Virginie Dutoya

“Pakistan’s Daughter-in-Law”: Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in India-Pakistan Relations

In April 2010, Indian tennis player Sania Mirza created a sensation by marrying a Pakistani sportsman, Shoaib Malik. The marriage sparked mixed reactions on both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border, from both government officials and anonymous commenters on the Internet. Whereas Sania Mirza’s decision was strongly criticized by some of her compatriots, many Pakistanis were excited by this “love story” and nurtured the hope that the young couple would settle in Pakistan and Sania Mirza would assume her husband’s nationality and play for her new homeland. Sania Mirza thus received the nickname “Pakistan’s daughter-in-law,” a title she curtly rejected, arguing that she had married a man and not a country and that she neither wanted to live in Pakistan nor represent it in sport.

This case distills the complexity of the roles played by gender and sexuality (especially female gender and sexuality) in defining the Indian and Pakistani nation, and the relationship between the two. In the first place, Sania Mirza’s marriage questions the compatibility of women’s sexual autonomy with “national identity.” The ensuing debates resemble those developed within nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist movements about what rights should be granted to women in the context of nationalist projects that aspired both to “modernity” and to cultural authenticity. The asymmetry of the reactions on either side...
of the border also highlights the sexual nature of the India-Pakistan rivalry, as the country losing a woman feels humiliated by the one gaining one. In this respect, nationalism has always been gendered in South Asia, and the concept of “sexual nationalism” could extend the scope of the historical analyses that focus on the colonial period. This expression in effect refers to the instrumentalization of women’s rights and LGBT rights in nationalist discourses, not in order to promote such rights, but in order to create a hierarchy between nations—a direct throwback to the civilizing and chivalrous mission of colonialism.

The notion of “sexual nationalism” however has mainly been applied to contemporary forms of European and American nationalism in relation to the so-called countries (often Muslim) of the Global South, without necessarily exploring the links with older forms of nationalism. Also, too narrow an understanding of the concept implicitly presupposes that the national identity of such countries, especially former colonies, has essentially been constructed in opposition to so-called “Western culture,” particularly in areas of morality. But while the reactions (both positive and negative) to the wedding of Sania Mirza and Shoaib Malik are based on gendered conceptions of the nation, the question of the relationship to the “Western” world is secondary. In this respect, the case allows us to historicize the notion of sexual nationalism, foregrounding the continuities and developments since the colonial period and “provincializing Europe” in favor of a “South-South” relationship.

The “Sania Mirza case” and its media fallout thus allow us to explore the gendered dimension of the India-Pakistani rivalry, and in so-doing show the role of gender representations in the construction and expression of nationalism. Moreover, in a context where women’s rights are presented in both countries as indispensable to national modernization, this case highlights the ambivalence of this discourse, which considers “women” as objects rather than subjects and continues to monitor female sexuality as part of the prerogative of the “state-patriarch.” In order to analyze this case, it is firstly useful to look back over how women’s sexuality has been a critical site for the formation of

nationalist projects with “modernizing” aspirations in both India and Pakistan. This issue has been extensively discussed in relation to the colonial period, but the aim of this paper is to connect the colonial debates to contemporary ones, by stressing not only the symbolic and metaphoric importance of the question of marriage, but also its importance to the foundation of new nation states. Because the two countries have defined themselves against one another (in both senses of the term), the India-Pakistan relationship, which we will return to in the second part of this article, is particularly revealing of nationalist issues concerning the control of female sexuality and marriage.

Because the debate around Sania Mirza’s marriage involves two camps who clash “not only regarding the assignment of the positions of victim and perpetrator, but also and especially regarding the standards that allow this judgment to be made,” it is better described as a “case” (affaire) than as a “scandal,” as in a “case” the guilt of the accused and the criteria for judgment are clearly established. Analyzing public reaction to this marriage thus allows us to identify the standards that govern women’s sexuality in the context of the India-Pakistan relationship. Admittedly, by focusing on the media coverage of the case, especially in what is called the new media, we might overlook some positions and opinions in this debate. In particular, we may assume that the urban middle classes (and the diaspora) are overrepresented on social networks and other Internet-enabled media. Nevertheless, recent studies suggest that new media represent a fairly diverse forum for debate in South Asia. The corpus of media texts on which this article is based does not claim in any case to be exhaustive, but is formed from close monitoring of the media and social networks in April and May 2010 and the study of already existing press reviews. Finally, the media reactions to the marriage are systematically considered in their historical, institutional, and legal contexts.


6. This corpus is made up of about fifty articles published in Indian and Pakistani daily generalist newspapers (in English, apart from the Urdu-speaking Daily Jang). The comments on these articles, as well as those posted on social networking and sharing sites (Facebook, YouTube) were also analyzed. Most of the articles used are from online versions of the newspapers and the clippings files of the Pakistani NGO Uks, and thus may appear without page numbers.
Between “Modernity” and “Tradition”: Women, Kinship and the Construction of the Nation

In order to understand the Sania Mirza case, we need to return to the formation of the Indian and Pakistani nations and the gendered dimension of these processes. This is not to say that clear-cut “national identities” were born in 1947 with the end of British rule and the partition of the subcontinent, or that they have solidified since then, but it is important to remember the force of the political and social upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that turned an indefinite political space (the Indian subcontinent) into a space regulated by borders between nation-states. As part of this process, women and their sexuality were placed at the center of the construction of national identity, which had a major impact on their status in the newly formed states.

From the Reform of the Status of Women and the Family to Nationalism

The distillation of the question of national identity around women is linked to several interconnected phenomena that are difficult to tease apart. In the first place, the institution of marriage underwent a profound transformation during the colonial period. Rochona Majumdar has pointed out in this respect the appearance of “arranged marriages” in the late nineteenth century, which is the transition from marriages orchestrated by genealogical professionals to a “marriage market” organized through personal ads. The arranged marriage that has now been naturalized as a tradition dating from time immemorial is thus actually a fairly recent institution that emerged as a result of socio-economic and technological changes (urbanization, monetization, the development of print media), but also as a result of the criticisms levelled at “Indian marriage” compared to “European marriage.” In the eyes of the colonizers, and later in a section of Indian elites, the marriage system was the main cause of India’s “backwardness,” as it was characterized by child marriages and polygamy (among other practices), and served primarily to perpetuate the caste system.

Questioning women’s status within marriage was also part of the broader rhetoric of the “protection of women” that was used by the colonizers to justify their civilizing mission. The debate initially takes place “among men,” the real stakes being the control of India. In this regard, several authors have pointed out that the institution of marriage, and the place of women in it, was at the heart of the formation of the nationalist movement, particularly with regard to child marriages, or sati, the ritual suicide of widows. Thus, nationalism was not only expressed through the rejection of British intrusion into Indian homes, but also through a reform movement launched by Indians aiming to improve the “status of women”. Women thus played a significant role in “the production and maintenance of national communities and national identities,” as “symbols of national culture and, through the control of women’s sexuality, as markers of community boundaries.”

According to Partha Chatterjee, nationalists faced the challenge of finding a balance between “Indian traditions” and “Western modernity,” the latter being perceived as representing new forms of social relations (based particularly on the mixing of the sexes and the rejection of castes), but also scientific rationality, new technologies, and so on. They thus strove to preserve what was seen as distinctive in Indian culture while at the same time seeking some kind of modernity. In the absence of consensus on the nature of modernity, the “new woman” emerged from the debates as a pivotal figure between the preservation of tradition and modernization. Partha Chatterjee’s observations are based on middle-class Bengali Hindu society, but similar phenomena can be observed among Muslims in northern India. It is difficult to speak of convergence, however, as the discourse on the status of women is linked in both communities to a redefinition of “Hindu” and “Muslim,” the

Mayo’s book was widely contested in India, including by feminists and social reformers who were campaigning for the transformation of marriage.

In particular, each presented their own community, or even “civilization,” as more respectful of women. On the Hindu side, the myth of a “Vedic golden age” was developed, characterized by the high position of women and destroyed by the Muslim invasions, whereas on the Muslim side, Hindu society was accused of having corrupted the principle of gender equality which is said to be at the heart of Islam. In both cases the discourse promoting a modernity respectful of cultural authenticity works, to a large extent, through the rejection of an “other,” either on the grounds of lack of “authenticity” (the colonizer, the Westernized, those belonging to another religion), or lack of “modernity” (conservatives, lower classes).

From the Preservation of National Identity to the Transmission of Nationality

The development of new representations of women alongside the transformation of the institution of marriage is of great importance because in 1947 India and Pakistan become nation-states. The kinship system thus becomes fundamental in the transmission of Indian or Pakistani nationality, even if this was initially defined in terms of *jus soli* because of the specific context of Partition. The family is the site of reproduction of the nation and stands in a metonymic relationship to it. Both countries gave precedence to patrilineal descent and women could not at the time of Independence pass on their citizenship to their husbands or their children in the same way as a man. This is for instance very clear in the debates on nationality in the Indian Constituent Assembly. In India, gender biases were abolished in 1986 and 1992.

15. For the Hindus, see Maitrayee Chaudhuri, *Indian Women’s Movement: Reform and Revival* (London: Sangam Books, 1993), 11. This thesis was defended by feminists I met in New Delhi in 2010. The position of certain Muslims is highlighted by Mumtaz Shahnawaz in her novel *The Heart Divided* (New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2004 [1957]).
17. See in particular the Constituent Assembly Debates, Memorandum CA/63/Cons./47, vol. 4, p. 718–734 [21 July, 1947].
The Pakistan Citizenship Act however still contains a special section on married women, although an amendment passed in 2000 replaced the term “father” with “parent” in some articles. If there are restrictions on the role of women in the transmission of nationality, this is precisely because—as Cynthia Enloe has pointed out—women play a key role in the preservation and reproduction of the nation, and their sexual behavior must be monitored particularly closely, especially as they are generally perceived as vulnerable and impressionable creatures.  

The state must therefore protect both the nation against women and the women from themselves. From this point of view, women’s sexual autonomy can be perceived as a threat to the nation. Even though they are citizens under the law, Pakistani and Indian women are seen as girls who need to be controlled by a patriarch, a figure that can be represented by the state itself. Thus, during the population exchanges at the time of the 1947 Partition, an estimated 75,000 women were abducted or raped. This violence was a way of using women’s bodies to mark the boundaries between communities and nations in the making. Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon have shown, however, that India and Pakistan easily found common ground for the purpose of recovering “their” women, by defining their nationality in terms of their religion and their family’s place of residence, which deprived them of the right to choose their country, unlike other inhabitants of the subcontinent.

In this way both countries acted as “patriarchs,” refusing to consider “abducted” women as citizens because their experience involved the “most critical site of patriarchal control,” namely sexuality.

This position is reflected today in the regulation of women’s sexuality by the legal system. Even though women’s autonomy in choosing to marry is recognized in both countries, the judicial system is generally ambivalent with regards to women’s sexual freedom. In the case of “love marriages,” where the marriage is the choice of the couple and does not involve the intervention (or sometimes even the agreement) of their families, the police and courts are often swayed by the interpretation

19. Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, 54.
20. This is obviously not to say that a woman should stay with a man who has raped her, but some abducted women nevertheless wanted to stay in the marriage contracted after the abduction, even when this had started with a rape (which was not always the case). Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, “Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition,” Economic and Political Weekly 28 no. 17 (1993): WS2–WS11.
given by the family of the bride. These marriages, although legal, are then considered (and prosecuted) as an abduction and rape of the woman by her “husband,” even if the woman insists that she gave her consent. The police are not usually taken in by this, but they choose to express a traditional crime (removing a woman from the natural authority of her guardians) in the legally valid terms of today. In cases where the family decides to take justice into their own hands through murder, the police and the judiciary turn a blind eye as far as possible—if they are involved at all.  

Modernization and Control of Female Sexuality: Contemporary Debates

Recently, the highest courts of India and Pakistan (the Supreme Court and High Courts, respectively) have taken a stronger stance in support of the right to choose one’s marital partner and against honor killings, the latter being presented as a form of barbarism that India and Pakistan need to rid themselves of. The “status of women” has once again become a matter of social, economic, and political “modernity,” in particular under the influence of the “globalized political culture of sexual equality.” Both countries ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and have participated in various conferences on women’s rights since the Mexico City conference in 1975. “Pro-women” laws have proliferated in India since this period, while in the early 1990s a quota of 33% was established for women in local political institutions. Since the 1970s and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s government, the connection between “socio-economic modernization” and the “status of women” has also been made in Pakistan. Bhutto launched major social programs in which the social mobilization of women played a key part, and women’s rights became synonymous with national progress. Conversely, after the coup of 1977 and until the death of General Zia-ul-Haq in 1988, the control

of women’s sexuality and how they dress came to symbolize the Islamic state-building project.\textsuperscript{26} In the 2000s, both the authoritarian military regime led by General Pervez Musharraf and the civilian government that came to power in 2008 ostensibly adopted a “pro-women policy” through the adoption of laws against “barbaric practices” (honor killings, forced weddings, violence, etc.), as well as measures such as political quotas implemented from the local to the national level. For Pervez Musharraf, who came to power after a military coup in 1999, this policy was a matter of asserting his “modernity” or even his commitment to democracy, and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, about distancing himself from “Islamic fundamentalism.”

These institutional practices work in conjunction with major social changes that have occurred within a few generations. In India, child marriage (for all) and polygamy (for non-Muslims) are now prohibited, and school attendance for girls is compulsory, but what is more (as Uma Narayan has pointed out), these new norms have been internalized by the Indian middle and upper classes, including by those who support “tradition” and criticize the “Westernization” of women.\textsuperscript{27} To a certain extent, a similar phenomenon can be observed in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{28} Educating one’s daughter, not having her marry until she has reached adulthood, and rejecting polygamy is no longer necessarily perceived as “Western” behavior and denounced as such. In addition, Islamic and right-wing Hindu movements, who are often put on the spot by the so-called liberal fringes of the two countries for being opposed to modernity\textsuperscript{29} and who lay claim to a certain cultural or religious authenticity, nonetheless also position themselves as defenders of women’s rights. They do so particularly by fighting against what they consider as obscenity and sexual exploitation (beauty pageants, advertisements, etc.), but also by admitting women into their movements.\textsuperscript{30} In reality, most

\textsuperscript{27} Narayan, \textit{Dislocating Cultures}, 8.
\textsuperscript{29} They’re not the only ones on the accused bench in liberal circles (epitomized by the English-speaking press), the “feudals” and their “barbarism” (forced labor, rape, illegal prisons) are also criticized. Christèle Dedebant, \textit{Le voile et la bannière: L’avant-garde féministe au Pakistan} (Paris: CNRS, 2003), 242–250.
participants in public debates on women’s rights claim to be mindful of these rights, and the opposition is therefore not between “progressives” and “conservatives,” but rather between various actors seeking to define “alternative modernities.”

In this quest, the question of women’s sexual autonomy has long been a key issue. In her profession, her outfits, and the way she conducts her love life in general, Sania Mirza has often been considered “too liberated.” Her previous broken engagement and her short skirts on the tennis courts had already been a topic of public debate, while some criticized her marriage, as it did not meet the “traditional” norms of arranged marriages. A member of India’s Muslim Personal Law Board (which oversees Muslim Personal Law in this country) declared that her case was the result of “unfettered freedom.” This kind of criticism has not been heard in Pakistan in relation to Sania Mirza, but this should not necessarily be interpreted as indicating a greater tolerance for the sexual autonomy of women. A case from the same period can be cited in this respect, this time concerning a Pakistani woman, Veena Malik. The actress attracted attention in 2010 and 2011, firstly by participating in an Indian reality television show in which she was “intimate” with an Indian (Hindu) contestant. Afterwards, she posed on the cover of the Indian edition of men’s magazine FHM, “dressed” in a tattoo that explicitly referred to the Pakistani intelligence services. Many Pakistanis were upset that she had embarrassed her country through these actions, calling Pakistan’s national honor (’izzat) into question abroad, and in India in particular. There was thus much less tolerance of women’s sexual autonomy and “modernity” in this case. Nevertheless, some Pakistani commentators presented Veena Malik as representing a new generation of Pakistani women—modern, cosmopolitan, and Muslim.

In both countries, the sexual autonomy of women brings the question of national identity into play. Placing these two cases in perspective however highlights the fact that the “West” (and its supposedly greater sexual freedom) is far from being the only point of reference for discourses on modernity. In the case of India and Pakistan, we can see

a strong rivalry between the two nations when it comes to the defense of women’s rights, carrying further a debate that started during the colonial period on whether women have a better position in Islam or Hinduism. The Indian media report cases of violence against women in Pakistan in a sensationalist manner, especially when they are connected with Islam. At the same time, in Pakistan the superiority of the country according to certain indicators is regularly highlighted. In this respect it may seem surprising that Indian commentators (nationalists moreover) condemn the autonomy of a young woman, while Pakistanis, who are considered more conservative, were delighted by it. As a young Muslim sportswoman leading an independent career, Sania Mirza seems to be an ideal figure of Indian “modernity.” In addition, while some may be shocked by her relative sexual freedom, her marriage basically complies with the dominant sexual morality insofar as it was accepted by her parents. These elements suggest that it is not just Sania Mirza’s sexual autonomy that is problematic in this case, but also the context in which this autonomy is asserted, namely the India-Pakistan relationship, whose gender dynamics should now be explored.

India-Pakistan: A Gendered Relationship

“Sleeping with the Enemy”: Sania as “Traitor”

Some Indians consider Sania Mirza’s marriage to be a form of treason. According to Bal Thackeray, the leader of Shiv Sena (“Shivaji’s Army”), a Hindu nationalist party in Maharashtra, “Sania will not remain an Indian. Had her heart been Indian, it wouldn’t have beaten for a Pakistani. If she wished to play for India, she should have chosen an Indian life partner.”34 This statement was first published in the party newspaper, which is mainly aimed at militants, but it was soon relayed in the mainstream media and referred to on the Internet (social networks, forums, etc.). Apart from Shiv Sena, there has been little reaction to the news within Indian politics. A member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, also from the Hindu right, made similar criticisms,35 but he remained an isolated case. One individual filed a complaint against Sania Mirza for sedition, but the complaint was deemed inadmissible.36 Yet, Indian

34. Quoted in “Shiv Sena attacks Sania, Asks Her to Marry an Indian,” Hindustan Times, April 2, 2010.
resentment is apparent in the media. The “event” received widespread media coverage on television, in the press (including the mainstream press), and on the Internet (blogs, forums, social networks). The Times of India published articles entitled “There’s something about Paki men” and “Cross-border marriages . . . do they last?” Many commentators identifying themselves as “Indian” made quite vicious comments about Sania Mirza. On the video-sharing website YouTube, a video in which another high-ranking Indian (and Hindu) sportswoman, Saina Nehwal, explained that she would never marry a Pakistani, garnered many comments that readily condemned Sania Mirza as by “sunnysahota09”:

“Indian government should take away the right of Indian citizenship from Sania Mirza and let the bitch play from the shit uncivilized Paki country.”

Conversely, two commentators identifying themselves as Pakistanis made the following remarks on the Times of India website:

Unfortunately for your guys, your girls love us, the Pakistanis. (. . .) among billions of you, she could not find a single decent guy.

All of those who criticising Pakistan, the blessed land, should accept that you Indians have become our “Salas.”

In these remarks, nationalism takes the form of sexual competition between men, where the stakes seem to be the control of “their women” and the conquest of the enemy’s. The opponents of the marriage (identified as Indian and Hindu) criticize Sania Mirza in often obscene terms (bitch, whore, randi [prostitute], etc.). Conversely, commentators identifying themselves as Pakistanis denigrate the masculinity of Indian men or even the beauty of Indian women. This rivalry goes back to the colonial period, when the British developed a strategy to disparage the colonized populations by opposing their “effeminate” character to the supposedly chivalrous spirit of the British. This strategy did not apply to

all colonized groups, however, as Muslims were supposedly considered as manly (and therefore potential army recruits), along with Sikhs and Rajputs. Still today, part of Pakistani nationalism is based on the belief that (Hindu) Indians are effeminate, which is reflected in the comments quoted above. The term sālā, moreover, should be highlighted, because it is both the term used by a man to refer to his wife’s brother, and a fairly virulent insult common to Hindi and Urdu. This polysemy is based on the asymmetry between the family of the groom and that of the bride, in favor of the former. A woman who forces her brothers to become the sālā of their enemy humiliates them, and this is what Sania Mirza has done to all her “Indian brothers” by marrying a Pakistani. She thus became “Pakistan’s daughter-in-law” according to the expression of a female Pakistani minister that was widely picked up in the media. The term “daughter-in-law” (bahū) is laden with implications in the Indo-Pakistani context, the daughter-in-law having to be modest, submissive to her husband’s family, and silent. The fact that this nickname, despite its gender implications, was suggested by a woman reminds us that women don’t just occupy a passive or victim role in the construction of gender norms. In addition, the use of a kinship term in the nationalist discourse again emphasizes the metonymic character of the family in relation to the nation and the continuity between the control of female sexuality exercised by the family and that exercised by the state.

Pakistanis were thus much more enthusiastic about Sania Mirza marrying “one of theirs.” The Pakistani government officially welcomed the marriage, sending representatives to the wedding celebrations that took place in Pakistan, while many parliamentarians sent their congratulations to the couple, expressing the hope that the marriage would improve relations between the two countries. Firdous Ashiq Awan, the minister who popularized the nickname “Pakistan’s daughter-in-law,” thus referred to “marriage diplomacy” in relation to the occasion. Another interesting reaction came from the president of the

42. Shahnaz Rouse, Shifting Body Politics: Gender, Nation, State in Pakistan (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 111.
Pakistan Tennis Federation, who expressed the hope that Sania Mirza would observe the tradition of Asian women following their husbands and play for Pakistan. Mirza dismissed the suggestion, as well as the title of “the nation’s daughter-in-law,” but these comments confirm that the difference in reaction between Indians and Pakistanis is not due to greater “open-mindedness” on the Pakistani side, but rather a conjunction of male chauvinism and nationalism.

As evidenced by the restrictions that existed for a long time (and still exist in Pakistan) on the transmission of nationality by women, women who marry foreigners are rarely considered in a very positive light by their country of origin. This distrust seems to be exacerbated in the case of Indian women who marry Pakistani men (in India) and Pakistani women who marry Indian men (in Pakistan). Thus in India, even though gender asymmetries have been removed from nationality laws, the rules for obtaining and extending visas for a Pakistani man who marries an Indian woman are much harder than in the reverse case. Similarly, when the inequalities between men and women in the transmission of nationality were examined by Pakistan’s Federal Shariat Court, the Ministry of the Interior justified them by explaining that if an alien could acquire Pakistani citizenship by marrying a Pakistani woman, it would lead to Indian men duping Pakistani women into marriages for the purposes of migration and espionage.

From the Loss of a Woman to the Loss of Identity

The anxiety about national integrity and the dissolution of identity needs to be considered in relation to the extensive use that has been made of the metaphor of marriage since the colonial period. Pro-unity nationalists for example used the figure of Emperor Akbar, a sixteenth-century Muslim ruler famous for his tolerance and in particular for his

46. “Sania should follow tradition, play for Pakistan after marriage: PTF chief,” Times of India, April 1, 2010.
49. The Court concluded that this inequality was contrary to Islamic law and called on the government to change the law, which hasn’t taken place. Federal Shariat Court, decision dated December 12, 2007 in “Suo moto notice no 1/K of 2006,” 4–5.
marriage to a Hindu woman. The issue of inter-community marriage is found again in Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s novel *The Heart Divided*. The author, a member of middle-class (Muslim) society in Lahore, was the daughter of a prominent female politician. Her novel is a chronicle from the 1920s to the time of Partition that follows Zohra, a young Muslim woman, who gradually gives up her dream of a united and independent India. This dream is symbolized by the romance between her brother, Habib, and her best friend Mohini, a Hindu. The young couple’s marriage is met with fierce opposition from both families and their love ends tragically with the death of Mohini, exhausted by the struggle for independence and her impossible love. This love is presented both as the romantic fervor of two young people and as a militant act (rather than an individualistic impulse): the marriage between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman is a manifestation of national unity and harmony.

The author is sympathetic to the young couple’s dream, and the impossibility of the marriage is a symbol in the novel of the end of the dream of unity, which turns out to be unattainable, in particular because the marriage is perceived by those around the young couple and by their communities as a whole as destined to destroy identities.

In reality, cases of inter-community marriage from this period were equally problematic. Jinnah, the “father” of the Pakistani nation and Liaquat Ali Khan, its first prime minister, both married non-Muslims, but in both cases the brides converted and were assimilated into their husbands’ community. Ruttie Jinnah had to break off her relationship with her father to marry and Jinnah did the same afterwards with his daughter when she married a non-Muslim. The Christian background of Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan is often kept quiet in Pakistan, where her biography begins with her marriage.

50. A piece by Sarojini Naidu, a nationalist, feminist and member of Congress, illustrates this vision; Sarojini Naidu, “The Soul of India,” in *Indian Political System and Constitution-Making*, ed. Verinder Grover (Delhi, Deep & Deep Publications, 1997), 5. This story is still celebrated, as shown in the recent film *Jodhaa-Akbar* directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, which tells the story of Akbar’s marriage to a Hindu princess. There is a “counter-myth” spread by the Hindu right that the daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb (Akbar’s great-grandson, often depicted as an orthodox Muslim and violent with non-Muslims) was abducted by the (manly) Hindu king Shivaji; see Menon, *Sexualities*, xxiv.

51. Shahnawaz, *The Heart Divided*.


53. She long championed the cause of unity and was a fervent admirer of Jawaharlal Nehru.


Still today, the metaphor of marriage represents the possibility of an alliance in a “love marriage” or a loss of identity in a “forced marriage.” The choice between the two metaphors does not just reflect an ideological position, but also often a status as “bride giver” or “bride taker.” Whether in the case of directors of romantic films or Pakistani ministers commenting on the marriage of Sania Mirza and Shoaib Malik, the one who “wins” the girl always seems more inclined to celebrate the union. Similarly, the fairly strong anxiety generated by inter-community marriages in the two countries is still expressed through examples of the “abduction” and “forced conversion” of girls. A Pakistani Hindu member of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) thus expressed to me the importance of quickly implementing a law against forced conversions, to prevent Muslim boys from “hypnotizing” Hindu girls in order to marry and convert them. In India in the early 2010s, the Hindu youth organization Bajrang Dal warned young Hindu women on its website against the danger of the seductive wiles of young Muslim men.

In this regard, the reaction of the Hindu right to Sania Mirza’s marriage may seem surprising. This is a case of a Muslim woman marrying a Muslim man, whereas usually Hindu nationalists protest against marriages between Muslim men and Hindu women (and the supposed conversion of the latter to Islam). By criticizing Sania Mirza’s choice, Shiv Sena thus implicitly acknowledges that she is part of the “national community,” which she should have put ahead of her “religious community” (which transcends borders). In so doing, Shiv Sena puts a secularist principle ahead of a religious principle, even though the party supports the idea of a “Hindu India.” While it seems paradoxical, this position reflects the nationalization of Hinduism, considered as a social framework that transcends religious communities and into which religious minorities must fit. This same “secularism” can be seen in the demand for the removal of personal status laws (governing family law) for religious minorities. Indeed, while Hindu nationalists opposed the

56. For example Randhir Kapoor’s 1991 movie Heena, and Yash Chopra’s Veer-Zaara from 2004, two Indian films centered on the love between a Pakistani woman and an Indian man.

57. Interview with Mahesh Malani, Islamabad, November 14, 2010. Cases of Hindu abductions/marriages with Muslims and conversions to Islam (whether forced or not is difficult to tell) have made the news in Pakistan since early 2012, and several have been brought before the Supreme Court.

58. “Beware Hindu and Sikh Girls! Muslims want you” The website is now offline, but such rumors remain rampant on the internet, very often under the term “love jihad.” On that subject, see Mohan Rao, “Love Jihad and Demographic Fears,” Indian Journal of Gender Studies 18 no.3 (2011): 425–430.
reform of (Hindu) family law in the 1950s in the name of religious principles, they now demand a single civil code in the name of secularism and gender equality, as the provisions of the Hindu Code Bill (which is in fact not very religious) are more favorable to women. In this respect, the “Muslim woman” must be protected from the “Muslim man”—depicted as sexually aggressive, chauvinistic, and violent—and eventually “reintegrated” into the Hindu community through marriage.

Indians and Pakistanis, whether government agents seeking to highlight the “modernization” of their country or Hindu and Islamic nationalists criticizing the “exploitation of women” in the West or the neighboring country, are thus now fluent in the rhetoric of the protection of women, used since colonial times to criticize South Asia.

Conclusion

Sexuality is one of the major stakes in the definition of the Indian and Pakistani nations, especially (but not only) when it comes to the sexual autonomy of women. We should nevertheless be wary of treating notions of “national identity” or “modernity” as fixed and untested objects. Indeed, the Sania Mirza case reveals conflicting interpretations of the nation and the rights that women can have within it. Broadly speaking, Hindu movements think the nation should be the privileged group within which women can marry if they want to retain their nationality. Sania Mirza on the other hand has privileged her individual right to choose her husband without this having any effect on her nationality, thus maintaining a strict separation between private and public and a conception of marriage as above all a private matter. Paradoxically, Pakistanis, and in particular the Pakistani government, who are happy to embrace Sania Mirza, follow the same line as the Hindu right, by considering her to have become part of the “Pakistani family” with her marriage.

In both countries, a number of political players have not expressed any position, for example feminist movements and (Islamic) religious parties in Pakistan. This silence can’t be interpreted in any categorical way, since many may not have said anything because they considered

the matter to be trivial. The apparent lack of interest on the part of the Pakistani Islamic parties (who could have celebrated it as a reaffirmation of the primordial connection between Muslims) may be in part due to an unease about the sexual autonomy shown by Sania Mirza. Regarding the feminists, there are multiple possible reasons for the silence, and a first explanation would no doubt be to do with Sania Mirza’s social characteristics. She belongs to the upper-middle class and is usually depicted as a “Westernized woman” because of her economic independence, profession, and clothing choices. For this reason she is not considered to be representative of “real” Indian or Pakistani women. As they are often criticized for their “acculturation,” feminists had every reason not to take a position on the case. In addition to this, it emerged that Sania Mirza’s fiancé, Shoaib Malik, was already married to an Indian woman. He had never met his first wife, who he married over the phone, and challenged the validity of the marriage on the grounds that she was “fatter” than the photo he had been sent. The indifference shown by Sania Mirza to this first marriage, when the battle against polygamy is an old feminist cause on both sides of the border, no doubt helped to diminish feminist interest in her case. Sania Mirza moreover has never claimed to be a feminist and has defended her professional and romantic choices as personal decisions. This position is obviously political in itself, but its overall orientation is individualistic and liberal, and thus at odds with feminism’s collectivist principles.

Even if trivial, the Sania Mirza case nevertheless touches on issues that are important for Indian and Pakistani feminists. It needs to be considered in a context where, in the name of cultural authenticity, various movements have developed a sometimes violent critique of a number of practices deemed “obscene”: beauty pageants, going to bars, wearing miniskirts, Bollywood cinema, etc. The control of the female body is at stake in these questions, whether it is a question of revealing or on the contrary hiding it. As in other parts of the world, South Asian feminists face the challenge of holding their ground in the area of women’s rights, when this same ground is occupied and exploited both by nationalist movements and developmentalist discourses on a state and international level.

Virginie Dutoya is a research associate at the CERI (Sciences Po) and is a teaching assistant at the Université François Rabelais of Tours. Her research focuses on the issues involved in the political representation of women in India and Pakistan. She recently published the article “Féminisation des Parlements, quotas et transformation de la représentation au Pakistan et en Inde” (Feminization of Parliaments, Quotas and Transformation of Representation in Pakistan and India), *Critique Internationale* 55 (April–June 2012).

**ABSTRACT**

In 2010, the marriage of a female Indian tennis player to a Pakistani cricketer sparked heated debate in India and Pakistan. Seen as a form of treason by Indian nationalists, the union was celebrated as a victory in Pakistan, but also as an opportunity for reconciliation between the two nations. These debates shed light on the interconnection between notions of family and nation and the gendered nature of the relationship between the two countries. Considered in its legal and historical context, this case highlights the role of gender representations in the construction of India and Pakistan’s national projects. The sexual autonomy of women is simultaneously perceived as a sign of “modernity” and a threat to national integrity. The India-Pakistan relations, marked by the legacy of colonialism, reveals the ambivalence of a “sexual nationalism” that combines the defense of women’s rights with control of their sexuality.