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## CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND WOMEN AGENCY IN COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

This abstract provides a succinct overview of the intertwined narratives of cultural nationalism and women's agency during the colonial and post-colonial eras in India. It examines how cultural nationalism was employed as a means of asserting national identity and pride, while also delving into the active role that women played in shaping the course of social and political transformation. During the colonial period, India's cultural identity underwent a transformation under British rule. Though Cultural nationalism emerged as a response to British imperialism, 'women question' became a complex ground where both colonial and anti-colonial forces tried to negotiate their agendas in different ways. This article investigates how 'women question' became the integral part to this movement in which both cultural nationalists and colonial power augmented a discursive conflict between East and West.

The article further scrutinizes the role of women within the nationalist movement, showcasing their resilience and determination to challenge societal norms. Women emerged as vital participants in protests, civil disobedience, and political activism, leaving an indelible mark on the struggle for India's independence. Post-colonial India witnessed the continuation of women's agency, with constitutional reforms aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment. However, the journey towards gender parity was not without challenges. This abstract critically examines the persisting gender-based disparities, including violence, unequal representation, and socio-economic inequalities that women faced even after India gained independence. It underscores the intersectionality of these challenges with caste, class, and religious identities, which further complicated the quest for women's empowerment.

**Keywords:** Cultural Nationalism, Women's Agency, Colonial India, Post-colonial India, Gender Equality, Nationalist Movement, Identity, Empowerment, Cultural Revival, Social Reform, Independence Struggle & Gender Disparities.

### Introduction

The intertwining narratives of cultural nationalism and women's agency have been pivotal in shaping the trajectory of colonial and post-colonial India. The colonial era marked a transformative period for India's cultural landscape, catalyzing the emergence of cultural nationalism as a response to British imperial rule. Concurrently, women's agency came to the forefront as a catalyst for social and political change, challenging deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. As India transitioned into the post-colonial era, both these aspects continued to play a crucial role in defining the nation's identity and direction.

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**Book review: Robert M. Press, *Ripples of Hope***

**Review author: Richa Biswas**

**Robert M. Press, 2015, *Ripples of Hope: How ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (327 pp., hardcover, €99.00).**

The book *Ripples of Hope* by Robert M. Press enunciates a new version of *satyagraha* (a form of non-violent resistance coined and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi) in the contemporary world where ordinary individuals stepping out of the relative safe enclosure of anonymity to participate in the non-violent tradition of Gandhi or Martin Luther King to challenge the repressive regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book focuses on forms of dissidence practised by ordinary individuals or small group activists that do not replicate the familiar and traditional grammar of movement studies. This dynamics of ordinary public mobilization brings forth a new focus on “individual activism” in the genesis of social movement which again anticipates new formations that has led to the actualization of novel political uprisings or imaginaries. *Ripples of Hope* focuses on micro and macro level forms of social mobilizations in three African countries, namely Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya, from each study we get new theoretical perspectives that allow rich understanding of social movements, democratization, and mechanisms of how non-violent movements operate in repressive settings.

The book is based on extensive archival and empirical research (it contains 170 interviews). It includes case studies of the three African countries which experienced long repressive rules. In these countries, individuals and small groups of activists led non-violent resistance which resulted in the ouster of autocratic leaders. This has established a new trend in the domain of popular mobilization in these African contexts.

*Ripples of Hope* argues that non-violent social movements in repressive settings are sometimes likely to generate “individual activism”, a much understudied part of social movement studies. This kind of activism appears when repression is at a high level and resistance is likely to decline into abeyance and become fragmented because it has to wait for safer times to emerge more openly and formally. Hence there will have to be “organization without organization” of ordinary individuals in such coercive contexts, who can only resort to non-violent modes of mobilisation as they do not have the means to organize large scale and externally resourced tropes of militancy (p. 25). Non-violent resistance, the book shows, can take place even under severe repression without favourable conditions or “political opportunities” and non-violent social mobilization in repressive settings also involves a broader and more complex array of participants in more fluid modes of actions than is generally recognized.



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## Covid Nationalism: Women Agency and Its Challenges in Pandemic Hit India

Richa Biswas

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**Abstract:** *This paper tries to critically look at unique forms of hyper-nationalist rhetorics that emerged during the Covid 19 crisis in India, it investigates how the popular right-wing governmental machinery in India utilised the pandemic as a moment for ethnic and nationalist unification by playing with human fear and sense of uncertainties or insecurities. This surge for demagoguery around national and ethnic health security completely erased other forms of existing precarities such as poverty and gender atrocities or caste related atrocities in India. The pandemic outbreak has exposed governmental apathies towards the poor and also towards the agonies of the poor women who had to suffer increased domestic violence and various forms of uncertainties and dislocations during the pandemic in the preceding months. In India thousands of poor labourers migrated from one state to another for job and during the pandemic they were asked to leave their places of livelihood as the country was completely locked down with four hours of notice without any prior consultation and preparation. With loss of jobs and income, absence of communication and public space resulted in violence against poor women migrant labourers and their family members. The government did not take proper steps to improve their lot and they were forced to walk hundreds of miles on foot to walk back to their villages and home towns. Millions of impoverished women labourers were further marginalized by class, caste and religious discrimination in Indian society which is already plagued by patriarchal domination. Therefore, I would try to find out how the agency of poor women is getting affected within this over-hyped narrative of rhetorical deception generated by the ultra-nationalist forces who are taking advantage of this pandemic condition. I will also try to investigate whether majoritarian Cultural nationalism thrived during the pandemic and whether its sole focus on religion is intensifying the embedded patriarchal culture of women subjugation in a country where health care systems are in a poor shape.*

**Key Words:** Covid Nationalism, Gender Atrocities, Cultural Nationalism, Patriarchal Cultural Discourse