nationalist movement and appears to propagate the ideals of subjectivity upheld by the movement at large, the folklore on Jijabai contains within it a challenge to the movement’s construction of both male and female self view.

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