

# UNBINDING BODIES AND DESIRES

RE-SEARCHING THE HOME, THE WORLD AND THE IN-BETWEEN IN NARA-NAREE, THE ONLY BENGALI JOURNAL ON HEALTH, HYGIENE, SEX (1939-1950)

by

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This thesis intends to meet the requirement for obtaining the PhD degree from Aalborg University and Malaga University. I hereby declare that the thesis and its contents have not previously been submitted for assessment.

To

The ‘citizens of the world’ who keep stretching the boundaries of  
knowledge

# FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The time we live from birth to death is the only real history we experience; what we hear of what happened before and of what can happen later are just stories. The only space we experience is the land we live in, work in or travel to. What we hear of other lands is other people's imagination.*

Devdutt Pattanaik, "Frog in the well", *Times of India*, 2011

'Kupa manduka' is a Sanskrit phrase for the frog in the well that imagines the well, its home, to be the whole world. Ideas travel across geographical borders and in my mobility period I have come across ideas that keep on intersecting through porous boundaries. These intellectual and cultural exchanges have helped me to grow internally and individually. Moreover, this research has enriched my self-realization which is an endless and continuous process. This project has taken me through continuous shiftings and mobilities where the local and the global worlds are increasingly converging.

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stood by me against all odds and always supported me in whatever path I chose. My heartiest regard goes to my parents, who have remained my mentors throughout my life and without whom I would not have been able to be what I am. I fondly remember the refreshing presence of my sister, Swastika, the “little woman” and childhood companion who is my trusted conspirator in breaking social conventions. I would like to extend my regards to all my teachers at school, colleges and universities who made me to grow up into a thinking individual and taught me to continuously question and challenge myself. Finally, I would like to thank all the people who are directly and indirectly linked with my project and have helped me in exploring the meaning of cosmopolitan connections. I would like to end this note with a tribute to the ‘world poet’, social reformer, humanist and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, who conjured up the image of the New Woman or *Nabina* in his creations to challenge the gender boundaries and traditional social norms of his time. He was a globe trotter who embarked on an intellectual odyssey and believed in a common ground and equal terms of fellowship, “where knowledge flows in two streams – from the East and from the West” (qtd. in Kundu, 2010).



# ABSTRACT

In Bengal and across the world, the early twentieth century witnessed a growing interest in sexual reform through sexual science. Transnational discourses on conjugal science and birth control also became widespread and connections between Western advocates and Bengali experts asserted a new vision of modernity in the context of changing notions of the female body and sexuality. During the interwar period, two distinctive figures, the Modern Girl and the New Woman, became prevalent in public discourses across the globe, and debates over the legitimacy and respectability of their social and sexual autonomy raged.

So far, there has been no study of the global interconnection in the overlapping features of modern women in Bengal and how they were interlaced within the intertextual discourses on modern sexual reform around the world. The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which Bengali womanhood was portrayed in the vernacular magazine *Nara-Naree* from 1939 to 1950. The overall aim of the project is to highlight the key issues regarding marriage and reproduction and the salient features of new womanhood, including gender equality, chastity, divorce, education, hygiene, birth control and the women's movement.

This thesis seeks to draw attention to the paradoxes of modernity that emerged when the Western encounter in Bengal gave rise to new attitudes, behaviours and values in the twentieth century and brought new choices, challenges and alternatives in the social arrangements of the gender system.

To address these problematic issues, I posed two research questions:

- i. In what ways did the contributors to the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) renegotiate and reconceptualize notions of the female body, sexuality and conjugality as expressed in the global dialogue and transnational social movements on modern sexual reform?

- ii. How did the reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality in *Nara-Naree* register cultural tensions and changes in the portrayals of the Bengali Modern Girl and the Bengali New Woman?

Since these two questions involve a complex interplay between gender, sexuality and culture, I have used intertextuality as a tool to explore the interconnected histories of the conceptualization of modern women in Bengal. By analyzing the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* I have concentrated on the conflicting and ambiguous notions of sexual and social autonomy available to Bengali women, which problematized the discourses on sexuality, conjugality and interrelated issues of the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman.

Disrupting the homogeneous notion of the non-West as opposed to the West, I have addressed the complexities in the global sexual reform which impacted upon the question of sexual freedom for Bengali women, its competing dynamics and the dangers related to socio-moral transgression.

By examining the problematic ideas about women's sexual emancipation and social autonomy I have addressed the complexity of transnational interconnectedness in the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* and explored the multifaceted restructurings of various aspects of social and sexual life and the acceptable or appropriate social/sexual norms for women in Bengali society. I have also analyzed how far Bengali women were modernized as a result of the male-initiated reform movement concerning marriage, intimacy and sexuality.

This thesis demonstrates that gender is an important factor in social movements for sexual reform and establishes global connections between discourses on female body and sexuality and debates on women's socio-sexual autonomy which goes beyond the scope of previous studies. Cultural contentions were writ large in the social control of the female body and desire and the moral regulation of sexual behaviour.

The findings also show that the tropes of the Modern Girl and the New Woman were part of the modernizing discourse and that new expectations about the social role of women were fraught with tensions between cosmopolitanism and an emerging nationalism.

## ABSTRAKT

Bengal og resten af verden var i det 20. århundrede vidne til en stigende interesse for seksualreformer gennem seksualvidenskab. Transnationale diskurser om ægteskab og prævention blev også udbredte og forbindelser mellem vestlige fortalere og bengalske eksperter frembragte en ny modernitetsvision i relation til skiftende forestillinger om den kvindelige krop og seksualitet. I mellemkrigstiden blev to karakteristiske figurer fremherskende i den offentlige diskurs verden over, den Moderne Pige og Den Nye Kvinde, og der var heftige debatter om deres sociale og seksuelle legitimitet og respektabilitet.

Hidtil har der ikke været studier af det globale samspil i de overlappende træk ved moderne kvinder i Bengal og hvordan de var sammenflettet med de intertekstuelle diskurser om moderne seksualreform verden over. Målet med den foreliggende undersøgelse er at forstå hvordan bengalsk kvindelighed blev portrætteret i det folkelige blad *Nara-Naree* fra 1939 til 1950. Det overordnede mål med projektet er at markere de centrale problemstillinger angående ægteskab og reproduktion og de fremtrædende træk ved den nye kvindelighed, inklusiv kønsligestilling, kyskhed, skilsmisse, uddannelse, hygiejne, prævention og kvindebevægelsen.

Denne afhandling søger at gøre opmærksom på disse modernitetens paradokser som opstod da vestlige ideer om seksualreform mødte Bengalen og gav anledning til nye holdninger, adfærd og værdier i det 20. århundrede og frembragte nye valg, udfordringer og alternativer i de sociale indretninger af kønssystemet. For at tage fat på disse problematiske emner fremsatte jeg to forskningsspørgsmål:

- i. På hvilke måder genforhandlede og rekonceptualiserede bidragsydere til det bengalske tidsskrift *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) forestillinger om den kvindelige krop, seksualitet og ægteskabelige forhold som blev udtrykt i den globale dialog og transnationale sociale bevægelser om moderne seksualreform?

- ii. Hvordan kom denne tilegnelse af idéer omkring kvindekroppen og seksualitet i *Nara-Naree* til udtryk i forhold til kulturelle spændinger og forandringer i portrættet af den moderne bengalske pige og den nye bengalske kvinde?

Da disse to spørgsmål involverer et komplekst samspil mellem køn, seksualitet og kultur har jeg brugt intertekstualitet som et værktøj til at undersøge de sammenflettede historier om konceptualiseringen af moderne kvinder i Bengal. Gennem analyse af det bengalske blad *Nara-Naree* har jeg fokuseret på de modstridende og tvetydige forestillinger om seksuel og social autonomi, som var tilgængelige for bengalske kvinder, og som problematiserede diskurserne om seksualitet, ægteskabelige forhold og tilgrænsende emner i forbindelse med fremkomsten af den moderne pige og den nye kvinde. Ved at stille mig på tværs af den homogene forestilling om ikke-Vesten modsat Vesten har jeg taget fat på kompleksiteterne i den globale seksualreform som påvirkede spørgsmålet om seksuel frihed for bengalske kvinder, dens konkurrerende dynamikker og farerne i relation til socio-moralsk overtrædelse.

Ved at undersøge de problematiske opfattelser af kvinders seksuelle frigørelse og sociale autonomi har jeg taget fat på den transnationale sammenhængs kompleksitet i det bengalske magasin *Nara-Naree* og udforsket de multifacetterede omstruktureringer af flere aspekter af social- og seksuallivet og de acceptable eller passende sociale/seksuelle normer for kvinder i det bengalske samfund. Jeg har også analyseret i hvilken grad bengalske kvinder kan siges at være blevet moderniserede som følge af denne reformbevægelse som var igangsat af mænd og vedrørte opfattelser omkring ægteskab, intimitet og seksualitet.

Denne afhandling demonstrerer at køn er en vigtig faktor i sociale bevægelser for seksuel reform og klarlægger globale forbindelser mellem diskurser om kvindekroppen og seksualitet og debatter om kvinders socio-seksuelle autonomi, hvilket går ud over rækkevidden af tidligere studier. Kulturelle stridigheder blev udtrykt tydeligt igennem den sociale kontrol af kvindekroppen og kvindens begær og den moralske regulering af seksuel adfærd.

Konklusionen viser også at troperne den Moderne Pige og den Nye Kvinde var en del af moderniseringsdiskursen og at nye forventninger til kvinders sociale rolle var fyldt med spændinger mellem kosmopolitisme og en fremherskende nationalisme.



# RESUMEN

Durante la primera mitad del siglo XX se manifestó un creciente interés por la reforma sexual mediante la llamada “ciencia sexual”. Este interés se desarrolló en muy diversos contextos sociales y culturales, incluido Bengala. En este marco, se establecieron conexiones entre los reformistas bengalíes y occidentales, y surgieron discursos transnacionales sobre la “ciencia conyugal” y el control de la natalidad. Así, se conformaron nuevas visiones de la modernidad en las que jugaron un importante papel cambios relevantes en las nociones del cuerpo y la sexualidad femenina. En las décadas de 1920 y 1930, periodo de entreguerras, la *New Woman* y la *Modern Girl* alcanzaron gran notoriedad en los discursos de sociedades diversas, y surgieron debates en torno a la legitimidad y respetabilidad de la autonomía social y sexual que estos modelos de mujer moderna representaban.

Las interrelaciones que caracterizaron a la configuración de la mujer moderna bengalí y que se expresaron en una intertextualidad que puede ser considerada propia de la reforma sexual moderna a nivel global, no han sido analizadas en profundidad. Por ello, el propósito de este estudio es comprender las formas en que la feminidad fue representada en la revista bengalí *Nara-Naree* durante el periodo 1939 – 1950. Así, el objetivo general de esta tesis es poner de manifiesto cuestiones claves en relación con el matrimonio, la reproducción y los rasgos más destacados del nuevo modelo de mujer, incluyendo la igualdad de género, la castidad, el divorcio, la educación, la higiene, el control de los nacimientos y el movimiento feminista.

De esta forma, se pretende mostrar las paradojas que se produjeron con los intercambios entre Bengala y Occidente, que dieron lugar al surgimiento de nuevas actitudes, conductas y valores durante el siglo XX, y trajeron nuevas opciones, desafíos y alternativas a un orden social configurado por el sistema de género.

El abordaje de estas cuestiones se inicia con dos preguntas:

- i. ¿De qué manera los colaboradores de la revista bengalí *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) renegociaron y reconceptualizaron las nociones referidas al cuerpo femenino, la sexualidad y la conyugalidad integradas en el diálogo global y los movimientos transnacionales relacionados con la reforma sexual moderna?
- ii. ¿En qué sentido la reapropiación de las ideas sobre el cuerpo femenino y la sexualidad que se produjo en *Nara-Naree* provocó tensiones y cambios en las representaciones de la New Woman y la Modern Girl bengalíes?

Dado que ambas cuestiones implican una compleja interrelación entre el género, la sexualidad y la cultura, la intertextualidad es una herramienta metodológica y conceptual para explorar las interconexiones en el proceso de constitución de la mujer moderna en Bengala.

A partir de estos supuestos teóricos y metodológicos, el análisis de la revista *Nara-Naree* ha sido centrado en las nociones de autonomía social y sexual disponibles para las mujeres bengalíes y en lo conflictivo y ambiguo de las mismas. La problematización de los discursos sobre la sexualidad, la conyugalidad y otras cuestiones relacionadas con la configuración de la Modern Girl y la New Woman fue consecuencia de las características de dichas nociones. Para poder llevar a cabo una aproximación a la complejidad que supuso el impacto de la reforma sexual global sobre la libertad sexual de las mujeres bengalíes, las dinámicas conflictivas y los peligros que se asociaron con la transgresión social y moral, ha resultado esencial la ruptura de la dicotomía que opone lo Occidental a lo No-Occidental.

Mediante el examen de las ideas en conflicto sobre la emancipación sexual de las mujeres y su autonomía social, he analizado el complejo entramado que las interrelaciones transnacionales conformaron en la revista *Nara-Naree*. También he explorado las reestructuraciones multidimensionales de diferentes aspectos de la vida social y sexual y de las normas sociales/sexuales consideradas adecuadas y aceptables para las mujeres bengalíes. Así como, hasta qué punto la

modernización de la mujer bengalí fue resultado del movimiento de reforma que, por iniciativa masculina, abordó el matrimonio, la intimidad y la sexualidad.

De esta forma, la tesis muestra que los sistemas de género han sido elementos relevantes para los movimientos sociales que han propugnado una reforma de la sexualidad. Además, yendo más allá de abordajes previos, profundiza en el análisis de las conexiones entre discursos sobre el cuerpo de las mujeres, la sexualidad en general y los debates surgidos en torno a la autonomía social y sexual de las mujeres. En este sentido, las controversias culturales estuvieron en el centro del interés por el control del cuerpo femenino, el deseo y la regulación moral de la conducta sexual.

Los resultados del análisis también evidencian que los tropos Modern Girl y New Woman eran parte del discurso de la modernización, y que las nuevas expectativas acerca del rol social de las mujeres estaban cargadas de las tensiones que se produjeron entre una visión cosmopolita y un nacionalismo emergente.



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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“This is the only copy. We don’t keep that type of magazines in our stock.”

One attendant at a makeshift stall named ‘Camp’ and heaped with old and yellowish second-hand books, muttered in Bengali after a thoughtful pause. His scrutinizing gaze remained fixated on the copy of *Nara-Naree* [*Man-Woman*] which I had searched out from the pile of periodicals and was holding in my hand. He presumably recollected the subject area of the sex-journal and was too embarrassed to discuss its further availability with a younger *woman*. The setting was Kolkata book fair 2011 and the entire area was bustling with the country theme USA<sup>1</sup>. Some people were flipping through their books pretending to read while trying to overhear our conversation. The head bookseller<sup>2</sup> inquisitively asserted “some other copies are in that rack” and continued as if in a monologue, “she must be doing some research,” thus trying to legitimize my search for an apparently taboo topic.

Such uneasiness and inhibition in the public sphere about sexuality and sexual issues are not solely based on the view that they are culturally sensitive and often prohibited. Rather, the critical surveillance immediately focused on my gender as a woman, the carefully carved boundaries between morality and obscenity and my supposed transgression of cultural boundaries. I have faced similar curious glances and smirks almost everywhere, in libraries and street bookshops, from institutions and individuals, as I, a *female*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Kolkata Book Fair is the third largest book fair in the world and themed annually on a country or region, in line with Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2012 the theme was Italy.

<sup>2</sup> His name is Swapan Mukherjee with whom I subsequently developed an amicable relation. I was amazed at his huge and precious old collection of second-hand books on various themes which he sells on the footpath in College Street and also stores at his home.

approached them with a list of books that fall into the category of sexual science. During my hunt for knowledge sources I met some people who were apparently amused at my endeavour to run after such ‘obscene’ information about those ‘petty’ booklets and pamphlets and often inspected my face and the booklist to read my seriousness between the lines. Dichotomies between forbiddance and respectability also revolved around my research affiliation with a ‘foreign’ university, which they assumed as the ‘advanced’ and ‘outside’ space where this kind of research is ‘entertained’. So, here the moot point is what is ‘sayable’ or ‘do-able’ in a particular socio-cultural context as tensions between insider/outsider add another dimension to the ambivalences around the issues of sex and sexuality.

On the other hand, I also found some discomfort over the issues of body and sexuality in those comparatively ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ places where scientific notions of sexuality are considered to be specifically Western and it is often presumed that ‘non-Western’ notions of sexuality are associated with a ‘liberal sexual culture’ and an exotic, idyllic and mystical East, based on its differences from the ‘Western’ ‘rational’ culture. Ideas about Indian sexuality are generally associated with a far-flung land of the *Kamasutra* unconnected to the real modern world and thus it continues to fascinate the Western imagination as its mirror image. So, in both cases, popular assumptions are built on the foundations of binary concepts and a construction of the ‘other’ in which the West is associated with modernity and development, and the non-West remains stuck in the past and fixed in history and tradition.

Later, I discovered a dozen issues of *Nara-Naree* in my late grandmother’s locked trunk along with other journals and books on health and scientific sexology. This collection in the closet and ambiguity in openness around matters of sex and sexuality bring out the central sexual contradiction and the core tension which remain inherent in the cultural sphere. *Nara-Naree*, the Bengali magazine launched in 1939 and other translated English books on sexual science, by Havelock Ellis, Marie Stopes, Norman Haire etc. became

very popular for circulating scientific sexual knowledge<sup>3</sup> during the late colonial period in Bengal<sup>4</sup>. Bengali writers also started to write treatises and books on scientific sexuality. I found quite a good number of such books in the national library and street bookshops but it remained difficult to access them. This also proves that, even though sexual science has always been a subject of suspicion, needing to be shielded from public view and especially inappropriate for female readers, hidden transgressions of these moral boundaries are not exceptions. Interestingly, it has usually been easier for male readers to get hold of ‘those’ books as they are supposed to be the active performers in sexual relations. Furthermore, women are completely ostracized when they talk about sexuality or display their desire in any way. Therefore, a large amount of social prestige or moral ‘goodness’ is attached to women’s sexual behaviour. Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (1998) highlighted how this ‘conspiracy of silence’ defined women as the embodiment of the boundaries between licit and illicit forms of sexuality as well as the guardian of the nation’s morality.

Cultural boundaries imposed on the sexual expression of women, have been an effective means for subjugating women all over the world. In every society, there are some appropriate gender roles and conducts assigned to women and these regulative proper codes are reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s (1953) famous argument, “One is not born, rather one becomes a woman”. Femaleness is widely conceived as being rooted in the home and maleness in the social domain. The construction of gender within society creates differing patterns of expectations, and gender is actively produced as an

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<sup>3</sup> I found a vast number of books published and translated by Bangiya Sahitya Parishad for the educated population as people’s interest in scientific knowledge about sexual matters and awareness about birth control and good living began to increase.

<sup>4</sup> Here by the term Bengal I mean the Bengali speaking region in the subcontinent. After partition following independence, the Bengali speaking community was divided between India (West Bengal) and Pakistan (the eastern part). Bangladesh was not formed as a separate country at that time and was part of Pakistan.

accomplishment within social interactions through “the activity of managing situated conduct in the light of normative conceptions of attitudes appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.127). The performance of gender varies in any given context of time, space, social interaction and interrogation, gender being simultaneously created and maintained as “both a process and a product, medium and outcome of such power relations” (Mumby, 1998, p.169). In this respect, female curiosity about the subject of sexuality and “intimate matters” violates cultural norm as women are supposed to be passive receivers of sexual knowledge from their husbands. This is how ‘becoming’ a woman is carried out in respect to ‘doing’ gender under prescribed norms in a sociocultural context. There is also another intriguing question linked with the formation of spatial boundaries and how women shift through these specific segregated domains of the home and the outside world, and their interface and transgression through transnational interactions and interconnectedness create an ‘in-betweenness’. This in-between space carries the meaning of culture.

Taking the tensions around the paradoxical notions of female socio-sexual autonomy as my point of departure, I will concentrate on the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950). This time-span encompasses a stage when Bengal was in a transition period and old gender norms and expectations were clashing with modern ideas. The debate over women’s sexual and social autonomy that surfaced in Bengal was interconnected with the transformation in gender relations worldwide. The interwar period witnessed a change in the traditional arrangement of gender roles around the world and continued to influence Bengali discourses on modernity and modern women. The Modern Girl and the New Woman emerged in Germany, Australia, China, Japan, France, Spain, Denmark, India, Malayasia, the United States, the UK, Russia, South Africa and Zimbabwe due to transnational encounters and their manifestations demonstrated the cultural flows that shaped modern femininity across national and geopolitical boundaries. Here I will analyze how Bengal’s engagement with global sexual reform challenged cultural taboos on ‘appropriate’ female socio-sexual behaviour. In this connection, I will highlight the conflicting ideals of the ‘new’ or ‘modern’ woman

which propelled engaging debates in both the private and the public domains and the magazine *Nara-Naree* registered multifarious and contingent dichotomies in the encounter between Bengal and the world. The keywords 'new' and 'modern' were applied to women as the embodiment of societal change. So, I will concentrate on the problematic negotiation of modernities in the conceptualization of modern conjugality and discourses on the transgressive female figures who intended to bridge the gap between the home and the world. In this context I will also critically examine the ambivalences in the construction of 'our society' and 'their society', and how transnational linkages could challenge such binaries.

### **1.1. PROBLEM FORMULATION**

Transnational processes of modernization contributed to the social changes in Bengal (1939—1950) which affected the ideas about the female body, sexuality and conjugal relations. The ideas of sexual reform that swayed the West in the early twentieth century assumed highly controversial overtones in Bengal. Since social movements on global sexual reform challenged traditional ideas about conjugality and female sexuality, these generated ambivalences and contestations about what should be the permissible social and sexual behaviour for Bengali women and what should be considered taboo. As a result, multifaceted tensions arose in connecting the two spheres, the home and the world, and these contentions intersected with the highly debated issues of sexual and social autonomy for Bengali women. The global emergence of the two archetypes of the Modern Girl and the New Woman during the interwar period also became interlocked with the paradoxical notions of modernity and sexual reform, which continued to contribute to the multifarious debates in the Bengali domain. These recurrent conflicts were clearly manifested in the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* as the writers expressed dilemmas concerning the reformulation of conjugal relations and female socio-sexual autonomy during the transformation of the social mindset.

### **1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this thesis I will analyze the problematic ideas about the Bengali women's body, sexuality and social autonomy that appeared in the

vernacular periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) and registered the paradoxes in mediating and contesting modernity while Bengal was experiencing social change.

I will investigate the following two key research questions:

- i. In what ways did the contributors to the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) renegotiate and reconceptualize notions of the female body, sexuality and conjugality as expressed in the global dialogue and transnational social movements on modern sexual reform?
- ii. How did the reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality in *Nara-Naree* register cultural tensions and changes in the portrayals of the Bengali Modern Girl and the Bengali New Woman?

In order to answer the above research questions and theoretically ground this analysis, I will concentrate on a textual analysis of the magazine by drawing attention to the alterations in conventional gender norms in Bengal. I will use intertextuality to highlight the interconnection between Western and Bengali ideas about female sexuality and women's social autonomy and will concentrate on the representations of the Modern Girl and the New Woman in Bengal, which were connected with the global discourses on modernity and modern sexual reform in non-Western countries. In this connection I will use theories about modernity and cosmopolitanism and theories about gender, sexuality and the body.

### **1.3. POSITIONING THE RESEARCH AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

During the early decades of the twentieth century, significant global changes in terms of traditional conceptions of women's sexuality redefined their 'proper place' in society with the popularity of the first sexual revolution in the West. Discourses on marital and sexual reform were not limited to Western countries and began to emerge in various parts of the world. In this transnational context, knowledge about the female body and sexuality, sexual reform and the reappropriation of gender norms in Bengal received no attention.



Therefore, it is necessary to understand the process of the circulation of modern knowledge between Bengal and the West.

With the coming of modernity, sexual reform was associated with the global visibility of two intersecting and paradoxical figures: the Modern Girl and the New Woman which generated social tensions in the face of the changing roles of women during the interwar period. The emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman at the turn of the century challenged conventional gender norms and conjugal compatibility was redefined. There arose fierce debates about the legitimacy of modern women's rebellion against conventional gender norms. No scholarly discussion has taken place on the link between global sexual reform and the worldwide social changes that occurred with the emergence of modern women and their assertion of bodily rights, individual autonomy and the right to pursue profession. These developments and ambivalences have been comparatively well researched in relation to the West. But no empirical research has been done on the construction of the female body and sexuality in the transnational context in Bengal. Considering that there is little research on this topic, my thesis lays useful groundwork for the textual analysis of *Nara-Naree* which is an important document that talks about the female body and sexuality and gendered articulations of modernity.

Current research has also tended to neglect the transitional phase in the twentieth century from the late-colonial to the (post-) independence period and how the complexities of gender ideologies in the conception of modernity contribute to contemporary debates on the female body and sexuality in Bengal. Here, I will take into consideration the transitional period from 1939 to 1950<sup>5</sup> which is historically significant in the sense that there were some crucial events and social changes going on around the world at that time (I will highlight these in Chapter 2).

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<sup>5</sup> The year 1947 marked Indian independence and the partition of Bengal, and 1950 marked the formal establishment of the Republic of India.

*Nara-Naree* is a cosmopolitan magazine in which home and the world come into contact. There are a few studies in which cosmopolitan characteristics and transnational connections have been analyzed in the context of sexual reform and changing gender relations in India. But this has not been done in the Bengali context. This lacuna suggests an important opening for research on *Nara-Naree* in the Bengali context. There is no systematic or empirical analysis of this magazine and so I will analyze this magazine in particular in order to unravel the complex and sometimes contradictory web of constructions that is built around gendered bodies and desires. This study is driven by the theme of the female body, sexuality and conjugality and the transformation of women's conventional roles in society rather than an analysis of various sections or features of the magazine. So, I will only investigate the areas of the magazine where these themes are evident.

The significance of the research lies in exploring the critical debates over women's sexual and social autonomy that raged in Bengal during the twentieth century. In this context I will highlight the complexity of transnational linkages in the Bengali vernacular periodical *Nara-Naree* that was historically undermined in the realm of 'respectable' popular print culture. So, the purpose of the research is to assess the impact of modernization on sexual reform in Bengal as part of the modernization of Bengali women. There has been a well-charted history of sexual reform in the European and American settings but Bengal remains excluded from this even though it was a part of the global undertaking. As argued by Sanjam Ahluwalia (2013), the history of the modern sexual reform thus becomes Eurocentric. Moreover, the theme of female sexuality in sexual reform is almost entirely missing from the previous studies on Bengali vernaculars. Most of the previous studies focused on health and medicine (Arnold, 1989; Bose, 2006; Goswami 2012; Jeffrey, 1987; Kaviraj, 2002; Mukharji, 2011; Pati & Harrison, 2001, 2008) rather than sexuality and here I will argue that sexuality is just as important a factor for analyzing the changing roles of women in the socio-political context. Charu Gupta (2001, 2005) and Sanjam Ahluwalia (2013) recently addressed the issues of female sexuality, sexual desire, pleasure and contraception in medical treatises in North

and South India respectively, although there has been no such critical attention in the Bengali domain. Anandhi (2000) has explored the links between birth control and patriarchy in the debates on women's autonomy and reproductive rights in colonial Tamilnadu.

Transnational linkages in different contexts have been sporadically discussed (Arondekar, 2009; Ghosh, 2008) and male sexuality, semen loss anxiety and manhood have received considerable attention (Sinha, 1995; Mukharji, 2011) in Bengali texts by researchers but female sexuality as a major concern of sexual reform has not been explored in its fuller dimensions. Some studies have focused on the sexuality of marginalized groups of women (Biswas, 2011; Banerjee, 1998; Sarkar, 1994) and sought to define how arenas of female sexuality outside marriage were considered to be immoral and dangerous, a characteristic of lower classes but not of respectable groups, and as something to be controlled. Some scholars have also highlighted several studies on women's sexual health within medical discourses (Gupta, 2005), but they did not address the impact of modern sexual reform in the domain of Bengali popular culture. So, the singular importance of *Nara-Naree* in this field lies in the fact that it was the first Bengali magazine which began to deal with sexual science by challenging traditional morality, gender hierarchy, conventional gender roles and social norms from a cosmopolitan perspective. Contrary to the popular assumption that social reform in Bengal did not address women's sexual and intellectual needs and remained centred on the inculcation of proper codes of behaviour for women in the anticolonial nationalistic ideology, some contributors to the magazine *Nara-Naree* questioned sexual double standards and discussed the changing gender roles of modern women and their search for sexual and social autonomy. At the same time, they maintained certain normative values by constructing a new sexual morality and stressed conjugal science as a way to regulate sexual behaviour. So there were divergences and dilemmas about women's sexual roles within the project of sexual reform.

During the twenty-first century, popular discourses on the two interlocking yet contradictory images of the Modern Girl and the New Woman have aroused renewed interest among Asian scholars. There

is a growing body of research and articles which has started to focus on these two archetypes and the gendered dimensions of modernity. Although there are a number of studies regarding the Women's Question and the New Woman in Bengal in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries (Chatterjee 1989; Murshid, 1983; Tambe, 2000), there is no adequate discussion about the emergence of the Modern Girl and changing gender relations within conjugal and social frameworks in the Bengali context. The significance of this research lies in exploring the transnational perspectives in the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman and finding the research gap in the context of Bengal. Literature in colonial Bengal usually highlighted the New Woman's active role in the socio-political arena as a potentially revolutionary anti-colonial social force, but did not address her sexuality. Seminal works on the history of the evolution of the New Woman also omitted tomboyism from their discussions. So here I will concentrate on the contentious development of women's roles and changing gender ideology in a world that was riven by cultural tensions. So, it is important to focus on several issues regarding the tensions within modern sexual reform in Bengal and their impact on the changing ideas about women's sexuality and their social roles.

I will highlight the different features of the magazine and the limitations of my research area in Chapter 4.

#### **1.4. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

I will employ a multidisciplinary approach and the methods used in the study have been drawn from various disciplines. The framework of much of the discussion in this thesis will be provided by concepts and theories regarding cosmopolitanism and modernity. I will outline the different theories that I will be using in Chapter 3.

By applying social constructivism and intertextuality as analytical tools I will consider how social phenomena or objects of consciousness develop in different social contexts and how they are interlinked. In this context I will address the ambiguities and complexities in the changing discourses on sexual reform in *Nara-*

*Naree* and their wider socio-cultural implications. Here I will explore the global interconnection in the changing knowledge about the female body, sexuality and conjugality as expressed in *Nara-Naree* and examine the magazine's representations of the Modern Girl and the New Woman.

#### **1.4.1. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Social constructionists posit that, while a behaviour or practice may appear to be natural, it is in practice an invention or artefact of a particular culture or society. Social constructionism is used to make sense of the social world and views knowledge as something that is constructed, rather than created. Culture is a social construct and cultural identities are based on notions of difference. The question of difference is about 'us' and 'them', and defines 'us' in relation to others. This is how ideas about imagined communities (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) are constructed and how we construct the self and convince other people that we are who we 'appear' to be. Thus, knowledge about various communities and cultures is constructed through the social interactions of a group. Social constructionism is also concerned with how knowledge about gender and gender roles is interpreted and understood in a society. Gender roles are constructed within society, and create an ideal of how a person of a specific gender should act or behave. Gender issues are interlaced with socio-cultural expectations about sexual behaviours, which are important components of all cultures, although societies may differ widely in attributing meanings to sex, sexual permissiveness, and expression of sexual values. There are cultural differences as to whether and in which circumstances public discussions on sexuality are socially acceptable. I will show how culture is instrumental in constructing gender and that gender is embedded into culture through particular performances of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Social constructions are shaped by patriarchal relations of power which impact upon gender roles. In *Nara-Naree*, gender remains a key factor in reappropriating the normative notions of conjugality and for investigating the dubious nature of the sexual emancipation of Bengali women during the transnational processes of modernization. Gender is thus a cultural construct and culture defines what is

permitted, appropriate, normal, conforming, desirable and expected. It also defines what is taboo, inappropriate, abnormal, deviant and not legitimate.

Gender hierarchy is deeply implicated in the social production of dichotomous notions of spaces: public (man)/private (woman), home (woman)/world (man). Women are often identified with the home/nation and the notion of uncontrollable women is associated with a transgression of the boundaries of cultural morality. Here, I will explore how appropriate social roles and sexual behaviours were constructed in relation to contradictory ways of belonging to the home and the world. ‘Nation’ is inextricably tied up with personal connections to the home and family and is often placed in opposition to the world. In contrast, the roles of modern women often surpass national boundaries. This attempt to overcome boundaries lends an in-betweenness to the separate domains of the home and the world.

Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them (qtd. in Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. The attention to ‘official’ and implicit voices within and between texts, and their clashes and contradictions, is central to understanding the ways in which discourses are constructed and how they are mediated, challenged and changed. Dominant discourses and social practices characterize how ‘normal’ women should feel and behave and are accompanied by social codes that assume and reproduce these discourses.

I will analyze how the discourses on sexual reform were assumed, reproduced, challenged and changed in *Nara-Naree*.

#### **1.4.2. INTERTEXTUALITY**

Intertextuality refers to the interrelationships among texts. In 1960 Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality to conceptualize the text as a dynamic site in which the relational processes and practices are

the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products (Martínez-Alfaro, 1996). The concept of intertextuality, therefore, requires that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as a network that is differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. So, the theory of intertextuality suggests that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole and, thus, it does not function as a closed system (Martínez-Alfaro, 1996). I will explore how in *Nara-Naree* this concept can be used to apply global knowledge in the local context and create a network of ‘shared knowledge’.

A text cannot be taken as a unified voice; it is rather a combination of fragmented polyphonic voices. Roland Barthes suggests that the meaning of a text does not reside in the text itself, but is produced by the reader in relation not only to the text in question, but also to the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process. Here I will show how both Western and Bengali writers were involved in creating a network of texts to construct knowledge about women’s bodies.

This intertextual process focuses on:

- a) How an idea or text is borrowed from other sources
- b) The shaping of a text’s meaning by another text
- c) And also the concepts borrowed from other texts

Thus, intertextuality refers to the ways in which texts gain meaning through their referencing or evocation of other texts.

Western texts became a frame of reference by which the subjects in the Bengali magazine can be approached and treated. So, each text can be theorized as a network of fragments that refer to still other texts. Here I will also explore how the intertextual system of networking starts dialoguing with and quoting prior texts (Boje, 2001) and I will show how the direct referencing by authors to other texts has a deeper meaning. The authors are not only quoting other texts and borrowing counter-hegemonic ideas to deal with social taboos in contemporary time but also imbibing various cultural elements.

The concept of intertextuality is very much interrelated with the idea of cosmopolitanism, whereby the world becomes one through shared knowledge, and the aim of intertextuality is to incorporate allusions and quotations into the work in order to unlock a field of possible readings.

I will concentrate on the interrelatedness between the Western and Bengali texts and how the Bengali writers produce meanings by referring copiously to the Western texts. So intertextuality will serve both purposes: 1) it will show the influence of Western sexologists on the native sexual science and how the native writers reappropriate the transmission of knowledge, and 2) it will show how the texts travel in this transference and translation of sexual modernity as the vernacular magazine, which is limited to the regional sphere by the language barrier, enters into a cross-cultural and transcultural dialogue in the interactive and comparative space that this intertextual strategy creates.

The representation of the Modern Girl and the New Woman in *Nara-Naree* in a comparative framework was based on the ideas of intertextuality and cosmopolitanism which I will analyze in this research.

### **1.5. DATA, MATERIAL AND SOURCE**

The primary data consist of articles from the Bengali vernacular magazine *Nara-Naree* collected from *Poush* [December–January] 1346 [1939] to *Agrahayan* [November–December] 1357 [1950] and I have investigated the contents of the texts spanning the first ten years of its publication. There are 12 issues for each year, since it was a monthly magazine. I will also refer to other primary sources, consisting of marriage advice books and sex advice manuals in Chapter 2. Secondary materials include numerous bibliographic sources. I have also used a wide variety of books, articles, e-articles and various internet websites in my quest to find substantive data and material.

The importance of a source like a magazine that was aiming to popularize scientific knowledge and practices during the colonial



period is immense. *Nara-Naree* became a platform for debate and contained several sections on sports, personal hygiene, beauty, health and sexuality, analysis of movies and movie stars (both international and Bengali) and advice, among other regular columns. It also incorporated reviews of new books and visually appealing and artistic photographs. Prominent figures in the history of Western sexology were widely quoted in *Nara-Naree* by the expert writers on health and sexual science and thus, the magazine maintained its cross-cultural and cosmopolitan flavour. The name of the Bengali magazine itself seems to be inspired by Havelock Ellis's work *Man-Woman* (1894). *Nara-Naree*, which focuses on the issues of the female body and sexuality, made a huge contribution to popular culture by breaking taboos and challenging the notions of obscenity. The writers consulted exclusive foreign magazines and connected elite and popular knowledge by promoting cultural exchange. It contained a web of interlinked references and also explored the depth and variety of Bengali culture.

I will provide an overview of the magazine and discuss the contents of *Nara-Naree* in detail in Chapter 4.

## 1.6. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the subject, purpose and significance of the project, sets the problem and lays down the overall framework of the thesis.

In Chapter 2 I will review the relevant academic literature on the topic of the female body and sexuality and the conceptualization of modern women. Here I will provide a research overview and offer historical perspectives and the context of the study by locating global and vernacular actors in the field of sexual reform as well as interlinking the conceptualizations of the Modern Girl and the New Woman with modern sexual reform. Chapter 2 is therefore a background chapter providing the context of the transnational processes of modernization and the social movement for sexual reform in the West and in the context of Bengal.

Chapter 3 is primarily a theoretical section in which I will discuss the concepts of modernities, cosmopolitanisms and gender that I have used in answering the research questions. Here I will focus on the different meanings of cosmopolitanism and transnational connections between the home and the world. I will also examine different meanings of modernities and highlight the women's question in the context of Bengal and the changing gender ideology.

In Chapter 4 I will provide a broader overview of the magazine *Nara-Naree* by discussing its publication and its different features and contents. I will highlight the choice of my subject and the limitation of my research.

Chapter 5 will provide an answer to the first research question. In this chapter I will analyze the nature of sexual reform within Bengal as highlighted in the magazine. This chapter will explore how the cosmopolitan transnational project remains focused on the questions of female sexuality and conjugality and leads to the reconstruction of the female body. I will analyze how cosmopolitanism shaped the development of sexual science in Bengal and focus on global interconnectedness. Here I will explore the three interlocking issues of women's bodies, sexuality and modernity. I will also note how the global sexual knowledge acquired from Western sexologists was used to sustain and subvert the traditional taboos and social norms concerning women's bodies and sexuality in Bengal.

In Chapter 6 I will answer the second research question and deal with the paradoxical construction of gendered modernity through the figures of the Modern Girl and the New Woman in *Nara-Naree* as part of the global print-culture. This chapter concentrates on complex identities that constituted modern women and how the tensions between modernization and Westernization generated various debates about modern sexual reform and the transformation of the roles of women and their sexual agency in the society. So, I will explore how Bengali writers argued about cosmopolitan ideals and how modern women exercised their sexual emancipation. Simultaneously, I will highlight the discrepancies and divergences within the discourse of sexual liberation. I will explore the distinctive and overlapping

characteristics of the Modern Girl and the New Woman and argue that global modernity was highly debated and appropriated in *Nara-Naree*.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusion in which I will return to the first and second research questions and summarize the whole discussion on the female body and sexuality and subsequent cultural tensions regarding the reconceptualization of the problematic ideas about the Bengali Modern Girl and the New Woman in *Nara-Naree*. I will also precisely describe the relevance of *Nara-Naree* in the contemporary scenario and highlight the significant debates on moral regulation and the sexual emancipation of women in Bengal at present.



## **CHAPTER 2. GLOBAL SEXUAL REFORM AND PARADOXES: SITUATING BENGAL IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT**

In the previous chapter I have laid down the overall framework of the thesis. In this chapter I will outline the history of transnational connections relating to sexual reform and scrutinize the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman by locating their global interconnectedness. This will provide a background to the first and second research questions in the thesis. Here, I will focus on Western sexologists and stress the relevant literature on modern sexual reform in the West and how global interconnection has been appropriated in Bengal. I will also highlight how the whole discourse of modernization in Bengal and changing ideas about the female body and sexuality were invariably interconnected with the complexities within modern sexual reform and the contending representations of the Modern Girl and the New Woman.

There has been an impenetrable silence on female sexuality within social movements. Here, I will emphasize the critical debates on global sexual reform and their impact on conjugal and sexual relations in Bengal. I will address how the ideas of socio-sexual reform were beset with underlying ambiguities that were encountered during the process of the modernization of Bengali women. The intertextual reference of a new and ‘healthy’ discourse on sexual science in Bengal provided the necessary context for exploring various factors regarding the female body and sexuality that grappled with multifarious tensions in formulating the emancipated roles of the modern women. Furthermore, this whole process of forging connections between the home and the world raised serious questions regarding the dichotomies between the ‘outsider’ and the ‘insider’. This chapter will also shed light on the intersection between global movements for sexual reform, feminist movements and nationalist movements in India.

So, Chapter 2 is a research overview of the transnational connections around sexual reform and highlights the debates and conflicts that emerged within the domain of modernization in India and around the world. I will consider how sexual reform became the focus of social reform and how it impacted upon the existing gender relations. This also provides a link with the following chapters and illustrates the lack of research in my topic.

## 2.1. SEXUAL REFORM FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The history of the evolution of modern sexuality involves an engagement with Foucault. In *History of Sexuality* Foucault (1978) distinguished between *the* ‘erotic art’, or erotology, as Eastern and *scientia sexualis* or sexology (“the science dealing with sexual behaviour”) as Western. According to him, while the West showed signs of *ars erotica* in ancient times, sexual science remained exclusively associated with the modern West (Foucault, 1978, pp. 57-58). Colonialism brought the knowledge of sexual science to non-Western countries through translation, mediation and circulation.

The expansion of Western sexual knowledge around the world is a crucial issue which involves the formation of modern societies. There is a well-charted history of examining the role of biomedical knowledge and practices by examining Foucault’s “technology of power” which focusses on the institutional development of biomedicine and public health measures in colonial India (Arnold, 1989, 1993; Bala, 1991, 2012; Harrison, 1994; Jeffrey, 2007; Pati & Harrison, 2001, 2008). It examines how this discourse exercises disciplinary power which aims to produce particular “technologies of the self” leading to cultural hegemony and the spread of Western ideas, institutions and practices. It is not my intention here to go into the discussion about how sexuality was disciplined and colonized by governing and surveying a population.

Western concerns with the difference between a technologized West and a ‘free-flowing’ East, as reflected in Michel Foucault’s (1978) work and India’s nationalistic ‘pride’ in its ‘great’ civilizational past and liberal sexual culture distinguished between scientific modern society and an antiquated erotic culture. I do not intend to draw a

demarcation line between *scientia sexualis* and erotic art. Here my main interest lies in how sexual reform in Bengal was influenced by the cosmopolitanism that emerged in the encounter between Bengal and the world and how the female body and sexuality were recast and reproduced during this transnational encounter.

Foucault's Eurocentric and binary formulation of the history of sexuality maintained a deliberate silencing of the Indian sexologists who were writing in English and other vernacular languages (Ahluwalia, 2013). So, my aim is to explore the overlaps and connections in the transnational sexual reform which produced the gendered bodies of the Modern Girl and the New Woman.

## **2.2. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SEXUAL REFORM**

Sexual science as a field became especially important in Europe, but also throughout the world during the early twentieth century (Matte, 2005). Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), Norman Haire (1892-1952), Magnus Hirschfield (1868-1935) challenged the taboos of Victorian and Wilhelmine societies and paved the way for the greater openness that characterized the modern era. The beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed the first international connections between individual sexologists and institutions which developed into a transnational network. Agents of sexual reform movements established collaborations between individuals, groups and institutions and created many international bodies, networks and forums. Through this process, sexologists reflected their conviction that social reform could be achieved through sexual science (Chiang, 2008).

While the new branch of sexology gained prominence during the first decades of the twentieth century in the West, it also marked a substantive transformation from the puritanical Victorian concept of female asexuality and passionlessness. The sexologists made a significant departure from the concept of sexual repression where female sexuality was unquestionably linked to procreation (Laqueur, 1986). The interwar period was decisive for the formation of modern heterosexuality and contraceptive choice was promoted. This period saw a shift in the scientific understanding of female sexuality which

fit with Sharon Ullman's (1997) concept of the "modernization of sexuality", by which she meant

*the twentieth-century redefinition of sexuality as a means of self-realization rooted in pleasure and unconnected to reproduction. A new value system revolving around desire and sexual fulfillment became prominent; sexual discourse emphatically entered the public realm, and the entire framework for sexual understanding came loose from religious and proscriptive moorings. This dramatic revisioning made sexuality central to personal identity and even to the definition of a successful life. (p. 3)*

Female sexuality started to receive attention and women began to be considered as sexual beings whose desire should not be considered dangerous or shameful. The prevention of unwanted conception was also central to this goal, which promoted the vocabulary of 'marital happiness', 'ideal marriage' and 'married love', as used in the marriage manuals.

In this context of modern sexual reform I will refer to some of the renowned Western proponents who were quoted frequently in the vernacular periodical *Nara-Naree*.

### **2.3. WESTERN PROPONENTS OF GLOBAL SEXUAL REFORM**

Ahluwalia (2008) and Srivastava (2004b) have highlighted the global interaction and engagement among Western contemporaries such as Havelock Ellis, Norman Himes, Albert Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes and Edith How-Martyn and showed how during the twentieth century the field of sexual science became a network of active participation of men and women around the world. Many of the key Western figures in the sexual reform movement, such as, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes and Magnus Hirschfeld, travelled extensively in India and propagated a scientific mode of living and thinking.

Placing the importance of female sexuality at the centre stage of sexual modernity, Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), Norman Haire



(1936), Van de Velde (1928) and Marie Stopes (1918) wrote extensively on the art of love and birth control. The most famous of these writers was Havelock Ellis, whose monumental seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928) detailed the enormous impact of sexuality on the individual, society and culture. His other books included *Man and Woman* (1894), *Sex in Relation to Society* (1910) etc. Ellis became an exclusively secular writer whose works were accessible to popular culture and gave importance to a scientific understanding of sexuality (Paul, 2006). As an anthropologist Ellis found variability and similarity in sexual practices among different cultures and focused on an international framework for the analysis of sexual behaviour. His works explicitly reflected cosmopolitan characteristics in the seven volumes of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928) in which he critically analyzed sexual knowledge in diverse cultures. Ellis’ “model of cosmopolitanism” (Cohen & Denver, 2002, p. 254) was replete with medical and anthropological evidence from various cultures around the world. Reading Ellis’s volumes on the *Psychology of Sex* I have found that he quoted extensively from the works of various sexologists, such as Albert Moll, Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud, Norman Haire, Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch, August Forel and others. He was regarded as the ‘Dr. Einstein of Sex’ in America and, echoing this enthusiastic reception, Indian scholars addressed him as “the modern Vatsayana of the West,” on his visit during the 1930s, “in reference to the author of the classic *Kamasutra*” (Bauer, 2006).

Here it is necessary to mention other sexologists and transnational actors of that time who focused on the internationalization of sexual reform. The development of an international network was initiated by the German-Jewish researcher Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) who was anti-imperialist, homosexual, non-Eurocentric and anti-racist. He laid the bedrock of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee as an arena for international sexual reform and later founded the world’s first Institute for Sexual Research in 1918 (Matte, 2005). Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore from India visited the centre which had a museum with lectures and received prominent personalities from all over the world (Matte, 2005). Hirschfeld opted for a secular understanding based on the realisation of universal humanness as the

true and final aim. True to his motto “*Per scientiam ad justitiam!*” (*Through science to justice!*), Hirschfeld worked openly and tirelessly for sexual reform, involving legal, social, and political aspects of reform (Mancini, 2007). He organized the world’s first sexological congress in Berlin (1921) which was followed by another large international meeting in Copenhagen (1928) and ensured the founding congress of a World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR). Hirschfeld shared the presidency of the new organization with the Englishman Havelock Ellis and the Swiss August Forel and an international advisory board included the Americans Margaret Sanger, William Robinson, and Harry Benjamin, the English Dora Russell and Norman Haire, the Germans Helene Stöcker and Max Hodann, the Russian Alexandra Kollontai, and many other outstanding women and men from Canada, France, Italy, Spain, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Argentina, Chile, Liberia, Sweden and Japan (Haeberle, 2009).

After Nazis came to power Hirschfeld took a two-year lecture tour around the world, introducing the new science of sexology to audiences in America, Japan, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Egypt, Palestine and Greece (Haeberle, 2009). This trip was the first attempt by a single individual to bring sexological knowledge and research to the farthest corners of the world and thus globalized sexual science through networking. As an ‘eternal wanderer’, Hirschfeld declared emphatically:

*My field is the*

*World – not Germany, not Europe alone. (Bauer, 2006, 2010)*

His book *Weltreise eines Sexualforschers* [The World Journey of a Sex Researcher]<sup>6</sup> was generally considered to be one of the grounding texts of sexual ethnology.

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<sup>6</sup> The book has been published three times in English under titles Magnus Hirschfeld, *Women East and West: Impressions of a Sex Expert*, trans. O.P. Green, London: W. Heinemann, 1935; Magnus Hirschfeld, *Men and Women: The World Journey of a Sexologist*, with an introduction by A.A. Brill, New York: G.P.

Hirschfeld remained mobile in his search for intellectual company and collaboration. His international network and ideas of sexual reform became popular in colonial India. He travelled to Kolkata, had conversation with Rabindranath Tagore and met several other renowned people such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Jagadish Chandra Bose (Bauer, 2010). Sanjam Ahluwalia (2008, p. 19) highlighted that the Western advocates found an opportunity in countries like India to experiment and extend their subjective locations in ways not necessarily available to them within their own national boundaries.

Marie Stopes (1880–1958), the British pioneer of contraception, was the author of probably the most influential and widely read marriage manual of the inter-war period. She aimed at dissipating sexual ignorance and inhibition and championed the propagation of contraception, thus divorcing sex from reproduction. Her book *Married Love* (1918) became a global sensation and millions of copies had been sold by the 1920s (Margolie, 2004, p. 313) as it was considered to be an ideal marriage manual dealing with female sexuality from a woman's perspective. But Stopes' promotion of an ideal heterosexual love did not do away with the biases in the sexological prescriptions which conceived the image of a passive wife. Additionally, her promotion of contraceptive techniques in non-Western countries was often associated with eugenics and she was regarded as the imperial mother of birth control (Klausen, 2002).

Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), who paralleled Stopes' role, framed birth control as women's right to control their bodies (Chesler, 2007). She was renowned for her unequivocal promotion of scientifically-based conjugal sexuality and propounded the need for exposure to the ideas of modern sexology. Sanger also founded the journal *The Birth Control Review* and established clinics to provide contraceptive information. Sanger was also keen on the participation of Indian women in the International Birth Control Conference, as women were

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Putnam's Sons, 1935, reprint: New York: AMS, 1974; Magnus Hirschfeld, *Curious Sex Customs in the Far East*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935, reprint: New York: Capricorn, 1965.

not much aware of these important issues and only men were qualified to discuss it. From 1931, despite strong opposition, the AIWC (All India Women's Conference) passed resolutions in favour of opening birth control clinics and joined Sanger's Family Hygiene Society. While highlighting the importance of Sanger in starting an international interaction on birth control, Ahluwalia (2008, p. 71) argued that Sanger's attitude remained patronizing at best and that she constructed Indian women as passive subjects by paralleling colonial representations.

#### **2.4. WESTERN INFLUENCE ON INDIAN SOCIO-SEXUAL REFORMERS**

Western sexologists made an impact in shaping modern sexual science in India. Sanjam Ahluwalia (2013) argued that a Eurocentric notion has eclipsed the Indian actors who started to engage in the transnational encounter. Although the sexual reform movement in India drew sustenance from a few Western activists, simultaneously it had important contributions of its own to make to the global community.

As both Sanjam Ahluwalia (2008) and Sarah Hodges (2008) have argued in different ways, the new scientific thinking was truly global in character, with both European and Indian actors participating in the processes of its construction. David Arnold (2000) has argued that even though Indians, unsurprisingly, differed widely in their responses to Western science and its messages of modernity, some, especially among the Western educated, endorsed the call for India's transformation and identified wholeheartedly with the modernizing project. As Gyan Prakash (1996) has put it, "scientific reasoning became the organising metaphor in the discourse of the Western-educated elite. Impressed and stimulated by the scientific and industrial progress in the West, the elite began to scrutinise indigenous religions and society in the light of scientific reason, not just rationality. The 'cultural authority of science' and the 'authorisation of the elite as agents of modernity and progress' attained an enduring dominance" (p. 60). Scientifically inclined Indians were eager to set up societies of their own following an international model. Indian enthusiasts participated in international

conferences, invited Western activists to India, visited birth-control clinics in London and thus joined an emerging transnational movement for sexual reform. But often their attempts to join the international community as scientists rather than specimens were rebuffed (Bashford & Levine, 2010). These sexologists were a new cast of global actors but remained excluded from the international historiography. So, within the transnational movement of ideas, issues of the globalization and modernization of sexual reform were not unproblematic and remained rife with unequal power relations

Sanjay Srivastava (2004b) pointed to the overlap between Indian and Western modernity and highlighted that sexual science was inspired by the work of European writers and “such writings attracted an educated readership and found support from a wide cross-section of the English-speaking, modernizing intelligentsia in India, as well as influential men and women in other parts of the world” (p. 347). The English educated doctors like A. P. Pillai (1889-1956), R. D. Karve (1882-1953), N.S. Phadke (1894-1978), Girindra Sekhar Bose (1887-1953) became instrumental in developing international societies and journals. Dr A.P. Pillai was the most significant Indian figure involved in disseminating a scientific view of sexuality and marriage. Pillai was the founding editor of *The International Journal of Sexology* in Bombay, which incorporated the older journal *Marriage and Hygiene*, first issued in 1934, and could be compared with Alfred Kinsey (Ahluwalia, 2008). He was connected with prominent international figures of that time, such as Albert Ellis, Havelock Ellis and Norman Haire and established Sex and Society in collaboration with the latter. In the World League of Sexual Reform, R.D. Karve was the correspondent for India, just as Norman Haire was for England.

Gradually, conjugal life started to receive attention from modern Indian reformers who were impressed by the production of new sexual knowledge and wanted to promote a ‘rational’ modern sexual and social life by forming a network with international sexologists (Srivastava, 2004c). Articles by pioneering Indian sexologists and doctors such as A. P. Pillai and N. S. Phadke were published in Margaret Sanger’s journal. Indian sexologist N.S. Phadke was among

the first Indians to correspond with Margaret Sanger and to publish in her journal, the *Birth Control Review*. The foreword to Phadke's book *Sex Problem in India: Being a Plea for a Eugenic Movement in India and a Study of all Theoretical and Practical Questions Pertaining to Eugenics* (1927) was written by Margaret Sanger. R.D. Karve, who studied the subject for 15 years and gathered information during a tour of Europe in 1920, started supplying information about contraception in Bombay.

The enthusiastic reception of Western advocates by expert Indian sexologists and physicians, who were concerned about the 'ideal' family size, highlighted the proliferation of eugenic societies and Malthusian leagues which maintained their hierarchical power relations. The elite and the middle class became suspicious of the 'prolific progeny' of the working class and the poor (Ahluwalia, 2008), which tied the discourses on sexual science to a definite class character. Another important point is that these global agents of modern science wrote in English; this drew an international audience but mostly remained confined to the educated class, which made modern sexual knowledge inaccessible to the native mass.

## **2.5. VERNACULAR CIRCULATION OF SEX MANUALS**

Medical institutions established in colonial India circulated modern Western scientific knowledge but the non-Western vernacular sources on sexual science remained an area largely overlooked by the international community. Some scholars have highlighted how Hindi sources provided cosmopolitan space for the discussion of the female body, desire and conjugality in a patriarchal set up (Gupta, 2005; Reddy & Tambe, 2011; Tambe, 2000). However, little is known about the Bengali vernaculars as the site of cosmopolitan sexual knowledge and how they disseminated modern information about conjugality and contraception.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the vernacular literatures played their roles as a catalyst in popular print but sexuality remained a taboo topic living on the fringes of 'high' literatures. Some historians and critics have addressed this selective exclusion in the mainstream culture and raised the question of obscenity in the

publication and popularity of “cheap books” (Banerjee, 1987; Ghosh, 2002, 2003). Simultaneously, there was a demand for the books published by the Western educated indigenous intelligentsia, who perceived a need for ‘proper’ sexual science in order to effect modernization and reform.

As Sudipta Kaviraj (2002) argued, colonial Bengal witnessed an “extraordinary proliferation of associations” amongst elite, educated circles and there arose a “new spirit [and] access to the means to try out new ways of living” (p. 117). The examination of Bengali periodicals revealed that:

*a variety of these practices and regimes of knowledge had originally emerged in the West. These were re-situated in the course of colonial rule. The re-situation of these practices led to their reformulations as well. A different society, culture, tradition and existing indigenous knowledge systems provided the context in which the gradual spread of this knowledge occurred, followed by its adaptation and articulation through various reformulations. (Bose, 2006, p. 98)*

The popularity of the works of European writers and activists such as Havelock Ellis, Margaret Sanger (the ‘pioneer birth controller’) etc. during the opening decades of the twentieth century, suggested an overlapping with the themes and agendas which attracted an educated readership in Bengal. Strongly motivated to learn and master Western scientific knowledge, a group of Bengali doctors, sexologists and writers began critically analyzing the field of sexual science and started to consciously and actively re-appropriate their own modernity. This intertextual referencing in the Bengali vernaculars highlights the complex interrelationship between Bengali texts and other Western texts. Girindra Sekhar Bose, the first president of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society (1922) in Calcutta, carried on a twenty-year dialogue with Sigmund Freud and became a full-fledged member of the international psychoanalytic community, which gradually opened up into an expanded global space (Hartnack, 1990;

Kakar, 1997). He also wrote the foreword to some scientific sex manuals written in Bengali.

While searching for sources, I have come across many translated books on conjugal and reproductive sexuality by Western sexologists. Abraham Stone and Hannah Stone's translated book *A Marriage Manual* (1935), Marie Stopes' *Married Love* (1918) and Van de Valde's *Ideal Marriage* (1928) are significant in this regard. In Bengali vernaculars, women's sexuality became a very important concern within heterosexual relations. Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) and Marie Stopes (1880–1958) became household names to educated people. Conjugal incompatibility became a common and popular concern among Bengali sexologists and their Western counterparts as they started to address sexual problems in the private realm. Magazines such as *Swasthya* [*Health*] and *Swasthya Samachar* [*Health News*] incorporated some conjugal advice and referred to modern medicine practised in Europe and America. Popular sexual manual of the day was Surjyonarayan Ghosh's *Vaigyanik Dampottoyo Pronali* [*Scientific Process of Conjugality*], which was considered to be an important sex guide (Mukharji, 2011, p. 221). *Biyer Age o Pore* [*Before and after Marriage*] by Nripendrakumar Basu also merits mention in this regard. Rudrendrakumar Pal also wrote some sex guides, such as *Sachitra Yauna Vidya* [*Illustrated Sexual Knowledge*] and *Hormone* (1949) etc. Debiprasad Chatopadhyay and Girindrashankar Basu focused on Freud and ancient Indian sexology and scientifically analyzed many aspects of sexual life during the 1940s.

Abul Hassanat was widely acclaimed for the multiple editions of his book *Yauna Vigyan* [*Sexual Science*] (1936) and profusely praised for his diligent research, which is recorded in the books, periodicals and newspapers of his time. In the acknowledgement section in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of his book in 1949, *Anadabazar* recorded that he deftly combined ancient Sanskrit texts of the *Kamashastra* of Hindu society, Arab, Egyptian and Indian Muslim texts on sex and modern European sexology, thereby reflecting a true cosmopolitanism in his assessment of a global sexual culture. He uninhibitedly discussed Western sexual science in order to disseminate 'appropriate' sexual knowledge to



native readers and in this context explored female sexuality. He also introduced the concept of ‘modern’ marriage, whose chief feature is to sexually satisfy the wife by combining art and science.

So, breaking the boundaries of obscenity, morality and shame was the main objective of these twentieth century books and periodicals, which strived to create a public discourse on the female body and sexuality. Fierce debates and tensions about censorship also surrounded the sex manuals or works of sexual science which recorded the moral dilemma that overpowered the language of sexual science. But most of the Bengali health magazines and marriage manuals were controlled by men, and women worked only in limited operational areas, such as motherhood and child-rearing. Although the paramount concern of the native male writers and foreign activists was predominantly their female counterpart, the voices of Bengali women themselves in matters of sexuality were uncommon.

In the following section I will provide a detailed discussion of how the perspective of Western and Indian sexology remained largely a male one.

## **2.6. DEBATES ON GENDER BIAS AND CRITICISM OF THE WESTERN SEXOLOGISTS**

Female sexuality was a prominent concern in sexual reform and, with its global undertaking, pleasure was divorced from procreation. Women were starting to be perceived as autonomous agents controlling their own sexuality rather than appearing as mere instruments of reproduction. But the view of women’s emancipation was narrow in the sense that women were to be given equal rights as long as they remained different and feminine. This was rooted in the doctrine of ‘separate spheres’ for men and women and based on biological differences (Jeffreys, 1985, p. 137). Patriarchal values were present among both Indian and Western sexologists and “sexological tracts of the 1920s and 1930s, whether written by Europeans or by Indians, articulated a new language of control” (Haynes, 2012, p. 824).

As sexual reform coincided with the suffrage movement in the West, discourses on sexuality somewhat challenged the “single, highly educated, economically autonomous New Woman” (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 156) who pioneered new roles. Feminist critic Sheila Jeffreys (1985) blamed Havelock Ellis and his fellows as well as the congress of the World League for Sex Reform (1929) for making “a great contribution to the defeat of militant feminism” (p. 26). Ellis was also labelled as anti-feminist by Jeffreys (1985) who pointed out that he believed in ‘equivalence’ not equality. This meant that the “two halves of the race are compensatory in their unlikeness”. He saw the two sexes as having quite separate, biologically determined roles and emphasized the ‘naturalness’ of motherhood as the greatest aim of a woman’s life. Ellis was alarmed at the idea that women should have “the same education as men, the same occupations as men, even the same sports” (qtd in Jeffreys, 1985, p. 138) and was disappointed with the feminist movement. Stringent criticism by Western sexologists like Havelock Ellis was directed at women’s (especially college women’s) new freedom of address, interest in careers, and other attributes of the New Woman as symptomatic of tendencies towards sexual depravity and inversion. Their “masculine straight-forwardness and sense of honor, and especially the attitude toward men, free from any suggestion of shyness” (Ellis, 1901, pp. 142–143) was seen as a sign of degeneracy. The advent of sexology raised worries about such a gender-defiant attitude. Women’s cross-dressing and ‘transgressive’ social and sexual behaviour were highly condemned by expert medical writers.

August Forel, the Swiss sexual reformer who was associated with Ellis, believed in natural physical and mental differences between men and women and his gender bias was expressed in *The Sexual Question* (1922):

*The emancipation of women is not intended to transform them into men, but simply to give them their human rights ... It in no way wishes to impose work on women nor to make them unaccustomed to it. (p. 504).*

The Swedish ‘maternalist’ Ellen Key was also highly critical of the “new women’s disinclination for motherhood” (Halaand, 1993). Van

de Valde (1928) wrote in the second volume of *Ideal Marriage*, “the sexual impulse is associated in women with a tendency to submit herself” (LeGates, 2001) by drawing a difference between the sexual desires of men and women. So, there was a growing backlash among sexologists against the rise of independent women. Charlotte Haldane (1927) saw the ‘warworking’ type of ‘woman’ as the most significant ‘enemy’ of motherhood:

*aping the cropped hair, the great booted feet, the grim jaw, the uniform, and if possible the medals, of the military man. If this type had been transitory its usefulness might be accorded, but it is not doubtful, as I propose to show, that in a long run we shall have to regret its social and political influence, much as we may applaud its wartime work. (qtd. in Jeffreys, 1985, 207–208)*

In this context it can be noted that Ellis and other sexologists glorified Vatsayana, the writer of the *Kamasutra* and the architect of India’s ‘golden age’ of sexual liberation. But even though the *Kamasutra* was praised profusely by Western writers as the classic erotic text, it portrayed women as subjugated to male desire by perpetuating the traditional role of the wife as an obedient disciple while emphasizing that “a married woman could acquire [sexual] knowledge with the permission of her husband” (Roy, 1998, p. 57). The *Kamasutra* was deeply rooted in patriarchal notions of women as men’s property and conceived sexual desire from the male point of view by attributing secondary roles to women and portraying them as courtesans and prostitutes, as argued by contemporary feminists at the Jaipur Literature Festival, which was organized in 2013 (Sengar, 2013).

## **2.7. AMBIVALENCES TOWARDS SEXUAL REFORM IN INDIA**

The women’s movement in India, as in the West, was deeply divided over the subject of regulating sexuality. Indian feminists were very careful not to link contraception with women’s sexual freedom and argued that birth control information should be made available only to married women and not to the unmarried and thus it was concerned with issues of immorality. Their emphasis remained on women as mothers and their concern and anxiety about access to birth control

among unmarried women continued to inscribe women's bodies as reproductive bodies. In contrast, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, the prominent social reformer, chairperson/secretary of AIWC (All India Women's Conference) and an outspoken member of the socialist wing of the Indian National Congress, objected to such biased opinions and declared that birth control was "the sacred and inalienable right of every woman to possess the means to control her body and no God or man can attempt to deprive her of that right without perpetrating an outrage on womanhood" (Anandhi, 2000, p. 150; Ramusack, 1989). She publicly supported birth control as a woman's right over her own body. She travelled to the U.S., toured birth control clinics and visited Sanger in Tucson, Arizona, who in turn introduced her to a Japanese birth control advocate who was also visiting the States (Ramusack, 1989). But women's political organizations such as the AIWC (All India Women's Conference), and the NCW (National Commission for Women), remained bifurcated over the issue of birth control.

On the other hand, Indian nationalist leaders were staunchly opposed to adopting Western knowledge, which was seen as a form of compromising national integrity. The construction of the image of Mother India espoused and idealized motherhood and argued that the very purpose of a woman's existence is to procreate. Margaret Sanger's debate with Gandhi on birth control<sup>7</sup> became a contested topic. Gandhi (1947) propounded that sanctioning the use of contraceptives would encourage sexual pleasure, 'profligacy' and 'vice' and suggested that all expressions of sexuality should be confined to the realm of patriarchal and procreative conjugality. Even within matrimony, the traditionally accepted legitimate space for sexual expression, Gandhi emphasized that bodies are not meant for sexual pleasure (Ahluwalia 2008; Anandhi, 2000). Refuting his proposition, Sanger referred to 'universal sisterhood' as she stressed the point that the heart of the Indian woman is not different from the heart of the American, Chinese, Italian or European woman where

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<sup>7</sup> One episode of which was published in *Asia Magazine* in 1936 and then reprinted in other journals in the subcontinent.

love is concerned. She focused on the equality of men's and women's sexuality as grounds for contesting Gandhi's views (Haynes, 2012; Ahluwalia, 2013). Another prominent internationalist, Marie Stopes, too, insisted on arguments against Gandhi's position on the importance of "women's sexual satisfaction to a successful, companionate marriage" (Hodges, 2008, p. 54; Ahluwalia, 2008, p. 73). In spite of nationalist objections, the birth control ideas of Sanger and others were certainly embraced by a wide range of Indian feminists and scientific thinkers and this suggested the compatibility of conjugal sexuality with modernity. Facing opposition from the Indian nationalists, Sanger urged Rabindranath Tagore to give his support in forming international linkages and he favourably complied with her and complimented her efforts (Dutta & Robinson, 1997, p. 320).

The Self-Respect Movement founded by Periyar demonstrated a clear departure from the moral notes associated with birth control and highlighted that desire is natural. Anandhi (2000) noted that he ridiculed those who advocated women's role solely as child-bearers. Periyar viewed contraception as a means to exercise women's right over their bodies and thus he linked it with the sexual autonomy of women:

*First of all, whether a woman needs birth control or not should be entirely woman's decision ... to create an environment for women to have rights and decision-making power (qtd. in Anandhi, 2000, p. 155).*

However, there was strong resistance against women's sexual freedom and the notion of respectable sexuality was supposed to be restricted to marital relations.

In the following sections I will discuss the emergence of two specific figures in the public sphere: the Modern Girl and the New Woman, and how the project of sexual reform is linked with women's sovereignty over their bodies.

## 2.8. WOMEN AND THE WORLD

“Throughout the world, women’s history has developed differently in different countries, and among groups within these countries, and cannot be separated from the political context” (Forbes, 2005, p. 1). The phrase ‘woman question’ was usually popular in connection with social changes and the rise of feminism in the West. During the twentieth, century the suffrage movement questioned the fundamental roles of women in Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Russia etc. But there were also global interconnections to these historical changes. The early twentieth century was marked by a period of transition when the old order of life was fast fading in relation to the expression of women’s social and sexual autonomy. There are numerous pieces of literature which have traced the history of the women’s movement and investigated the nature of modernization and changing ideas about the female body, sexuality and debates on reproductive rights in the West (Helsing, 1983; Evans, 1994). But there was no focus on the changing roles of women in non-Western countries to the same degree.

Before going into the transnational connections, here I will highlight the emergence of the New Woman in the West, which highlighted a breaking away from the bourgeois domesticity and the choice of intellectual self-fulfillment and autonomous roles outside the patriarchal family (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). Issues of women’s suffrage, reproductive rights and bodily autonomy dominated cultural discussions in newspapers and intellectual circles. While many women were supportive of these changing roles, they did not agree unanimously about the complete overhaul of conventional institutions and modes of behaviour, and the issues of marriage and sexual autonomy remained the most divisive.

Prominent concerns among the proponents of female sexual autonomy were the moral regulation of women’s right to sexual pleasure, preventing an unmarried couple from living together, adultery, the age of consent, birth control, homosexuality, abortion, public discussion of sexuality and sex education. Victoria Woodhull,

Alexandra Kollontai, Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger championed free love, by which they meant the freedom to love, marry, divorce and bear children without religious or governmental interference (Jensen, 2010). English homosexual socialist Edward Carpenter and international sexologist Havelock Ellis, alongside Emma Goldman and Clara Zetkin advocated sexual freedom, including homosexuality and access to contraception. Emma Goldman stressed the importance of love and companionship and attacked conventions and traditions, including puritanism. As an anarchist, she argued that women needed internal emancipation to know their own value, respect themselves and refuse to become psychological or economic slaves to their male lovers (Ackelsberg, 2005, p. 52). Women's assertive roles in society surged with the weakening of parental authority, the growth of peer attachment, the decline of traditional morality and a strong resurgence of individualism (Mintz, 2004).

Sexual reform coincided with the peak of the suffrage movement, which was a liberating experience for many women. During WWI and the interwar period, middle-class women began to enjoy more independent roles in public life, freed from the supervision of their families, and entered the world of work as men went to the battlefield. With the emergence of a 'new' type of woman, who rejected Victorian concepts of domesticity, women threw themselves into a broad range of public activities previously deemed incompatible with proper womanhood (Søland, 2000). By the end of the First World War, women were winning the vote, engaging in formerly masculine activities such as smoking and drinking and participating in the male world of work outside the home and the entire sex was "tomboyified" (Abate, 2008, p. x).

Women's growing adventurous lifestyle eventually generated social tensions and moral panic. The 'New Women', who wore bloomers and rode bicycles, striding forward to college and career, were parodied in satirical pieces (Marks, 1990). These 'revolting daughters' were drawn towards athletics and exhibited a sort of 'manliness' which indicated a deep fear of gender transference. Due to their departure from the traditional prototype of womanhood, they

were often described as disintegrators of the social fabric, in opposition to the conventional ‘womanly woman’.

These athletic New Women conjured up images of masculinization, which was viewed critically by medical writers, psychiatrists and sexologists. The influential psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1906) viewed sport and adventure as intrinsically male and thus a sure indication of the ‘Manly Woman’ whose action and appearance were “those of the man”:

*She is the rival in their play, preferring the rocking-horse, playing at soldiers, etc., to dolls and other girly occupations ... At times smoking and drinking are cultivated even with passion ... The masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom, finds pleasure in the pursuit of manly sports, and in manifestations of courage and bravado. There is a strong desire to imitate the male fashion in dressing the hair and in general attire (p. 264)*

Havelock Ellis was also highly critical of the New Woman’s gender-deviant behaviour. He highlighted the traits of the ‘manly woman’ or ‘invert’ as exhibiting a masculine straightforwardness, a sense of honour, a pronounced taste for smoking cigarettes, a lack of shyness and “a dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations, while there is some capacity for athletics” (qtd in Jeffreys, 1985, p. 105).

Despite these criticisms, the feminist movement in the West grew stronger and the traditional subjugation of women within marital, social and familial domains was challenged. But the environment during and directly after WWII again encouraged marriage as a stabilizing force because keeping the home in order was deemed to be a wife’s primary duty. So, there were transformations in the roles of women in the West during and after World War II (Soland, 2002).

In this thesis, I will highlight global interconnections during the advent of the Modern Girl and the New Woman in the public sphere. The women’s question was invariably linked with new ideas about the female body, sexuality and sexual freedom in non-Western



countries. While women in the West were struggling for their socio-sexual autonomy, India, and particularly Bengal, also saw the rise of the Modern Girl and the New Woman, who were interlinked with global sexual reform. In *Nara-Naree* such transformations in Bengali women's roles were recorded.

### **2.8.1. GLOBAL EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN GIRL AND THE NEW WOMAN**

To understand the global interconnectedness in conceptualizing the search for female subjectivity, we need to know the background of how the Modern Girl and the New Woman emerged worldwide and to understand how moral panic was associated with their social transgression of gender boundaries. Angela Woollacott (1999) argued that women's modernity was derived from a sense of global interconnectedness and that the trope of the Modern Girl and the New Woman could be located within and across colonial, national and international frameworks. The early decades of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of discussions in the popular press about the 'new' or 'modern' woman that ranged from Japan, China, Siam and India to South Africa, Germany, England and America (Ikeya, 2008) and the trope of the 'Modern Girl' was circulated around the global print culture. During the interwar period, mobility became integral to the meaning of modernity in cosmopolitan Asia and 'modern girls on the go' (Freedman et al., 2013) started to transgress the boundaries of what was then deemed to be appropriate female behaviour.

There have been a number of studies on the emergence of the urban Modern Girls in Asian countries (Choi 2013; Marran, 2007; Ramamurthy, 2006; Sato, 2003) and these studies argued that Asian women who followed Westernized fashions and lifestyles during the early twentieth century often triggered patriarchal anxiety and were deemed as provoking adultery and licentiousness and leading to socio-moral decline. Notwithstanding social regulation, the Modern Girl glided onto the scene from London and Paris to Singapore and Shanghai, Penang and Kolkata to Boston and Burma as flappers or in "trousers and casual shifts inspired by Art Deco couture, and donned new, androgynous styles consonant with existing cultural traditions"

(Lewis, 2009, p. 1386). The Modern Girl was characterized as a rebel venturing into the public domain, pursuing modern education, breaking away from the patriarchal family and embodying an adventure into the ‘outer world’. The Modern Girl is quintessentially a cosmopolitan, transgressive, urbanized figure of male desire. She inhabited the interstices of colonial and national spaces and embodied the very fragility of those boundaries (Ramamurthy, 2006). Some scholars have argued that we should view the Modern Girl as a commodity, produced and marketed by a capitalist society during the jazz age, while other scholars have suggested that modern girls can also be viewed as revolutionary figures who challenged conventional values and traditional ideas about the female body and sexuality. A critical analysis of the iconography of the Modern Girl in the colonial cosmopolitan space can be found in a number of works (Ikeya, 2008; Dong, 2008; Yen, 2005; Allen, 2010). Among scholarly works dealing with the rise of the Modern Girl in the commodity culture, the most significant is *The Modern Girl around the World* (2008), which systematically established the global link in the conception and contentions of modernity.

Global sexual reform impacted upon the fantasies and anxieties evoked by the figure of the Modern Girl that was emerging in Indian films of that time (Allen, 2010; Haynes, 2012; Ramamurthy, 2006). It embodied the attractions of heterosexual romantic love and represented a spirit of rebelliousness and sexuality. Priti Ramamurthy (2008) probed into the picturesque profile of Indian cinema and explored the images and lifestyles of some prominent female film stars who were experimenting with the emergence of the new cosmopolitan modernity. The Modern Girl was also socially visible as the English-educated college girl who was exploring the world outside her home. The denigration of Modern-Girl culture by nationalist leaders and her erasure from subsequent nationalist historiography powerfully reveals the manner in which hegemonic nationalism distanced itself from women’s participation in “artificial modernity” (Niranjana, 1998; Ramamurthy, 2006).

A study of American Modern Girls in the 1920s (Abate, 2008) highlighted the two intertwining and distinctive models of flappers

and tomboys who exhibited modern trends and became globally prevalent. Even though the appearance of modern women in the Indian scenario was critically debated, there was not much focus on tomboys by Indian scholars. So this area is worth investigating.

There has been a considerable amount of work done on the New Woman in the West (Marks, 1990; Matthews, 2003; Smith-Rosenberg, 1985), embodying crucial historical changes and sociocultural tensions. In this connection, the global prevalence of the New Woman is worth noting in a number of works by Asian scholars (Choi, 2013; Lowy, 2007; Ramamurthy, 2008; Stevens, 2003). The New Woman in India has also been a subject of critical investigation (Chatterjee, 1989; Murshid, 1983; Ramamurthy, 2011). Even though the Modern Girl and the New Woman both defied traditional patriarchal control over women's bodies, there was a thin line of difference in the politics of respectability. As New Women, women stood for the nation and its quest for modernity—modernity understood as an admirable state of civilization, strength and progress. At the same time, as Modern Girls, women were used to “represent fears for the modern nation and the drawbacks of modernity—modernity understood as a state of danger, individual alienation and cultural loss” (Stevens, 2003, p. 83) that accompanied the urban cosmopolitan world. In contrast, the New Woman was often equated with the positive aspects of modernity as educated, political and nationalistic. The New Woman archetype highlighted the transformation of a backward or bourgeois woman into a new model, thus representing the necessary transformation of the nation and saving it from the ‘rootlessness’ of cosmopolitanism. The image of the New Woman could be distinguished from the Modern Girl by her association with leftist and progressive intellectuals (Stevens, 2003, p. 83).

The conflict between the archetype of the New Woman, symbolizing the changing gender ideology, and that of the Modern Girl as a symbol of Westernization, was a popular concern in Asia. In India, the New Woman was an acceptable form as she was socially and nationally committed and was trying to establish a new order even though there were traditional criticisms and apprehensions about her

movements in the public sphere. The New Woman was supposed to be the mother of the Modern Girl, more mature and rational in her social dealings. Contestations between the iconography of the Modern Girl and that of the New Woman constituted the broader political ideology of the modern nation by linking the intimate with the global.

There are some studies of the New Woman in Bengal (Chatterjee, 1989), but studies of the Modern Girl are scarce in the Bengali context. The Bengali Modern Girl was recast differently from the New Woman, who criticized traditional gender roles and the educated Bengali *Bhadramahila* [gentlewoman], a regional prototype of ‘respectable’ woman who inhabited a procreative, middle-class femininity within heterosexual marriage.

### **2.8.2. THE MODERNIZATION OF BENGALI WOMEN AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DICHOTOMY**

As I have highlighted in the previous sections, the emergence of global debates about sexual reform and the appearance of the Modern Girl and the New Woman proved the fact that contestation about modernity in urban colonial cosmopolitan Kolkata (Allen, 2010) was not a distinct phenomenon. Colonial rule in Bengal, despite its unequal power relations, strengthened transnational linkages and initiated a self-critical change in the native social arrangements of gender relations. The women’s question was a central issue in the Bengali Renaissance and social reform was impelled by the progressive ideas imported from European educationalists. The women’s question increasingly became the locus of critical discussions regarding social reform among the English-educated urban elite of Bengali *Bhadraloks* (gentlemen) and it led to the emergence of significant debates pertaining to sexual reform. This group of English-educated men aimed to elevate their women and enrich their own lives by moulding women appropriately to fit men’s modernized views and expectations of marriage and the family (Datta, 2009, p. 45). This movement, coupled with other aspects of

social change, brought about a considerable transformation in the roles and status of women as well as in their self-perceptions. But the association of the women's question with sexual reform and social change did not receive adequate critical attention.

With exposure to European ideals, men and women became equally concerned about the parameters of a 'modern model' for Bengali women, who needed to be emancipated and inspired by the 'liberated' Western women but, at the same time, it was problematized by the urgent need to draw a distinction between the local and global, national and imperial binaries. In this context, it is striking to note how much of the literature on modern women was obsessively focused on the theme of the threat posed by the Westernization of newly-educated Bengali women. Ghulam Murshid (1983) highlighted how male Bengali reformers panicked about the impact of Western education on native culture, even though educated women were eager to break seclusion. The concern was that the educated and Westernized woman cared little about the well-being of the home and the family (Chatterjee, 1989; Murshid, 1983). Some were particularly afraid of feminism. A Bengali book, *Iurope Amerikar Yauna Tattwa* [*Europe America's Sexual Theory*] (1923) described the 'evil' effects of Western influence on Bengali society by emphasizing the ideas of sexual reform in the works of Western writers. Hardik Biswas (2013) recorded that the new-found modernity or *bibiana* (English style) of the *memsahib* [European Woman] was perceived as particularly harmful for society and spoke about the socio-moral anxiety about women's expanding sphere. In satires and parodies, piano-playing English-educated Bengali women were depicted as vamps who kept men at their feet. To ridicule the idea of a Bengali woman trying to imitate the ways of a *memsahib* was a sure recipe calculated to evoke raucous laughter and moral condemnation from both male and female audiences (Chatterjee, 1989). Ghulam Murshid (1983) highlighted how people were prejudiced against women wearing any articles associated with Western modernity and often described how female education and modernization would destroy all the womanly qualities of Bengali women. It is interesting to note that 'modern fashion' made a man no less virtuous or patriotic but rendered a woman immoral and unpatriotic. It was presumed that the 'future'

‘modernized’ ‘manly’ woman might drive her own carriage, smoke cigars and wear boots. Even though modern Bengali men accepted Western dress and trousers for themselves, they restricted Western dress for their women. This distinction was tied to the ‘politics of difference’ where the Bengali woman was constructed as a spiritual being, as opposed to the Western woman, who was individualistic, materialistic and excessively sexual (Anandhi, 2000). The unresolved dilemma and moral panic about sexual expression and suppression were reflected in the texts dealing with the adventures of ‘newly educated’ and ‘liberated’ women (Bannerji, 2001). Therefore, ‘too much freedom’ was criticized as it was believed that it would unsettle the institution of marriage and motherhood, leading to adultery and immodesty. As the Westernized Modern Girl and New Woman in Bengal represented the new ways of being, new modes of behaviour, new patterns and attitudes and a reversal of gender roles, cultural tension was evident to a large extent within sexual reform. These caricatures and negative reactions were surprisingly similar to the portrayals of the New Woman and the Modern Girl in the West and other Asian countries, where they flouted patriarchal norms and received a great deal of attention in the popular press. So, women were given a choice of selecting from a wide array of discourses on tradition and modernity (Anagol, 2008, p. 284). The self-emancipation of women also revolved within its own gendered logic of being “different yet modern” (Chatterjee, 1989; Chakrabarty, 1997). But the myth of the compliant woman was problematic as women were not mute receivers of such instructions within traditional patriarchy, nationalism and social reform organizations (Forbes, 2005). Some scholars (Allen, 2010; Bandyopadhyay, 1994; Chatterjee, 1989; Forbes, 2004; Murshid, 1983; Tambe, 2000) have highlighted how native women were developing their own modernity. Conflicts between the new and the old forms of social order became further complicated as women contested the confines of their prescribed space within the inner domain (*andar mahal/antahpur*) of the home and argued against gender bias and female seclusion, urging that allowing women to mix with men would not necessarily make them unchaste or immoral (Murshid, 1983). So, the emergence of modern women precipitated a serious clash of personalities between

the educated, liberated woman who dressed and lived differently from her more traditional counterparts.

This new-found aspiration for individuality and desire for change on the one hand, and the unchanging balance of power within the home, family and society on the other spearheaded mounting tensions. Dagmer Engels (1996) highlighted the contentions in the public domain when women became visible in the social arena through their participation in the nationalist movement. Even though the male nationalist resolution demarcated the two domains, public and private, by allocating the home to the woman and the world to the man, the New Woman started to attend the schools and medical colleges that had begun to develop in the metropolitan cities, which took them away from their domestic confines by giving them a public identity beyond the familial (Sarkar, 2008, p. 4). The trajectory of social reform also blended into the new world of women's political activism. In the anti-colonial struggle, a number of young women joined the militant nationalist movement, learned to shoot, made bombs, drove cars and carried out armed struggle along with men, thereby challenging the existing norm of 'feminine respectability' (Datta, 2009).

The New Woman entered into the public domain by speaking out on issues like marriage, the sexual double standard and the new roles of Bengali modern women. These possibilities included expanding what women might say in public and what was 'sayable' about sexual consent. Socio-sexual reform concentrated on and was directed towards women in order to balance cultural identity and global modernity. But it continued to involve the disciplining of women, whose sexuality was still to be contained within the context of marriage. Thus, women's bodies became a contentious terrain and a site for social dialogue, marked by the overlapping agendas that were continuously being negotiated and appropriated. There were myriad conflicts about the amount of female emancipation desired by society, and the dilemma between the world and the home lay at the heart of this new project.

The modernization and social reform project of Brahma Samaj<sup>8</sup> has attracted much attention, but sexual reform remained unaddressed. In this connection, Ghulam Murshid (1983) highlighted that modernization in Bengal began with the ‘penetration’ of Western ideas but also emphasized that the modernization of Bengali women had not included a sense of emancipation like their Western counterparts:

*Despite their long exposure to modernization, educated Bengali women are still quite traditional in some respects. For example, they are not sexually ‘liberated’, and most of them would not be aware of such a concept. Premarital and extramarital sex is still regarded as extremely exceptional. In married life, a woman probably remains satisfied with her sexual experiences irrespective of quality and quantity.*

The Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* remains distinct in this respect. In Chapters 5 and 6 I will explore how Bengali women became increasingly assertive about individual autonomy and rights over their bodies and this will fill the gap created by the existing lack of research in this area. I will also highlight how interest in the women’s question generated various debates about the new Bengali women, their sexual roles, conjugality and contraception and thus address the need to re-organize fundamental societal relations and forms of power. As a new consciousness was emerging in the Bengali domain, the competing ideals of a new sexual behaviour raised fundamental anxieties surrounding the concepts of modernity and morality. I also intend to look into the conflicting ways in which Bengali writers confronted multiple dilemmas in establishing themselves as equally modern with some cultural differences in relation to the West in an attempt to negotiate their own modernity and to spread modernity to the women of Bengal. Simultaneously, I will also examine how women responded to and participated in the project of modernization and issued varied responses aimed at connecting the home and the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Brahma Samaj was at the forefront of the social reform movements during the nineteenth century. It questioned prevalent gender norms and practices.



## 2.9. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided the background to the global sexual reform and how Western scientific notions of the female body and sexuality influenced Bengali ideas about modern conjugality. I have highlighted the research gap and indicated that there is no scholarly discussion on the global interconnectedness and transnational processes of sexual reform in the Bengali context. There is no systematic study of the Bengali Modern Girl and New Woman and their global emergence. The role of the New Woman was solely interpreted in the context of the changing roles of women at home and in sociopolitical affairs, but not in terms of conjugal and sexual relations. So *Nara-Naree* is significant in this regard.

The key theme is how transnational processes of modernization affected the social changes that happened in Bengal and intertextually impacted upon ideas about the female body and sexuality. I have also noted the dubious nature of the sexual emancipation of women in the modern sexual reform and in this connection I have underscored how the conceptualization of modern women was interlinked with modern sexual reform through the emergence of two distinctive yet overlapping archetypes: the Modern Girl and the New Woman. So, this chapter has provided a foundation for the further textual analyses in Chapters 5 and 6, in which I will explore how the contributors to the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939–1950) negotiated and conceptualized normative notions of the female body and conjugality in the global dialogue and transnational social movements on modern sexual reform. In Chapter 6, I will also underscore how the reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality in *Nara-Naree* registered cultural tensions and changes in the portrayals of the Bengali Modern Girl and the Bengali New Woman.

This chapter provides the rationale for moving into the next chapter, which deals with the overall theoretical framework and grounds the main research questions.



## **CHAPTER 3. COSMOPOLITANISMS, MODERNITIES AND SEXUALITIES**

In Chapter 2 I have provided the historical background to transnational interconnectedness. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework in relation to the problem formulation and methodology which will help in the further analysis of the contents of the magazine. This theoretical framework offers a lens to examine global interconnectedness in Chapters 5 and 6. It will also highlight the cosmopolitan features and paradoxical notions of modernity and the complexities inherent therein. By tracing the transnational traits in the hybrid world of Bengal, I will explore the ways in which various issues are intertextually interlinked, situated and problematized against the larger sociopolitical backdrop of the magazine.

### **3.1. BRIDGING THE HOME AND THE WORLD**

Cosmopolitanism is associated with an essentially moral view that individuals have allegiance to the wider world. It is based on the principle of global openness, which is associated with the notion of global publics. In this context, the name of Rabindranath Tagore is relevant as he was a humanist, universalist, internationalist, anti-imperialist and the first non-European Nobel laureate who brought Bengal to the global stage. Martha Nussbaum (1996) in her critique of patriotism referred to his novel *The Home and the World* (1916) (the original Bengali title of which is *Ghare Baire*), which highlighted how nationalism obstructs the fuller growth and potential of cosmopolitanism. Tagore, the global citizen, was no friend of nationalism and he destabilized the comfortable bifurcation between the home and the world and showed that when women exit into the world, they do so with more than interests in the home or tradition. Tagore's writings bore the mark of a locally rooted globalism and a commitment to a universal humanism and an avowed love for the country (Saha, 2013). Tagore actively espoused an alternative model of attachment which sought to balance local commitment with humanist ideals (Saha, 2013). Martha Nussbaum's (1996) seminal

essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” drew inspiration from cosmopolitan thinkers from the Stoics through Kant and Tagore, and advanced a strong cosmopolitan universalism. Nussbaum defined a cosmopolitan as a “citizen of the world ... whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world,” in terms of “what we share as rational and mutually dependent human beings” (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 2).

### **3.2. DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF COSMOPOLITANISM AND WORLDVIEWS**

The term cosmopolitanism is derived from the Greek word *kosmopolitês* (‘citizen of the world’) by combining the two words *cosmos* and *polites*, meaning citizen (those who belong to the *polis*, the city) of the world (*cosmos*). Martha Nussbaum (1996) elaborates on the concept by quoting the ancient Greek Cynic philosopher Diogenes who, when asked where he came from, replied, “I am a citizen of the world.” He, thus, refused to be defined by his locality and insisted on defining himself in terms of universal aspirations and concerns. The Stoics who followed his lead argued that each of us dwells, in effect, in two communities – the local community of our birth, and the community of human aspiration that “is truly great and truly common, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our nation by the sun” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 6).

In the same way, the Sanskrit phrase “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (“vasudha” = the earth; “iva” = as a; and “kutumbakam” = family) implies that the whole world is a family and emphasizes the importance of cultivating one’s sense of belonging and attachment from within. Herbert Marshall McLuhan used the term in his theory to denote the concept of the “global village”. Similarly, Ubuntu is an African humanist philosophy or worldview which focuses on ‘human kindness’ and people’s allegiances and relations with each other. So even though cosmopolitanism has recently become a buzzword in the academic world, its origin is not new. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007) drew attention to how Christoph Martin defined “ideal cosmopolitans” as individuals who “regard all the people of the earth as so many branches of a single family, and the universe as a state, of

which they, with innumerable other rational beings, are citizens, promoting together under the general laws of nature the perfection of the whole, while each in his own fashion is busy about his own well-being” (p. xv).

For a long time, cosmopolitanism has been associated with Western moral and political philosophy (Tan, 2004) and has tended to be linked with a universalistic orientation towards a world community (Bohman & Bachmann, 1997). Now various arguments about cosmopolitanism are striving to redefine the traditional implications of rootlessness and examine the viability of globalism with localism in a non-Western setting, from a thick solidarity (which overpowers difference) to a more rooted view of solidarity. So, the concept of multiple cosmopolitanisms is explored in specific cultural, philosophical and political contexts without any pre-given or foreclosed conclusion. Cosmopolitanism has thus become a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do (Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha et al, 2000). Delanty (2006) suggested a post-universalistic kind of cosmopolitanism and noted that the very notion of cosmopolitanism compels the recognition of multiple kinds of cosmopolitanisms and different modernities.

When two different cultures come into contact there emerge new signs of hybridity. New transcultural forms arise from the cross-cultural exchange and an in-between space is generated signifying a complex, on-going negotiation. Bhabha (1994) considers this to be an interstitial perspective, “It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the inter-subjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1–2). Delanty & He (2008) opined:

*European liberalism, nationalism and Marxism have all been absorbed by Asian civilizations to the extent that these European ideologies have become internalized as an*

*essential component of Asian cultures. Asian hybrid cultural forms are favourable milieus for the development of cosmopolitanism. Many political, economic and cultural reforms; or the transformation of Asian societies have been taken in the light of the perspectives from Europe and America... These facts suggest that there is a stronger 'external' dimension to Asia than is the case in Europe.*

(pp. 17-18)

The boundaries of belonging, sometimes physically, but always symbolically, separate the global population into 'us' and 'them'. Cultural identities are based on these notions of difference, and knowledge about various communities and cultures are constructed through the social interactions of a group. The category of the nation is used as a kind of tool to distinguish between who belongs and who does not. It is believed that nationalism prioritizes the 'nation/home' over other categories while, in contrast, cosmopolitanism prioritizes the 'world' and thus it legitimates discourses and practices that transcend the nation. Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) definition of nations as 'imagined communities' stressed the fluidity of the notion as it can be defined as contingent, heterogeneous and subject to change.

Here I will avoid the strict bipolarity that structures most of the existing literature on colonial encounters and will instead highlight the cultural overlap of the Western and Bengali spheres of sexual reform, which produced a new state of interaction and generated dichotomies and contentions in Bengali traditional values and social norms for conceptualizing the liberated roles of women.

In this chapter I will discuss the concepts of cosmopolitanism and modernization in the context of Bengal and highlight the women's question and its interrelation with the meanings of the home and the world.

### 3.3. MODERNIZATION AND CONTACT ZONE

Cosmopolitanism builds upon theories of modernization. The rise of humanism is interlinked with the advent of the Enlightenment and the coming of modernity. Classical modernization theory is based on Durkheim's view that the world can be divided into two parts, the traditional and the modern. A modern society is equal to a developed society, and is based on the Enlightenment values of secularism, rationality, scientism and optimism (Chatterjee and Riley, 2001). Timothy Mitchell (2000, p.1) argues that "Modernization continues to be commonly understood as a process begun and finished in Europe, from where it has been exported across the ever-expanding regions of the non-West." There is a danger of drawing a dividing line between 'pre-modern' and 'advanced' cultures which associates Westernness as being modern and non-Westernness as standing opposed to the modern. To define modernity as a singularly Western phenomenon excludes the non-West forever and thus it fails to capture the historical connectedness, overlaps, dichotomies and paradoxes of modernization. The non-West is not a space of absolute difference without any historical linkages with the 'West' (Srivastava, 2004c). The very conception of the other of the West as being something to which Western concepts do not apply is itself a Western legacy (John & Nair, 1998). In this regard it is necessary to keep in mind Antoinette Burton's (1999) critique of a single Eurocentric view of modernity as "the concepts of modernity and tradition [are] themselves colonial constructs" (pp. 3-4).

Modernity cannot be understood as a singular Eurocentric phenomenon travelling from the West to the East; rather, it needs to be understood as 'multiple' and composed of 'alternative' or 'parallel' forms and it is also necessary to recognize the agency of educated Bengalis as producers and appropriators of their own modernity. When non-Western people began to engage critically with the discourse of modernity, it led to the creation of a modernity of the subaltern, "our modernity" (Chakrabarty, 1997), or alternative modernity. A substantial literature has developed on the related concepts of 'multiple modernities', 'alternative modernities', or modernity 'at large'. Partha Chatterjee (1997), Dipesh Chakrabarty

(2000, 2001), Goankar (2001) and Appadurai (2005) contributed to various debates and different developments of modernities. A comparative approach to Asian modernities provides useful data for studies of modernity in the world and in global history, what Arif Dirlik (2003) has called ‘global modernity’. Frederick Cooper (2005) has also highlighted the plurality of experiences of ‘modernity’.

The colonial era opened up an interactional dialogue and Bengal registered the conflict between modernity and tradition in its growing acquaintance with European ideas. The Bengali Renaissance was a sort of intellectual arousal in the undivided province of Bengal which is deemed to have perceived the revival of the positives of the ancient past and an appreciation of Western elements by creating a unique synthesis. Despite being a civilizatory force, the Western encounter widened the space for transnational interconnectedness, intercultural dialogue and the mobility of ideas. Tapan Raychaudhuri (1988) noted that the Bengali intelligentsia was the first Asian social group of any size whose mental world was transformed through its interactions with the West (p. ix). Colonial Bengal stood for a polyphonic society which included multiple voices that supported or were ambivalent towards the imperial and cultural enterprises and transnational network of exchanging modern ideas. So, colonial space could be conceived as a contact-zone (Pratt, 1991) where cultural interactions were played out between the outsider and the insider despite asymmetrical power relations. Contact zones are social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other. In colonial Bengal, the circulation of modern knowledge initiated a debate on the Western and Indian notions of sexuality and this dissemination of modern sexual knowledge also helped to transcend the traditional binary by creating a space for cross-cultural exchange. Sugata Bose (2010, pp. 17–18) argued that the colonized did not simply erect defensive walls around their notions of cultural difference, they were keen to be players in the broad arenas of cosmopolitan thought zones and wished to contribute to the shaping of a global future. In this connection, Bill Ashcroft (2009) highlighted what Rabindranath Tagore had observed, “Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin” (qtd. in Sen, 2005, p. 86) and this observation broadly stands



against the idea that the local culture is so fragile that it would break if exposed to outside influences.

Modernity is unavoidable for the progress of knowledge. I will investigate the paradoxical nature of modernities in order to understand the role that the transnational interactions played in challenging social taboos and cultural barriers and I will examine the multifarious conflicts generated by the cultural encounter around women's sexual autonomy. Although the Bengali reformers in *Nara-Naree* relied to a large extent on the appropriation of Western modernity, they often operated in a curiously adversarial position to it, a relationship that emerged from creative adaptation rather than mere imitation. The Bengali writers demonstrated the scope of cultural transformation as well as their cultural grounding by pluralizing their experiences of 'modernity'. In this context I will argue in Chapter 6 that the engagement with Western modernity produced complex responses in the minds of Bengali intellectuals about the conceptualization of modern women and women's sexual autonomy and that modernity itself became a contingent process. I will also argue that modernity is not a forceful imposition from outside but is based on willing adaptations and conscious reformulation through "selective assimilation" (Chatterjee, 1989).

### **3.4. CULTURAL REFORMATION AND BENGALI IDENTITY**

Bengal was considered to be the first 'modern' province of India. The Bengali Renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries derived its inspiration from the European Enlightenment; its purpose was to reform society rationally by challenging conventional ideas grounded in tradition and advance knowledge through the scientific method. Bengal was recognized as the prime citadel for modern culture, intellectual and scientific activities. Calcutta (as it was known at that time) was the capital of British rule and known as a famous cosmopolitan city. Many books from Europe and America were brought to Kolkata, which made people aware of world culture and global thinking (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Bengal perceived a strong desire to participate in a world community of peoples or nations (Chakrabarty, 1997). The rise of the *Bhadralok*

[gentleman] is considered to be the most significant intellectual trend in Bengal and in India generally. Bengal's intellectual elite were very keen to distinguish between the mere imitation of a foreign culture and the changes that they themselves desired to make. In other words, the *Bhadralok* had no desire to model their society as a copy of British or European society. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) argued that the colonial experience of becoming modern is haunted by the fear of looking unoriginal. So, they wanted to build a distinctively Bengali society that was more in step with the prevailing trends of modernity and they did so in all areas of their religious, cultural and social life. Educated Bengali groups were motivated to re-construct an imagined past as 'the golden age', which was also admired by Europeans. Bengali intellectuals thus positioned and repositioned themselves in the comparative framework of past and present by reconstructing their own traditions.

On the other hand, Partha Chatterjee (1989) highlighted how the inner/outer distinction separated social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. He argued that an ideological justification for the selective appropriation of Western discourses was necessary as the nationalists sought a specific site of resistance for Indian cultural identity while fighting for independence. In order to enrich their own tradition through hermeneutic absorption and assimilation, women were supposed to be different yet modern by writing a new script of modernity. In the cosmopolitan public sphere, it was perceived to be important to nurture one's cultural heritage and forge solidarities within the community (Lewis, 2009, p. 1405).

In Bengal, modernity is also a problematic concept based on the competing discourses of cultural 'superiority', which is traced from antiquity, in a comparative framework with the 'outside' notions of modernity. Thus, the formulation of modernities entangled variegated contentions about national identity and cosmopolitan openness. So, it is important to capture the complexities and contingencies that beset the concept of modernity.

### 3.5. TRANSNATIONAL MODERNITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN WOMEN

In Chapter 2, I highlighted how women's modernity originated globally. Some international feminist scholars have been calling for an interrogation of narrow national boundaries to examine how gender issues are interrelated with larger transnational movements. Viewed within the context of colonial and world history, the archetypes of the Modern Girl and the New Woman completely collapsed the "traditional dichotomies between the modern, imperial metropole and a 'backward', colonial periphery" (Lewis, 2009, p. 1386).

The American feminists Carol Smith-Rosenberg (1985), Michelle Ann Abate (2008) and Frances B. Cogan (1989) traced the history of the evolution of the New Woman, the Modern Girl and the Tomboys in the context of gender-bending codes of female conduct in the West. Challenging the construction of "The Cult of True Womanhood" (Welter, 1966), based on piety, docility and domesticity, new qualities like "intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage" were advocated (Cogan, 1989, p. 4). By the dawn of the twentieth century, these behaviours had established a new paradigm of the vigorous, adventurous, athletic and even muscular "Outdoors Pal" (Abate, 2008, p. ix). The scientific discourses developed women's modern identity, which was a "contested and contradictory one, emerging at varying rates in various places, encountering various counter-discourses along the way, and taking varying forms that intersected and overlapped with other cultural discourses" (McCullough, 1999, p. 58). Asian scholars, such as Barbara Sato (2003), Hsiao-Pei Yen (2005) and Sarah E. Stevens (2003) are underscoring the global interconnectedness by researching the historical and cultural perspectives. Undertaking cross-cultural research on the global emergence of the Modern Girl as a heuristic device in the twentieth century, *The Modern Girl around the World* (2008) ambitiously chalked out the similarities in the trope of the modern women who challenged the traditional domain.

Much of the literature in Bengal has focused on the serious contestations about how the advent of Western Enlightenment ideals and the ‘emancipatory’ enterprise of the ‘civilizing mission’ identified ‘Indian women’ as a site of concern and aimed to rescue them from their own culture and patriarchy. A reconstructive contestation resulted between British and Bengali male intelligentsia, whose object of study was “the new Bengali woman” (Chatterjee, 1989) and it extended to reconsider women in this formative process of subjectivities and agency. Therefore, the body came to be at the centre of a wider social system and was brought into the sphere of politics in a powerful and explicit way. But it was argued that, while social reform concerned itself almost exclusively with the women’s question, it remained more or less transparently a question about regulating their marital and extramarital sexuality and some scholars have highlighted how the European and Bengali patriarchies colluded on the Women’s Question. Tanika Sarkar (2008) and Padma Anagol (2008) investigated the nature of colonial dynamics, its relation to conjugality and the indigenous and colonialist constructions of passive women.

Partha Chatterjee (1989), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) and Sangari & Vaid (1989) contributed significant work with regard to the Women’s Question in colonial Bengal. Feminist historiography on modern India, such as the works of Tanika Sarkar (2008), Mrinalini Sinha (2006), Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) and Partha Chatterjee (1989), have particularly influenced my analysis of the ‘women’s question’ in the colonial context. In this regard, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1997) explored the caricatures of the individualistic and Western-attired Bengali New Women who were allegedly arrogant, lazy, immodest, defiant of authority and neglectful of domestic duties. Their memsahib-like behaviour was unbecoming of a Bengali housewife and these ‘ultra-modern’ women were portrayed as selfish and self-indulgent people who had overturned the domestic order by their disrespectful attitude.

So, in the politics of respectability, motherhood and chastity for women were glorified as part of the national tradition. Within these competing ideologies, women became the carriers of national culture

and custodians of the nation's morals, which they created by comparing a series of binary opposites such as male vs. female, private vs. public, nation vs. colonizers, indigenous vs. Western and spiritual vs. material. The women's question was addressed within these binary opposites. While the nationalist discourse subordinated the women's question and tried to contain it within the binaries of 'national' vs. 'Western' (or 'colonial'), the autonomous women's organizations took up a number of important women's issues, but were still trapped within the nationalist discourse because of their enchantment with nationalism.

In Bengal, the early twentieth century witnessed a historical shift in terms of appropriate gender behaviour and women's transgression of moral codes. Women's emancipation was an integral part of the struggle towards socialism and the fight against British imperialism (Datta, 2009, p. 71). Dagmer Engels (1996) highlighted the contentions in the public domain when women became visible in the social arena through their participation in the nationalist movement. By analyzing Bengali domestic manuals, Judith E. Walsh (2005) demonstrated that the entire life-world and the most intimate relationships of Bengalis became contested ground in the family context. Tapan Raychaudhuri (2000) highlighted that the relationship between men and women in its sexual context focused on the "sphere of cultural change where 'private' concerns were profoundly altered through interaction with developments in the 'public' sphere" (p. 349).

I have discussed in Chapter 2 how the New Woman in Bengal has been the subject of critical investigation by scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (1989), Sumit Sarkar (1997) and Tanika Sarkar (2008) and I stressed how the modernized New Woman was often parodied as a *memsahib* (Chatterjee, 1989; Murshid, 1983). As the agents of modernity were mainly men who tried to modernize their women and circulated their ideas through a gendered lens, new constructions of and contentions about modernity became an unfinished process and national boundaries between the home and the world were simultaneously built and increasingly blurred.

Tanika Sarkar (1998) felt that the ‘home’ was the only (conceptual) space in which nationalist Bengali men could act with any sense of autonomy or sovereignty over women. It is understandable, therefore, as Partha Chatterjee (1989) and Tanika Sarkar (1998) have both insightfully suggested, that the idea of the home should take on a special, compensatory significance in the modernity that Bengali nationalists experienced in the context of European colonial domination (Raychaudhuri, 1988, p. ix). Tanika Sarkar (2008) also observed that even though women were able to wrench themselves away from domestic and feminine mores, the understanding of their social situation changed little. When English women left their homes to join the workforce, it shook up unequal sexual arrangements both within the home and outside it. But in the case of Bengali’s women participation in the nationalist movement, it brought no such permanent change.

In this context it is necessary to highlight the global interconnections involved in sexual reform and the emergence of the modern women who engaged in an array of tasks that fell outside traditional gender roles. In Chapter 2, I have highlighted the arguments of prominent feminist historians like Sanjam Ahluwalia (2008) and Sarah Hodges (2008), who contributed to the debate on birth control and biopolitics. Geraldine Forbes (2002) has also contributed to the complex understanding of refashioning modern Indian women and their identity through several works.

In this context I will try to explore the intricacies of global interconnectedness and the engagement between the World and the Home. In *Nara-Naree*, the writers and readers travel, either physically or mentally or both, by crossing the boundaries in search of a global vision. But at the same time, affinity to the home also remains strong in the midst of constant mobility and textual, spatial and ideational shiftings through history and the future, past and present.

### **3.6. COSMOPOLITAN KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSNATIONAL SEXUAL REFORM**

In the cultural and intellectual realms, the word ‘modern’ assumed a specific historical meaning pertaining to the first half of the twentieth

century, and global sexual reform was interlinked with modernity. In Chapter 2, I highlighted the historical background to the global interconnectedness in sexual reform in the West and how the transnational framework can be intertextually linked with Bengal. In colonial India, sexual knowledge was reformulated under a globalizing network of transnational connections. Sanjay Srivastava (2004c) argued:

*The construction of sexuality, and the discourses that gather around it, have a fundamental connection with the entire gamut of processes—cultural, economic, political, ‘global’—with which people must engage and sexuality becomes one of the many sites around which social and cultural ideas can be expressed. (p. 25)*

Here, intertextuality can be a very useful tool to analyze this awakening to a wider world through the transnational circulation of knowledge. Intertextual links are keys to the production and reproduction of discourses on the female body and sexuality. I will show how in *Nara-Naree* the educated group of Bengali reformers became a connecting link between Western reformers and the native non-expert Bengali public in the process of circulating knowledge. The intertextual dissemination of ideas on modern sexual reform and the increasing globalization imply both “the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” affecting the ways in which sexuality is understood, experienced and regulated (Altman, 2001, p. 1). I will concentrate on *Nara-Naree* and investigate how modern sexual knowledge was propagated and appropriated in Bengal and how the modern sexual reformers in the twentieth century became cosmopolitan with the view that “all the world’s a stage” (Crozier, 2003). In this context Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (2000) have criticized the long-prevailing conspiracy of silence around the female body and sexuality and indicated how spaces have opened up to highlight female desire.

In Chapter 2, I referred to Havelock Ellis and other Western sexologists who made significant contributions to theorizing female sexuality. I have taken Sheila Jeffreys as the major critic of Western sexologists and focused on the inherent gender bias among the

proponents. My research is also influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of sexuality as a product of discourse and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity.

### **3.7. CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY**

The construction of gender is implicated in the process of constructing knowledge on sexuality. Gender is "a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions" (Gerson and Peiss, 1985, p. 327) and constructed through dynamic and dialectic relationships. Gender is "something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 140); it is better understood as a verb than as a noun (Bohan, 1993). As Butler (1990) states: "Gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real" (p. viii). Gender norms and expressions change over time and differ between cultures. "(Gender) signification is never achieved through one act: it is a series of repetitions that take place in a socially constructed symbolic reality over a given period of time" (Butler, 1990, p. 145). It is through this repetition that gender becomes culturally intelligible (Butler, 1993, p. xii).

Social constructivism as a metatheory is the foundation of this framework. It is concerned with how knowledge about gender and gender roles are interpreted and understood in a society. Gender roles are constructed within society and create an ideal of how a person of a specific gender should act or behave. Gender issues are interlaced with socio-cultural expectations about sexual behaviours, which are important components of all cultures although societies may differ widely in attributing meanings to sex, sexual permissiveness and the expression of sexual values. There are cultural differences as to whether and in which circumstances public discussions on sexuality are socially acceptable. Culture is instrumental in constructing gender and gender is embedded into culture through particular performances of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Social constructions are shaped by patriarchal relations of power which impact upon gender roles. In *Nara-Naree*, gender remains a key factor in reappropriating the normative notions of conjugality and for



investigating the dubious nature of the sexual emancipation of Bengali women during the transnational processes of modernization. Gender is thus a cultural construct and culture defines what is permitted, appropriate, normal, conforming and desirable and it also defines what is taboo, inappropriate, abnormal, deviant and not legitimate.

West and Zimmerman (1987) theorized that notions of femininity and gender norms are directly related to the distribution of power between the genders, and that this is related to their “appropriate” roles. Gender is, therefore, a relationship, with their relative relocation in the structures of hierarchy (Srivastava, 2004c). Gender and sexuality are not self-evident categories, but contingent and highly unstable systems of power. Gender and sexuality are, in Butler’s words, “interimplicated” (Butler, 1990). The critique of gender problematizes sexuality and vice versa.

In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the magazine *Nara-Naree* and indicate the limitations of my research.



## **CHAPTER 4. NARA-NAREE, THE TRANSNATIONAL JOURNAL WITH A SCIENTIFIC AIM**

In Chapters 2 and 3 I have laid down the historical background of global interconnectedness and the theoretical framework of the thesis. I have analyzed the interrelationship of the world with Bengal and how sexual reform was interrelated with the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman, in Bengal and around the world. I have also analyzed how cultural tensions were associated with the changing roles of Bengali modern women, who were increasingly becoming assertive in their social and sexual behaviour. In this chapter I will provide an overview of the magazine *Nara-Naree* and the various subjects that it dealt with. I will also highlight the issues of the female body and sexuality that I have chosen as my research area and identify other aspects on which I am not focusing in this thesis, even though they are significant and worth considering.

### **4.1. NEGOTIATING BODIES AND BOUNDARIES**

*Madhumala is incarcerated in the castle of distorted sexuality. Who will free her? Prince, where are your heroic adornments and the sword of pure health flashing in your hand? When will the dark horse of restless youth commence its conquest of love?*<sup>9</sup> (Editorial, 1346 [1940]<sup>10</sup>, p. 82)

*There was a time when it was unthinkable for a woman to step out of the family. Those who were modern among them were also restricted to the drawing room or sat near the*

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<sup>9</sup> All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> The Bengali calendar is completely different from the English calendar. January, 1900 started in Paush, 1306 and in every Bengali month two English months overlap and so do the English years at the end of the Bengali annual cycle.

*musical instrument. But the trend has changed. Among contemporary women, as we can find Amy Johnson [the pioneering English female aviator] from the West, our women have also joined outdoor sports, displaying equivalent zeal like men. In European countries we are seeing women participating in various industrial jobs such as in ammunition factories and the ambulance service. Some European women are also exploring the unknown lands of Asia along with their male counterparts.*

(P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940], p. 358)

The first excerpt (Editorial, 1940 [1346], p. 82) from the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* [*Man-Woman*] presented the conflict between repressed desires and their expression where the woman was confined and the valiant youth was supposed to come to her rescue to free her from bondage. Here, *rupkatha* (fairy tale) and reality merged to focus on the female body and desire. It also reproduced the particular idea of masculinity and the active role that it played in sexual relations. But here my concern lies in investigating the female body and sexuality and the intertwined factors that surrounded the construction of modern femininity and the highly debated issues of sexual reform.

The second excerpt (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940], p. 358) extended the argument from the home to the world and talked about crossing national and cultural boundaries. The comparative study of Western and Asian women set the stage for analyzing the highly debated issue of women's transgression of conventional gender roles and their willingness to transcend cultural barriers. So, different types of modernities and concepts of freedom arose in relation to negotiating bodies and desires by juxtaposing 1) myth (imaginary space) and 2) reality, public and private.

*Nara-Naree* is an important case study for locating the rise of global modernity and the overlapping of global and local discourses. The monthly Bengali periodical was founded during the late colonial period (1346 [1939–40]) and dealt with the 'taboo' topics of the body and sexuality by filling the gap between *ghar* [inside/private/home] and *bahir* [outside/public/world]. *Nara-Naree* not only attempted to

break down the barrier of shame but also accepted sexuality as a normal part of life while engaging critically with the transnational discourses on sexual reform, social change and the interlocking ideas about the female body and sexuality and the representations of the Modern Girl and the New Woman.

#### **4.2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE MAGAZINE**

*Nara-Naree* [*Man-Woman*] was founded by a group of Bengali intellectuals, experts and distinguished physicians who had received their medical degrees from Indian medical colleges and foreign institutes and their intercultural expertise added a sharp edge of intellectuality to the magazine. The Bengali title of the magazine itself seemed to be inspired by and derived from Havelock Ellis' work *Man-Woman* (1894). The first volume of *Nara-Naree* [*Man-Woman*] mentioned that the magazine was edited by Sunil Kumar Dhar and published by Sukantakumar Halder with the co-ordination of an honorary advisory board of physicians consisting of Dr. D.R. Dhar, Dr. Benoy Sinha, Dr. B.K. Goswami and Dr. Sudhamadhab Sengupta. Later, Sukanta Halder and Panchanan Halder became editors and Srikanta Halder became the associate editor. They were well versed in Western technological developments in the field of medical science and combined transcultural competence with professional specialization.

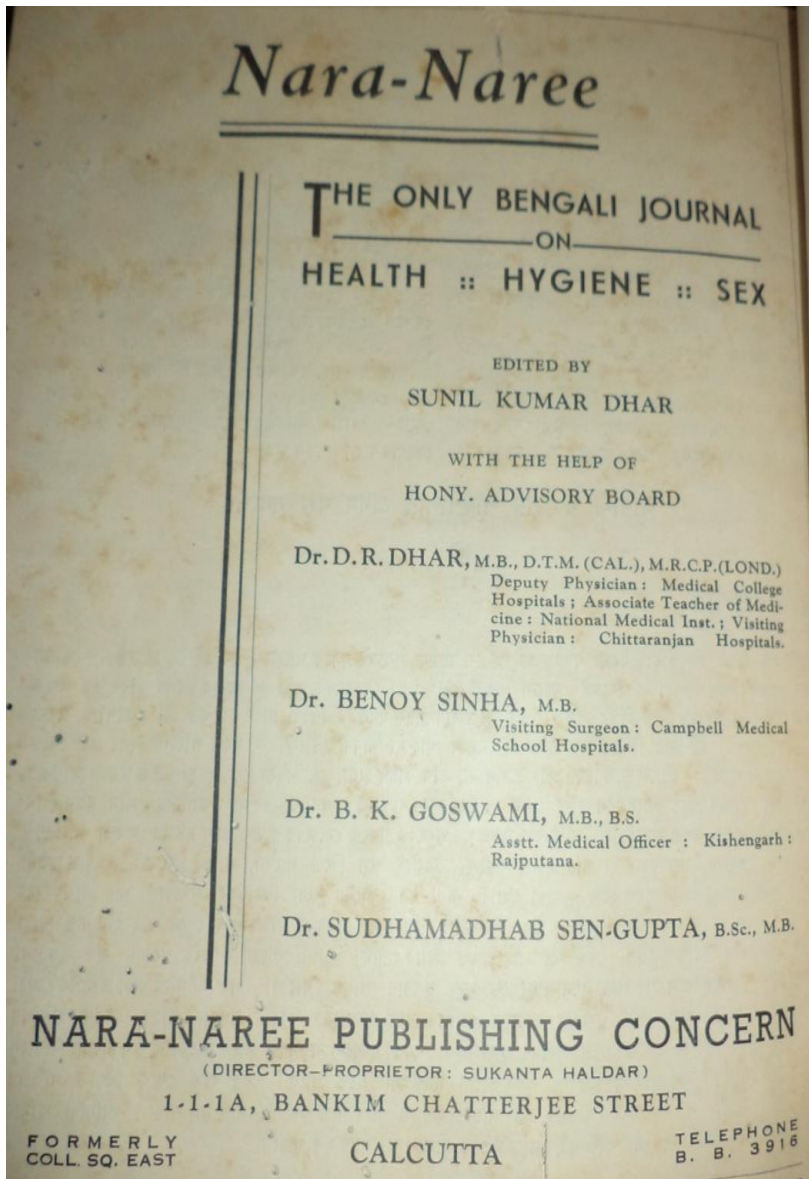


Figure 4-1: An overview of the editorial board and the management committee of the magazine Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], 1347 [1940].

The Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* extended its outreach beyond the local culture and provided a global outlook. The magazine was launched in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in West Bengal. In the subcontinent, *Nara-Naree* was circulated in undivided Bengal and in the year 1947, following the partition of the subcontinent, the readership was divided between Bengali communities in West Bengal (India) and East Bengal (which was then part of Pakistan). Hindi versions of the magazine also began to be circulated due to the magazine's huge popularity ("Sharadiya", 1356 [1949], p. 239). There were demands for circulation agents and postal orders were accepted from various parts of India, Pakistan and Myanmar. An office was also established in London (Adhikari, 1355 [1948], p. 203; "Suchipatra" [content page], 1356 [1949], p. 149).

In an attempt to engage with global scientific modernity, the magazine maintained a transnational approach by incorporating stories and articles about different countries and cultures. Dr. Durgaratan Dhar, a prolific writer on health, food habits and diseases, was a member of the Royal College of Physicians in London, Deputy Physician of Medical College Hospitals, associate teacher of medicine at the National Medical Institute and visiting physician at Chittaranjan Hospitals. His wife, Srimati Monika Debi, also contributed extensively on the topics of child welfare, scientific mothering and mothers' health. Dr. Benoy Sinha was the visiting surgeon of Campbell Medical School Hospitals and Dr. B.K. Goswami was the assistant medical officer in India. Apart from them, the publisher Sukanta Kumar Halder also wrote treatises on sexual health and man-woman relationships. Renowned Bengali writers, such as Manik Bandopadhyay, Abul Hassanat, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay and Girindra Sekhar Bose also contributed articles and essays to the magazine.

Sections on beauty, cosmetics and cosmopolitan aesthetics were managed by Mira Sanyal, who concentrated on contemporary modern fashion and make-up. Some of the women writers in *Nara-Naree* were associated with the renowned male contributors. Prominent among them were Bani Halder, wife of the publisher Sukanta Halder, and Monika Debi, wife of Dr D.R. Dhar. Some other prominent

female writers who were professionally acclaimed and featured articles in the magazine were champion Bengali swimmer Lila Chattopadhyay, midwife Srimati Sarojrekha Dutta, dancer Monika Desai, and actress Chandrabati Debi. Other female writers who focused on social issues, beauty and health columns were Shrimati Manjari Debi, Shrimati Tripti Roy, Maya Gupta, Bani Halder, Sudhira Sengupta, Mrinalini Dasgupta, Aparna Basu, Bela Bhattacharya, Kamala Goswami etc. The magazine also included articles and excerpts from renowned personalities from the West and Asia and numerous Western references and articles were juxtaposed alongside quotes from acknowledged Indians. Editor Sukanta Halder's wife, Bani Halder, founded a new magazine *Chele-Meye* [*Son-Daughter*] on maternity and childcare in collaboration with the columnist Bela Bhattacharya. So, women played an instrumental role in contributing ideas and opinions almost on an equal footing with men. This intellectual companionship among male and female writers strengthened the concept of gender equality and was known as a marker of modernity.

*Nara-Naree* contained specific sections on child-rearing, contraception, cosmopolitan aesthetics, physical exercise, snippets from films, scientific information and sexuality-related queries which were published in columns such as, 'Doctor' and 'Prescription' that appeared every month. The section 'Prescription' supplied informed sexual knowledge, and was replete with questions; some of the key concerns were: virginity, impotency, marriage, sexual relations and other social and psychological issues. Motherhood, mothers' health and Western childcare centres were crucial topics of discussion in some of the articles.

Writers in *Nara-Naree* came from the elite and the upper middle class while readers came from various cross-sections of society and were diverse across classes. In *Nara-Naree* [*Man-Woman*], male writers were more numerous and their treatment of women's issues remained different from the ways in which the women writers addressed them. While men concentrated on issues of the body and sexuality of both genders, the contributions of female writers were more women-centric and their instructions and analyses were restricted to educating



women-folk in particular. Some of the intimate questions that were managed by both men and women writers included: adolescent sexuality, sex education, birth control, sexual hygiene, marriage, motherhood, sexual pleasure and impotence. It is worth noting that there were heterogeneous voices in *Nara-Naree* and while one group of writers and reformers encouraged women's uninhibited expression in comparison to that of men, another group stressed the natural differences between the bodies and desires of men and women. I will focus on these contradictions in Chapters 5 and 6. Although some female writers started to break down social barriers and cultural taboos and expressed their opinions regarding bodies and sexuality, *Nara-Naree* lamented the lack of expert women writers in this regard.

The magazine opened a window to the world and Bengali women writers appeared to be conscious agents controlling and managing Western knowledge and modernity. The inclusion of letters from female readers in the magazine also seemed to challenge the repressive social structure by establishing global interconnectedness between the home and the world. They started to reformulate the home scientifically and thus broadened the outlook of readers by forging connections with the world. Women writers focused on beauty and cosmopolitan aesthetics that were coupled with global cultural flows, changing trends in fashion and a new cosmopolitan modernity. They also concentrated on childcare sections and penned various articles centred around the discourses on public health, social hygiene and sexual knowledge. They began to manage their own bodies and sexualities and the global transmission of sexual knowledge created a reasonable balance between universal concerns and local cultural understandings. Global ideas were often re-appropriated, resisted, or adopted according to the relevant conditions.

Inspired by the frank scientific discussion on sexuality in the international magazines, *Nara-Naree* started to deal with various issues. Subject areas covered by the magazine were diverse and highlighted the eclectic nature of the journal. *Nara-Naree* questioned the intricate issues of obscenity, morality and sexuality and this visually enriched magazine often drew parallels with Greek and

Roman sexual liberalism and indigenous tribal cultures. *Nara-Naree* also contained various references to the naturist movement, which started in Germany during the interwar period. It was a radical document and its radical stances are explicit in its defence of nudism, homosexuality and cross-dressing.

*Nara-Naree* circulated the global dialogue on the body and sexuality and tried to dissipate the silence which had long engulfed Bengali society:

*Russia has truncated the root of ancient beliefs and superstitions to establish new humanism. Everything is possible in their country. Let us have a look at the past. Take the example of our country. If descriptions in Sanskrit literature are true and if you have read the poem 'Sekal' ['Those Ages'] of Rabindranath then you must have been regretting not being born in the age of Kalidas.*

(D. Mukhopadhyay, 1346 [1940], p. 123)

While accommodating a global scientific modernity, *Nara-Naree* also engaged with the nostalgia of the past aesthetic 'richness' of an indigenous sexual culture. Therefore the educated middle class, conversant in the rational-scientific sense, strove to retain the consciousness of a cultural identity.

In this way, cultural openness was juxtaposed with the preservation of cultural identity. The reconciliation of tradition and modernity was encouraged in order to assimilate and adopt what is conducive to Bengal's advancement, but simultaneously the writers clung to their roots, their own cultural heritage.



Figure 4-2: The picture of the statue of Oslo, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], *Bhadra-Ashwin* [Aug-Sep-Oct], 1356 [1949], p. 257

The cosmopolitan characteristics of the magazine were evident in its treatment of various subjects. *Nara-Naree* printed commentaries on Indian film stars as well as snippets on Hollywood, European and other foreign stars and thus blurred national boundaries. The extensive scope of the magazine also included multiple sections on lifestyle, hygiene and healthy living. Columns on fashion, sports and beauty tips were regular features, and the magazine ran sections on cinema, beauty and photography contests. It was replete with various

visuals and biographies of skilled and muscular athletes, boxers and heavy-weight champions from Bengal and around the world and thus gave Bengali athletes a position of global visibility. The female swimmers and gymnasts from Europe, America, the Soviet Union and Asia were juxtaposed with the professional sportspersons from India, and particularly Bengal, who physically travelled the world.

Transnational mobility characterized the modern age and it saw the growth of international travel, the development of new technologies of communication and the creation of international networks between people and societies. People were seen to be moving from traditional confines to being more socially mobile. Travel was promoted as a major feature of *Nara-Naree* for enriching its readers' worldly outlook. Bengali sportsmen and Yoga practitioners were represented on the global platform and sent their inputs from various sport and exercise conferences. They also specifically described their unique experiences during their participation in the World Congress for Physical Culture organized in Lidingö and Stockholm in August 1949. They wrote letters from abroad and revealed their glorious achievements in foreign lands. Ashwin (September–October) issue of *Nara-Naree* mentioned the names of countries, such as Switzerland, England, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Soviet Russia, praising them for their unadulterated enthusiasm for healthy exercise, physical activity, athleticism and sports (Ranjitbhai, 1355 [1948], pp. 360–366). It highlighted the significance of cultivating physical and intellectual culture and emphasized the promotion of recreational centres, cultural centres, athletic clubs and associations, tournaments, leagues, summer camps and national sports festivals. *Nara-Naree* also highlighted the names of countries like the United States, Sweden, France, Great Britain, Italy, Hungary, Denmark, Holland, Finland, Switzerland, Japan, Germany and India for displaying commendable performance in the Olympic games which took place in Berlin in 1936 (Roy, 1355 [1948], pp. 302–306).

Expert writers in *Nara-Naree* also debated feminism, socialism, imperialism and foreign affairs. Critical issues in different countries and cultures were featured irrespective of national boundaries. This

cross-cultural setting of the magazine also highlighted various international historical events.

Contributors to *Nara-Naree* admired the West, its technologies and organisational prowess and focused on Asian development in various fields. They highlighted the importance of establishing sports teams, cultural clubs and international associations and collaborations.

Travel was also perceived as the key to self-enhancement. Rabindranath Tagore's letters from Russia and Europe were printed in the magazine, making comparisons with modern and developed countries in order to focus on social development in Bengal.

### 4.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAGAZINE

Historically, *Nara-Naree* is important as the first Bengali magazine to fit into cosmopolitan ways of belonging and its significance lies in its frank expression regarding issues of the female body and sexuality. It initiated a global dialogue within a vernacular space. *Nara-Naree* recorded the modernizing phase in Bengal and this monthly journal was different from other publications on sexual science in the sense that it not only dealt with the issues of sexuality and man-woman relationships, but it also covered a wider arena of different socio-cultural and political issues that were prominent at that time. Being eclectic in its treatment of various issues, the magazine provided a broader transnational perspective encompassing divergent elements.

Even though *Nara-Naree* was the only 'scientific' sex magazine when it first began publication, in its later years, specifically after independence (1947), it identified some other vernacular actors after the publication of Bengali manuals and magazines on sexual science started to increase in numbers (De, 1948 [1355], pp. 390–391). Their need to identify other local actors in the domain of sexual science—a field that was primarily dominated by Western sexologists, was stressed repeatedly. Vernacular writers such as Nripendrakumar Basu (who was the writer of the book *Janmosashon* [*Birth Control*]), Kartikchandra Basu (who was editor of the magazine *Swasthya Samachar* [*Health News*] and also an English book *Sex Hygiene*) and Rameshchandra Roy (who contributed to the sexual issues concerning

young children in *Swasthya Samachar* [*Health News*]) were praised and acknowledged. So, there appeared to be a network of Bengali sexologists like their Western counterparts whom I have discussed in Chapter 2.

*Nara-Naree* engaged critically with transnational discourses on sexual reform and social change and aimed to *creatively* rebuild an open identity. The magazine is significant for its critical engagement with the world in its aim to resolve the dialectical relationships (i.e., interactions and contestations) between the local and global dimensions. The importance of *Nara-Naree* lies in its signification of Bengali culture and its retention of the symbols of a cosmopolitan identity. The magazine revolved around modern ideas of intimacy and discussed various themes around sexual behaviour as well as giving relationship advice. In its coverage of transnational issues, it exhibited the spirit of cosmopolitanism by advising readers to “grow free like a tree rooted in the soil of the world” (1356 [1950] Bhadra, p. 231). Imagining themselves as world citizens from a globally interconnected perspective, the writers of *Nara-Naree* declared that arts and science have no border. The word ‘cosmopolitan’ actually appeared in the pages of the periodical as it mentioned that “Kolkata is a cosmopolitan city” (Ranjitbhai, 1950 [1356], p. 97) which developed the foundations for the “habits of coexistence” (Appiah, 2007: xix) between British, Chinese and Bengali children and adults from different cultural backgrounds, but at the same time it also emphasized that Bengalis are rooted in their cosmopolitan outlook and in their love for their motherland (Ranjitbhai, 1950 [1356], p. 98). These multiple positionings in a multicultural society raised the issue of the simultaneous constitution of a Bengali identity and a global modernity, which became interlocked. This cross-cultural communication did not ignore the importance of cultivating one’s mother tongue, i.e., Bengali. The writers enthusiastically discussed their cultural differences and shared aspirations drawing on both Bengali and global values. “This kind of ‘double consciousness’ enhanced the vitality, elasticity and diversity of culture as part of a universal humanist tradition” (Lewis, 2009, p. 1392).

*Nara-Naree* emphasized that talk about the body in the public domain was often under surveillance and the main objective of the magazine was emphatically stated in various articles and editorials (Maitra, 1355 [1948–49], p. 29; Editorial, 1357 [1950], p. 213), which highlighted the relevance of the magazine in contemporary society. Readers often congratulated the editors for their ground-breaking efforts to popularize scientific knowledge by connecting experts with the non-expert public through a vernacular medium (Chakrabarty, 1357 [1950], pp. 370–373; Dutta, 1357 [1950], p. 343). One reader spoke highly of the significance of the Bengali magazine, which presented the topic of sexual science as a subject of scientific research and expanded the scope of knowledge about various international journals, which were not easy to access:

*So many books on science and new information are being published worldwide. Most of them are in English. How many people can afford to read or comprehend books written in a foreign language? Nara-Naree has opened the way for ordinary people like me to secure complicated knowledge about the body and psychology in the Bengali language.*

*(Chakrabarty, 1357 [1950], p. 372)*

*Nara-Naree* highlighted that repression in the public sphere led to an association of sexual science with shame and vulgarity, which made the subject virtually unspeakable. The magazine consciously tried to avoid obscenity charges and editorials issued several notices about the choice of subject area to clarify its scientific and non-pornographic intentions (Editorial, 1355 [1948], pp. 113). *Nara-Naree* repeatedly stressed that sexual consciousness should “blossom like the morning flower” and curiosity should be dealt in the same way as it is handled in other progressive countries (Editorial, 1355 [1948], p. 113) and emphasized the importance of sexual knowledge (Editorial, 1353 [1946], p. 457). The contributors to *Nara-Naree* repeatedly emphasized the point that the study of sexuality should not be considered obscene or taboo and thus opened up a channel for disseminating sexual knowledge when sex education was considered to be an inappropriate topic for discussion in mixed public groups. By

channelizing dialogue between the scientific experts and non-experts, the vernacular Bengali magazine promoted informed sexual knowledge, and was replete with questions regarding sexuality, health and hygiene which contested social orthodoxy and prejudice. Its expert agents dispensed valuable information through the advice column ‘Prescription’ and thus connected the reading public with advocates of sexual reform. It provided an alternative/parallel public sphere to which individuals could resort to resolve potential problems and private dilemmas.

The vernacular periodical *Nara-Naree* became very popular among the general public. Its significant and unique contribution in the realm of modernized sexual reform in Bengal was widely acclaimed and duly recognized by its readers, whose favourable responses and admiration became explicit in huge number of letters and replies which were published in the sections entitled ‘Prescription’ and ‘Alochana’ [Discussion]. Thus these sections unleashed personal voices to publicly communicate taboo issues and widened the space for expert-non-expert interactions. In *Nara-Naree*, readers directly participated in the dialogue by sending queries and these advice columns in the magazines acted as conduits or capillaries between individual experience and expert advice, and thus stressed how these were connected (Cornell & Hunt, 2006). The purpose of publishing the ‘Prescription’ section was educational, informative and helpful and it operated as a connecting device between the expert and popular culture. Letters in the ‘Prescription’ section highlighted the great popularity of the section and also that of the magazine as a whole. The editorials of *Nara-Naree* mentioned a whole range of queries and appreciated and acknowledged the huge response and positive reception from its readers:

*In the ‘Prescription’ section we have received 7474 questions until now: of these, the total number of sex-specific questions is 4922, of food and nutrition 1102, about exercise and sports 585, beauty and make-up 109, public health 399 and about various diseases and their treatment 957. We have invested our best efforts to solve the problems and provide instructions as well as we can. Those who*



*requested specific treatment for various diseases, we succeeded in contacting specialized and responsible physicians in this regard to help them procure economical consultation with limited medical expenditure and tried to relieve their pain and burden of expenses. (Editorial, 1354 [1947], p. 1)*

Economical treatment was aimed at the people from all walks of life who wrote letters for consultation. *Nara-Naree* also acknowledged the readers' encouragement and appraisal across India and from different parts of the country:

*We welcome insightful remarks and notes from our readers as both parties can benefit from sharing experience. We will continue discussing all physical and psychological diseases with the help of specialized physicians.*

*(“Prescription,” 1353b [1947], p. 125)*

Some readers critically estimated the value of the magazine and highlighted the purpose and immense relevance of *Nara-Naree* for its target group (“Alochana [Discussion],” 1355b [1948], p. 281). Readers also contested and challenged the advisor's viewpoint by suggesting the implications and relevance of discussions on sexual freedom in a broader context. The popularity of its readers' columns highlighted the magazine's instrumental role in subverting the hegemonic ideology of society and that of the reading public through the written form of conversation between the advisor and the questioner.

#### **4.4. CHOICE OF DATA AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

My focus in this thesis revolves around the debates on the female body and sexuality that emerged during the period of global sexual reform and its impact on the sexual autonomy of Bengali women. In this connection I will highlight how sexual reform was invariably interconnected with the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman in the public sphere and how this generated various contentions about the global relevance of modernity.

The contributors to *Nara-Naree* intended to cater to all sections of society through the educated masses and bring about a collective social change, irrespective of social categories and class divisions, by connecting the expert and popular knowledge. While an integrative perspective acknowledges the importance of race and class in any analysis, my thesis focuses primarily on the global interconnectedness of sexual reform and the global emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman. In this specific instance, *Nara-Naree* firmly and explicitly grounds itself in Bengali women's sexuality, thus making it a fruitful domain for investigation. There is much to unpack regarding these two interlocking issues.

The broadness of the area covered by the magazine implies that there are certain limitations to the thesis, as only relevant issues will be explored. Since my study is specifically concerned with the cosmopolitan characteristics and modernities that developed through transnational linkages, I will not go into a detailed description of global historical and political events, such as World War I & II, the Industrial Revolution, Socialist Revolutions or the Indian Independence movement. I will only discuss the effects of these movements on sexual reform, as the writers in *Nara-Naree* occasionally referred to them.

Medical knowledge and medicine are some of the key research areas in previous studies. Consequently, it is not part of the scope of this project. Some scholars have highlighted that public health was the primary concern among the Western-educated elites in colonial India and associated this with the idea of a 'diseased' nation which needed medical intervention (Harrison & Pati, 2001, 2008; Bala, 2007). Similarly, *Nara-Naree* was concerned about the degeneration of the nation, as the body and the nation became merged. But in this thesis I will not explore the construction of masculinity or the sexual dynamics of the male body. Numerous studies (Alter, 1994, 2000; Haynes, 2012; Mills & Sen, 2003; Mukharji, 2011; Osella & Osella, 2006; Pati & Harrison, 2008; Roselli, 1980; Sinha, 1995; Srivastava, 2004a) have argued that the notion of effeminacy, "semen loss anxiety", abstinence and weakness acquired considerable significance in the colonial context as the British saw native men as lacking in

virile character, muscularity and energy. Due to the limited amount of time available, I have chosen not to go into this area in order to maintain my focus on the female body and sexuality and how the intertextual scientific discourses on conjugality were influenced by the transnational movement of sexual reform and the global emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman. Here I will critically analyze the ‘truth’ of the scientific management of sexual and social reform and the debates over women’s socio-sexual autonomy.

#### **4.5. CONCLUSION**

In analyzing the magazine, my main focus is on how women’s bodies were constructed as discursive sites onto which contestations between tradition and modernity and the ‘external’ concepts of sexual reform were played out. I will take into consideration the wider socio-cultural implications of changing gender relations as well as cultural differences in attitudes to modernization and sexual permissiveness. This tension forms part of this thesis and I will explore the ambivalences in Chapters 5 and 6. Moreover, I will identify and analyze the reconceptualization and reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality as expressed in the global dialogue and transnational movements on modern sexual reform and how changes in the ideas about the Bengali Modern Girl and the New Woman are interlinked with the whole discourse of modern conjugality and sexuality. So, I will explore how the female body and sexuality became a subject of critical supervision in this Bengali periodical.

In the next two chapters, I will discuss the empirical research, analyze my findings about the discourses on conjugality and highlight the tensions around women’s socio-sexual autonomy with regards to modern sexual science and modern women’s transgression of conventional roles.



# **CHAPTER 5. DEBATING THE SCIENCE OF MODERN CONJUGALITY: PLEASURE, PROCREATION AND CONTRACEPTION**

During the early twentieth century, the world-wide interest in sexual reform concentrated on discussions about the female body and sexuality and conceptualized conjugal happiness as synonymous with the rhetoric of a healthy family. I have highlighted in Chapter 2 that the intertextual dissemination of global sexology established the foundations of a modern, scientific concept of sexual compatibility and ‘marital happiness’ (Haynes, 2012). This chapter will examine how the contributors to the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* created a cosmopolitan intertextual space by circulating global knowledge about the female body, conjugality and reproductive sexuality in Bengal. Here, I will answer the first research question and show how the transnational processes of modernization were important in changing ideas about the female body and sexuality in the magazine. I will highlight how *Nara-Naree* dealt with the modern concepts of conjugal compatibility and contraception and describe the ways in which contributors to the periodical used and/or reacted to the ideas expressed by sexual reformers around the world. I will also deal with the ambivalences inherent within the global discourses on companionate marriage, the birth control movement and scientific sexology. This chapter will explore the intricacies of modern sexual reform and the ways in which it affected gender roles within heterosexual relations. Here I will analyze how the Bengali vernacular magazine, by assimilating Western references, was creating an ideological space for the expression of female sexuality and encouraging women to make contraceptive choices. Simultaneously, I will also analyze the paradoxes in the birth control debate and the discrepancies and anomalies inherent therein. On the one hand, Western sexual science was used to popularize contraception for women’s sexual emancipation and autonomy, but on the other hand birth control was deemed to be useful for the

national interest with the espousal of the ideal of a healthy and happy conjugal family. Moreover, I will analyze the ways in which Western science was used to justify and sustain traditional conception about marriage and motherhood.

So, this chapter will exhibit inherent tensions within modern sexual reform. I will take into consideration how the gendered construction of sexual reform at home was very much connected with the world outside and explore the problematic ideas of the female body and sexuality, which became the subject of critical supervision.

### **5.1. MARRIAGE AS A PRESCRIPTION**

Contributors to *Nara-Naree* provided a model of ‘a happy married life’ that was influenced by global sexology and also debated the modern elements of global knowledge within the local domain. Here, I will explore the production of a new sexual knowledge in Western scientific literature and its impact on the Bengali sexologists and physicians who incorporated a transnational interconnection into their research.

In *Nara-Naree*, male advocates often borrowed views from Western writers and argued that sex is a biological instinct (Chattopadhyay, 1355b [1948], p. 384) which is profoundly affected by cultural and moral notions. With the advent of global sexology, abstinence was considered unnatural and conjugal compatibility gained favour. The institution of marriage was considered to be the sanctioned social mode for sexual expression and any repression of sexual activity was believed to have far-reaching manifestations. The adverse effects of repression was regarded as ‘Nature’s retaliation’ (Nandy, 1347 [1940], p. 281; S.M. Sengupta, 1347 [1940], p.174; Sen, 1346 [1940], p. 53; Vatsayan, 1347b [1940], p. 364). Sexual stimulation without reaching the ‘natural end’ through marriage was deemed to cause nervous disorders, which might create critical medical circumstances and jeopardize sexual health.

During the early years of *Nara-Naree*, adult men and women in love were advised to avoid sex before marriage in accordance with the Bengali cultural norm (Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]). But soon physical

attraction and intimacy in premarital relations began to be highlighted in different stories (Halder, 1347c [1940]; S.M. Sengupta, 1347 [1940]; Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]). ‘Prescription’ section also received several questions from readers about their premarital experiences and the advisors often asked lovers to restrain their sexual desire until marriage. There were some questions from the readers about the character of the wife indicating premarital affairs. In reply to such a question about the virginity and chastity of the wife, the advisor described various types of hymen which could be ruptured without intercourse (“Prescription,” 1355d [1948], pp. 314-315). Following the study of Havelock Ellis he also cited the prevalence of broken hymens among the Chinese and Indians and women from some other parts of the East where the hymen might be destroyed apart from coitus. Different shapes and structures of hymen were also dealt in detail in Jyoti Bachaspati’s “Yauna Jiban” [“Sexual Life”] (1355a [1948], p. 122) to remove moral panic. Therefore, desire in premarital relations was supposed to be natural (S.M. Sengupta, 1347 [1940]), but only the sexual act within marriage (especially for women) was considered to be socially acceptable (Nandy, 1347 [1940]; Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]). Marital compatibility and conjugal fidelity were also held to be a therapy for controlling sexual extravagance and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (S. Nandy, 1347 [1940]; Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]). In this context *Nara-Naree* referred to Ellen Key’s observation:

*Never do greater possibilities exist for the happiness of both of the individuals and of the race than in a love which begins so early that the two can grow together in a common development; when they possess all the memories of youth as well as all the aims of the future in common, when a shadow of the third has never fallen across the path of either. (qtd. in Sen, 1346 [1940], p. 53)*

This argument was elaborated in ‘Valobasar Bighno’ [‘Travails of Love’] (Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]), where sexual desire prior to marriage was argued to generate various physiological problems to jeopardize sexual health. Marriage was propagated by the doctor as the ‘prescription’ to cure the psychological excitement caused by love. The critical condition of a love-struck Bengali girl was

compared with an American girl named Betty who suffered from abdominal pain and for whom doctors advised marriage as the remedy. Repression was also believed to lead to barrenness or impotence and marriage was cited as the medical cure.

Monogamous marriage was also hailed as the major and permanent solution for curbing the irresistible desire of the new generation of youth who easily gave in to material temptations (D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347a [1940]) and marriage was scientifically ascertained as being important in keeping the social structure from crumbling. The ‘medicinal value’ of marriage and its ‘natural’ and scientific implications were endorsed by Western references, such as, Dr. Wench’s ‘Healthy Wedded life’, which highlighted the necessity of marriage:

*Marriage is a condition the time for which is indicated by Nature and if Nature is disregarded and marriage is delayed, a certain amount of punishment will surely follow. (qtd in Sen, 1346 [1940], p. 53)*

A proper marriageable age for both boys and girls was scientifically endorsed as the prolonged repression of natural urges was believed to affect their psychophysical health (Nandy, 1347 [1940], p. 281; Vatsayan, 1347b [1940]). Love was treated as a private affair that was supposed to properly take place only between a husband and a wife; sex outside these confines was repressed and the institution of marriage claimed exclusive rights to the discourses on sexuality. Society tried to regulate the sexuality of modern women by placing it firmly within marriage, which was deemed to be the *only* appropriate institution for sexual intimacy. One article also referred to Havelock Ellis, who observed in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*:

*It is recognized that a girl becomes sexually a woman at puberty, at that epoch she receives her initiation into adult life and becomes a wife and a mother. (qtd in Sen, 1346 [1940], p. 53)*

Companionate marriage and conjugal life became the best prevention against emotional and physical complications, ‘immorality’, sexual



extravagance, promiscuity and sexual diseases (D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]). The process of taming ‘wild’ sexuality also led to comparisons between the prostitute and the chaste wife. So, naturally all other forms of intercourse, except that within monogamous heterosexual marriage, became subject to a strict regime of surveillance.

It can be argued that this moral panic was interlinked with the rise of independent women, who were breaking away from conventional gender roles. So, domesticity, respectability and female sexuality remained interlocked. The rising concern with the phenomenon of delayed marriage and scientific remedies of conjugal union indicated how the assertive emergence of the New Woman and the Modern Girl aggravated social unease as they rejected traditional gender stereotypes and the procreative function as the sole aim of life. Moreover, Bengali writers expressed conflicting opinions about the changing social scenario, women’s demands for social equality and economic independence, which were interlinked with modern women’s social transgression. Some writers felt it necessary to contain the New Woman’s uninhibited exercise of freedom and social autonomy within marriage and motherhood:

*Exhibiting the vanity of education when women are entering marriage, by that time the charms of youth have bidden adieu. (Nandy, 1347 [1940], pp. 281-283)*

As it was perceived that modern women were careful about marriage and indulged in premarital relations, their ‘unruly’ ways were often questioned and controlled. There were fears that liberated women would avoid marriage and bear children outside of marriage or, in a far worse scenario, would cease having children altogether. There prevailed a common perception that the New Woman and the Modern Girl were likely to engage in romantic relationships outside marriage and so marriage was propagated as a cure for all problems. Letters from readers also indicated that physical proximity beyond marriage had started to increase (“Prescription,” 1346 [1940], p. 525). During the initial years of *Nara-Naree*, love beyond marriage and premarital physical intimacy became highly debated. Gradually, love marriages became predominant and socially acceptable. Soliciting parents and

guardians and seeking their consent in relation to intimate matters and marriage were advised as it was necessary to control the love affairs of adolescents who might fall into danger. Some readers complained about the social restrictions on premarital affairs outside the institution of marriage and the lack of social space in this age of women's empowerment ("Prescription," 1355b [1948], p. 167). An article explained that premarital sex should not be considered as sin and the writer made an intertextual reference to Ellen Key's observation: "Those who love each other are husband and wife" (Chattopadhyay, 1355b [1948], p. 385).

There were also questions from readers to the advisors about managing problems in one's love-life. Women and men started to profess marital commitment through letters like "Keno Ami Amar Swami K Valobasi" ["Why Do I Love My Husband?"] (Bhattacharya, 1353 [1946], p. 212; Debi, 1353 [1946]; Maitreya, 1353 [1946], p. 254) and "Keno Ami Amar Stri k Valobasi" [Why Do I Love My Wife?] (Nandy, 1357 [1950], p. 342). Therefore, the idealization of compatibility and companionship found a major role in *Nara-Naree* and conjugal love was considered to be the necessary and basic foundation of marriage. So, modernity was interlinked with the ideals of romantic love and monogamous companionate marriage, which centred around intimate needs such as the need to love, to be loved and to experience a fulfilling sex life.

## **5.2. WOMEN'S SEXUAL NATURE AND COMBATING CONJUGAL DISPLEASURE**

In *Nara-Naree*, companionate marriage and the new understanding of the 'scientific' management of sex were conceived as central sites and the markers of a modern society. Discourses on 'conjugal happiness' were designed to inculcate a sense of marital responsibility in spouses, who were provided with valuable tips to maintain a knowledgeable sexual life. For this purpose, *Nara-Naree* quoted extensively from Marie Stopes' *Married Love* (1918), Bertrand Russell's *Marriage and Morals* (1929) and Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897–1928) and thus implied an openness towards knowledge by crossing national and cultural borders (De, 1355 [1948], p. 390).

With the popularization of Western sexual science and global sexology, Marie Stopes' *Married Love* (1918) became a handbook of sexual knowledge for both men and women (Maitra, 1355 [1948–49], p. 29). Scientific sexology countered taboos surrounding the discussion of female sexuality in the social domain and even within conjugal life. Contributors to *Nara-Naree* were particularly significant in popularizing sexual science by taking it out of elite and Western circles and producing a lucid form of knowledge for the non-Western expert and non-expert public in order to guide readers towards a better understanding of conjugal life. But it is crucial to stress that this scientific discourse was mostly gendered and located within the context of heterosexual marriage which was considered to be the foundation stone of a society.

To the Bengali public, *Nara-Naree* became a capsule form of Western sexual knowledge and private life became a public concern. Readers were very enthusiastic about the scientific analysis of sexual issues, which acquainted them with a global sexual culture (“Alochana”, 1355 [1948], Maitra, 1355 [1948–49]). Readers also acknowledged the importance of *Nara-Naree* in making a huge contribution to promoting ‘conjugal science’ (Chakrabarty, 1357 [1950]) as the silence about sex education in public space contributed to marital dissatisfaction, mainly caused by ‘ignorant’ husbands (“Prescription,” 1356 [1949], 246; Sengupta, 1356 [1949], pp. 274–275). Here, a wife’s contentment was intertextually linked with marital happiness and a successful conjugal life. This involved an increasingly explicit concern for a wife’s right to pleasure that found expression in the discursive formation of the ideal of ‘companionate marriage’ (Connell & Hunt, 2006).

Abul Hassanat, a Bengali sexologist, whom I referred to in Chapter 2, contributed some articles to *Nara-Naree* on sexual science. Following the case studies made by Havelock Ellis, Abul Hassanat’s set of questionnaires on conjugal relations (1353 [1947], p. 77) were addressed to the journal’s readers. It is also very interesting to note that an indigenous astrologer, Jyoti Bachaspati (1355b [1948], p. 324–325), combined Western scientific theories in his columns and talked about Marie Carmichael Stopes as he could not find any strong

confrontation between Western and non-Western theories on female sexuality and desire.

One important factor in ‘modern’ marriage was the emerging consensus among sexologists that women need preparation for the sexual act and that men need to be more aware of this (Connel & Hunt, 2008; Haynes, 2012). Western and Bengali experts focused on ways of consolidating and stabilizing the conjugal relationship and the wife’s sexual satisfaction was a prerequisite for reinforcing her commitment to the relationship. Contributors to *Nara-Naree* provided a wide range of advice to married couples and particularly stressed the importance of the husband’s role in providing sexual satisfaction to his wife. Diganta Roy (1354 [1947-48], p. 30) explained the function of female sexual physiology and Mukul De (1353 [1946], p. 476) stressed that knowledge about ‘preparatory tenderness’ and the art of love-making was essential for attaining ‘marital bliss’. Various prescriptions and techniques were issued for ensuring the wife’s pleasure, which was assumed to be the marker of true modernity. Thus it struck a similar note with Douglas E. Haynes’ (2012) emphasis on the popularity of global sexology, which highlighted the modern husband’s need to satisfy his wife sexually, linking it with male concerns about sexual performance for achieving ‘marital enjoyment’.

Female desire was given much importance and this simultaneously raised anxiety about manhood and ‘sexual inadequacy’ among men (Ahluwalia, 2013, p. 28). There were many questions from readers, who interlinked spermatorrhea, duration of erection and size of penis with conjugal disharmony. Bengali sexologists maintained that ‘marital happiness’ and successful conjugal relationships were enhanced by knowledge about the essential facts of life and love. Some letters from the readers confirmed that a few men did not have any knowledge about sexual union and their complete ignorance baffled even the advisor (“Prescription,” 1356 [1949], p. 246). One female subscriber indicated that such not-so-uncommon instances were due to the silence about sex education in public space (Sengupta, 1356 [1949], pp. 274–275).

While insisting on female desire, Marie Stopes (1918) attributed to husbands the role of ‘awakening’ female sexual response and highlighted that the husband has a continuing duty to court and woo his wife. This gendered model of the male as initiator and tutor and the female as a passive responding student remained remarkably persistent throughout the twentieth century (Connell & Hunt, 2006). It brings to mind Ellis’ theory (1953, p. 156) where he argued that women’s sexual stimulation is diffused over several areas of the body and he laid importance on the techniques of foreplay which were perceived to be predominant among various Western and Indian writers (Ahluwalia, 2013). Ellis’ long chapter on “The Art of Love” in the sixth volume of the *Studies* was in a sense the prototype for the countless how-to-do-it sexual manuals published over the last half century. Ellis struck a modern note when he argued that natural male aggressiveness ought to be tempered, but at the same time the woman was considered to be a flute or a musical instrument, to be played upon by the man until she was aroused. Thus, sexology conscripted all women as totally sexual and the ideology of the ‘sexual revolution’ and the main progenitors of the sex reform movement set out to eroticise women in the active servicing of male sexuality. In providing conjugal satisfaction, women’s body parts were often fetishized. Women were reduced by men’s obsession with physical love to a merely sexual function. International sexology mainly looked upon fetishism as a type of male sexual behaviour (and not as pathological), although “it does not explain why women are so rarely fetishist” (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 129). It probably suggested the constructed difference between male and female sexual behavior, where women were treated as “sex objects” (Robinson, 1973) at the cost of sexual liberation. So, the sex reform movement, even though it gave importance to women’s sexual desire and pleasure, on the other hand, it totally accepted the imperative nature of men’s sexual urges.

Moreover, the husband was treated as the teacher who could not only guide the wife in sexual matters but was also expected to initiate the sexual act (Basu, 1355 [1948], p.162; Nandy, 1353a [1947], P. 47). This observation fitted well with the work of Western sexologists, who promoted the husband’s responsibility to instruct and initiate his wife in conjugal intimacy and viewed women and men as naturally

and unequivocally defined categories of being with distinctive psychological and behavioural propensities that could be predicted from their reproductive functions (Garfinkel 1967, pp. 116–18). An expert husband was advised to master the art of transferring clitoral stimulation to a vaginal one as it was the sign of a mature woman to shift her centre of excitation (De, 1353 [1946], p. 47). Thus the reasoning of global sexology lay in the ability of a husband to provide his wife with pleasure in the physiological and emotional acts that were the basic foundations upon which marriage rested. The advocacy of conjugal happiness maintained normative gender roles: husband-as-teacher and wife-as-pupil. While the marriage manuals stressed the significance of marital responsibilities, the wife was universally assumed to be a virgin and sexually inexperienced. So, even though female sexual pleasure became a characteristic of modern sexual culture, women were considered to be the receivers of second-hand knowledge. This was also a characteristic of global sexology. Furthermore, some writers in *Nara-Naree* advised that women should master the art of love in order to please their husbands. Women were given instructions about the techniques of love play by combining scientific sexology and directions from erotic manuals like the *Kamasutra* to make them sexually appealing and approachable to their husbands. In *Nara-Naree* it was also advised that “women have as much responsibility to respond to their husbands by breaking the barrier of fear, shame and unwanted pregnancy, as their husbands have an obligation to satisfy their wives” (Nandy, 1353a [1947], p. 47). Mutual sexual harmony and gratification were considered to be the key concerns of modern conjugality. Despite the experts’ claims that conjugal relations could be improved by focusing on scientific techniques and discourses of sexual arousal for increasing pleasure, the sexologist Saroj Kumar Nandy’s wife put the emphasis on love, companionship and understanding rather than the mere process of sexual stimulation (Nandy, 1357 [1950], p. 344).

Thus, sexual performance became a critical social space where male and female sexuality were constructed. Paul Robinson (1973), in connection with the modernization of sexual reform, noted that with the prevalence of global sexology, sexual reformers emphasized that sexual desire in women could be universally characterized as

‘elusive’, while male sexuality was ‘predominantly open and aggressive’. Srimati Bani Halder (1948 [1355], p. 63) in “Nari o Prem” [“Women and Love”] stressed the differences between male and female sexual impulses and the natural differentiation of feminine and masculine attitudes and behaviours. Another writer Yusuf, (1353 [1947], pp. 36–37) also supported her view. He pointed out the wide differences in the sexual natures of men and women and highlighted women’s naturally ingrained preference for motherhood and chastity. Much of the problem centred on the different processes of sexual arousal as well as the ‘aim’ of sexual activity: orgasm for men and motherhood for women. Thus, motherhood was deemed to be the ‘healthy’ and indispensable goal for women and remained a significant concern within sexual reform. These constructions again somehow reinforced the Victorian masculine bias. No doubt, the sexologists gave female desire significant recognition in their writings, but such desires were often viewed through the prism of male fulfilment that was both physical and social (Haynes, 2012). Even though sexologists conceptualized women as sexual beings by breaking away from the traditional patriarchal notion of female passivity and submissiveness, sexual pleasure was tied to marriage and motherhood.

There were several articles that measured the fulfilment of a woman’s conjugal life in terms of attaining motherhood. A female Bengali writer, Manjari Debi (1346 [1940]), in the article “Gorilla” narrated the plight of a dissatisfied housewife named Lila, who used to scream in her dream while visualizing intimate scenes with a gorilla. Her suppressed desire was imprinted in the subconscious and it appeared through repetitive dreams by defying moral policing and repression in the actual social space. She tried to hide her latent dream-thoughts as her transgression occurred in the form of ‘unnatural’ fantasy. The repression of desire and pleasure took a toll on her health, which became evident through the deterioration of her physical health. She bore the brunt of social ignominy and was labelled a ‘barren woman’ even though the fault lay with her husband. Unable to undergo silent suffering, despair and mute agony, she confided in her ‘happily married’ friend and sought remedies to sustain her difficult marriage. Her friend’s husband, who was a psychologist, interpreted her dream

as a symbol of despair and discontentment with her conjugal relation and recommended her husband to consult a sexologist. This incident established the link between mind and body, where female desire and pleasure were suppressed in apprehension of social stigma, guilt and shame. The story ended on a happy note with Lila's contentment in married life as her husband regained his vigour after consulting the sexologist and she became a mother, evidencing renewed 'marital happiness'. Thus, the article linked the understanding of sexual functioning to the viability of the conjugal relationship. The best proof of conjugal satisfaction was deemed to be the exhilarating exhibition of motherhood and the experience of maternal joy. As I have argued earlier, the link between reproduction and sexual reform was indispensable in the case of both the Western and the Indian sexologists. Therefore, "Scientific sexology offered the potential of a highly-sexualised partner, a wife whose libido could be potentially unleashed in the context of 'sex love' without threatening the destruction of the conjugal relationship or the larger social order" (Haynes, 2012, p. 825).

### **5.3. DEBATES ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS WITHIN UNHAPPY MARRIAGES**

The discourse on conjugal happiness emphasized the need for husbands to take responsibility by focusing on compassionate understanding, but it was also meant for various reasons: to 1) ensure the viability of marriage as a heterosexual institution, 2) restrain the extramarital affairs of wives and thus increase fidelity and stability, 3) reduce the probability of divorce by focusing on marital compatibility. With the rise of the careerist New Woman and the Modern Girl, it became necessary to bind them to heterosexual romance and marriage. Global sexology also emphasized the point that the wife would probably seek pleasure through partners outside marriage if her needs were not met by her husband. In this context, Sanjam Ahluwalia (2008, p. 76) opined that, by championing conjugal pleasure and focusing on sexual satisfaction within marriage, sexologists were taking away the right of wives to resist their husbands.



When a woman reader voiced her disenchantment with her husband and spoke about her premarital affair with another man (“Prescription,” 1355d [1948], pp. 316–317), the advisor in *Nara-Naree* asked her to be content in the conjugal relation as the present man in her life was not only her husband but also the father of her child. After this moral advice he concluded that this judgment was applicable to both husbands and wives. So, personal fulfilment was supposed to be sacrificed at the altar of family and marriage.

In contrast, Kuntalar Chithi [Kuntala’s Letter] (Bhattacharya, 1347 [1940]) was an example that focused on the importance of the medical scrutiny of sexual health before marriage. In the form of a personal letter, the leading character Kuntala unveiled the ‘problem’ of her married life to her friend. Her husband’s premarital passivity, which she used to admire as modesty during their courtship, was discovered to be impotence, and his inefficacy led to futile consultations with sexologists for therapeutic solutions. Kuntala lamented that for married women there was no other choice. Their fate remained sealed with the chosen husband even if he was found to be impotent or passive. Disgusted, Kuntala urged her friend to understand the gravity of the situation where women were supposed to follow the Hindu Shastric tradition of Manu and divorce was not an acceptable choice as in the Western countries.

Kuntala’s outburst showed how self-imposed abstinence tried to overshadow the wife’s sexual agency and stood against the termination of marriage where the husband’s incapability was hidden under moral scruples and prejudices. Kuntala implored her friend to persuade her physician husband to begin a movement on sex-education by citing her miserable instance:

*In today’s era every developed nation has a system of scientifically testing the health of the spouses to declare them as fit for marriage by issuing a medical certificate [...] If Mr. Sen initiates a movement on sexology, it would be really beneficial for the womenfolk of our society. (Bhattacharya, 1347 [1940], p. 523)*

Thus, readers were taken into a world of female conversation, where women talked openly about conjugal disharmony, infertility and male impotence, certainly evoking a degree of shame in a man's incapacity. It further highlighted the issue that if a woman was 'barren' and could not bear children, men wasted no time in arranging a remarriage. On the other hand, if a man was sexually impotent, it was expected that women should remain subservient; otherwise the family system would break down.

Articles in *Nara-Naree* also provided a space for women to pour out their desperation and dissatisfaction with marital life to their married female friends. Female characters broke the conspiracy of silence around married women's bodies and sexuality. So, here women were participating directly and indirectly, through face-to-face conversations or epistolary confessions, as trusted empathizers of their female friends and they assisted in seeking out scientific solutions with the help of their specialist husbands. The sign of modernity was prominent among female companions and their sharing of intimate conversations and problems.

Divorce was also suggested as a much-needed alternative, while abstinence within marriage became 'unnatural' for both male and female partners (Bhattacharya, 1347 [1940]; D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]; P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347a [1940], p. 389). In "Dorokha Niti" [Double Standard of Morality] (Roy, 1355 [1948]) Bertrand Russell's *Marriage and Morals* was discussed and the writer indicated that the issues of morality hindered women from expressing their opinions and desires. Those who criticized divorce rates in Europe and applauded their own chastity were unmindful of the silent sacrifices and suicides on the pretext of preserving the institution of marriage. It was argued that higher divorce rates did not necessarily reflect a lack of commitment or the decline of moral character. But it might indicate that the institution of marriage had evolved to respect individual autonomy, particularly for women, instead of remaining confining in character.

#### 5.4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE FRIGIDITY

Scientific discourses that focused on ‘good sex’ and conjugal compatibility often highlighted female frigidity as a medical concern. Taking their cue from Western sexologists, Bengali sexual reformers started to direct their attention towards women’s bodies. In ‘Kuhelika’ [‘Enigma’], Shri Panchugopal Mukhopadhyay (1347a [1940]) narrated a man’s personal experience about his wife and mother. His mother’s sexually passive, terrified and cold approach towards his father’s advances was recounted. He also received the same attitude from his own wife. Her panic-stricken appearance, antipathy and indifference increased with the birth of their second child. He categorized his wife’s unresponsiveness and detachment as frigidity, ‘mental disease’ or a ‘complex’ (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347a [1940], p. 304) and the ‘cold woman’ was dubbed as ‘mad’. Physical reasons, such as menstrual problems, chronic appendicitis or deformity of the uterus or ovary were cited as causes of this ‘psychological anomaly’. The medicalization of his wife’s sexual unresponsiveness was influenced by global sexology and based on the work of the early twentieth century Western sexologists who associated female sexual passivity with psychiatric deficiency and pathology. Thus, some of the Western and native sexologists constructed the the ‘truth’ about orgasm and frigidity by making women’s bodies a legitimate site for medicalization. Women who were unable to respond zealously to their husbands were categorized as invert.

In contrast, some contributors to *Nara-Naree* suggested a lack of sexual knowledge (“Prescription,” 1356 [1949], p. 246) as the reason behind the high percentage of sexual dissatisfaction among women. The writers made intertextual references and noted that female frigidity is much less common than is believed and is often a mere consequence of the inability of the man and his selfishness. The key to frigidity is often not an anatomical anomaly but but a result of the insensitivity of the male. The lack of sexual education in youth, disgust or fear of the sexual act culminates in a painful and unpleasant sexual initiation on the wedding night.

Some writers observed that men easily indulge in extra-marital affairs (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347a [1940], “Prescription,” 1355a [1948] pp. 111–112) with or without reason (S. Chattopadhyay, 1347 [1940]). If any difficulty arises in conjugal happiness, some men separate their beds and develop liaisons with other women or prostitutes (“Prescription,” 1355a [1948], p. 112), some isolate themselves, expecting the wife to learn her own ‘mistake’ (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347a [1940], p. 305) and some suspect other men behind their wives’ ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviour instead of analyzing their own domineering and autocratic aggression (D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]). A number of articles in *Nara-Naree* dealt with the sensitive issue of sexual pleasure and frigidity and noted that the overbearing attitude of the partner could heighten psychological pressure, apathy, mental distress and hysteria (Vatsayan, 1347a [1940]). An article entitled ‘Shipra Bijoy ar Ami’ [‘Shipra, Bijoy and Me’] (D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347 [1940]) depicted the husband Bijoy’s insensitivity and hypersexual aggressiveness towards his wife Shipra from the marital night onwards, which were accompanied by physical torture and mental abuse on several occasions. Later, the woman was drawn towards her empathetic friend and married him after her divorce. Their conjugal harmony was a pointer to the fact that it was the threatening pattern of behaviour and unwanted sexual advances that she had received from her husband which had caused her sexual passivity in the face of mounting stress. Her failure to reciprocate and objection to his consecutive demands for sex pointed to the fact that women did not always yield to quench male sexual desire. Sheila Jeffreys (1985) in this context argued that the popular assumption about the ‘normal’ woman was that she would enthusiastically embrace sexual intercourse. The woman who failed to respond with enthusiasm was classified as ‘frigid’ and deviant. But in this case the traditional idea of a ‘normal’ woman who readily responded to male stimulation was overturned.

In the ‘Prescription’ section there were some questions about unhappy married life. One reply to a question in this section suggested that if a man had some patience and empathy he could solve conjugal problems as women needed some time for preparation and to become relaxed in marital relationships, especially in arranged

marriages (“Prescription,” 1355a [1948], p. 112). With the promotion of global sexology, the advisors stressed compassion as the foundation of conjugal happiness and emphasized the modern concept of love, which highlighted cosmopolitan characteristics. The contributors to the magazine extended support and respect for women’s desire and her rights over her body, while trying to foster mutual understanding. Following is an example of some vital questions on the part of the advisor, who clarified various factors to make the marriage happy and sexually fulfilling:

- a) What is the age of the wife? How is her health? (This implies that proper age and good health are criteria for marital happiness)
- b) Did you consummate the marriage?
- c) When did you make love for the first time after marriage?
- d) Was it consensual or forced?
- e) Did you discuss the conjugal relation with your wife? What is her opinion?
- f) Were both of you satisfied in the sexual union?

(“Prescription,” 1355e [1948], p. 398)

To hammer home the discourse of conjugal bliss, the contributors to the magazine cited the fact that scores of women have been mothers but have not reached the pleasure of sexual union due to the ignorance or disregard of men who had selfishly only been concerned with their own satisfaction (Nandy, 1356 [1950]). Many women were also scared of becoming pregnant, so they were reluctant in sexual union. Nonconsensual sex and women’s inability to refuse their husband’s sexual demands were the factors that most frequently led to unwanted pregnancy. Nirmalchandra De (1354 [1947–48], pp. 2–6) provided different reasons that could lead to sexual frigidity associated with the insensitivity of the partner. Some other contributors opined that forced sexual relations within marriage could be termed rape (Roy, 1354 [1948], p. 30). Thus men were given a serious responsibility to be sensitive, friendly, open to discussion, empathetic and compassionate. Various articles highlighted the need to seek the wife’s consent and asked men to value her emotions. Thus

scientific discourses suggested various formulas to be a good lover and sexological understanding was incorporated into the complex, hybrid conceptions of sexuality. So, it was no longer seen as sufficient to stress the wife's maternal and marital duties alone but it became absolutely necessary to give expression to her independent right to personal satisfaction (Connell & Hunt, 2006).

*Nara-Naree* reported that the number of 'frigid' women was not small in the West. Various examples of frigid women were quoted (De, 1354 [1947-48]) from *A Marriage Manual* by Abraham Stone and Hanah Stone and *Sexual Truths* by W.J. Robinson and pointed out that a huge number of women were not sexually responsive. Katherine Davis enlisted the reasons in her book *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty Two Hundred Women* and these were incorporated into an article by Nirmalchandra De (1354 [1947-48]). The prominent physical causes included: lack of desire, tiring process, physical weakness, pain, repeated coitus, pregnancy, menopause, lack of sexual harmony etc. while psychological reasons were wide-ranging. Inhibition and feelings of degradation made sexual intercourse distasteful. Bengali sexologists tried to draw a correlation between the responses from Western women and apply this knowledge in the native context. It was also found that frigidity could be temporary or 'person-specific'. A woman, who appeared cold towards her husband, might act normally with another person.

Sheila Jeffreys (1985) commented on the construction of the frigid woman by the sexual reformers and argued that it was biased:

*The concept of frigidity could not be applied to men. Men could be classified as 'impotent.' Men who were indifferent to or wished to avoid sexual intercourse were seen as exercising free will and freedom of choice rather than necessarily suffering from a medical or psychological complaint. The concept of frigidity removed that freedom of choice for women where sexual intercourse was concerned.*  
(p. 98)

As part of the enforcement of heterosexuality and the attack on women's resistance to sexual intercourse, female frigidity was

invented. It was a potent weapon to worry women into enthusiastic participation in the sexological prescription (Jeffreys, 1985, p. 5).

Moreover, frigidity was associated with the rise of ‘militant’ feminism. Mukul De (1353 [1947], p.53) propounded that the leaders of women’s groups were often found to be hostile towards men and marriage and it alluded to the campaigns by Western women who were fighting for voting rights. This antifeminist stand of some articles in the magazine revealed the conflict within the minds of the ‘progressive’ thinkers who were upholding the process of social transformation through the promotion of sexual science.

### **5.5. CONTRACEPTION, MOTHERHOOD AND PROBLEMATICS OF CHOICE**

The Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* recorded the global discourse on the modern model of conjugality and reproductive sexuality that characterized and influenced the changing ideas about the female body. The global and local practices concerning discourses on birth control and conjugal science propagated by Western sexologists were repeatedly referred to by the Bengali advocates. Contraceptive information made a legitimate platform for the articulation of new discourses on sexuality and conjugality. Sarah Hodges (2008) stressed that the late colonial contraceptive commercialism was rooted in the pursuit of pleasure and cultivation of selves. Discourses surrounding domestic science focused on a simultaneously ‘forward thinking’ and pleasure-seeking modern public by the virtue of their adoption of new forms of technology (Hodges, 2008, p. 128). In *Nara-Naree*, contraception was proposed to enhance pleasure in sexual life and women’s health was primarily considered in terms of the circulation of birth-control information.

The propagation of birth control goes hand in hand with sexual autonomy for women. The ideology of limiting family size and the declining birthrate were symptomatic of a larger questioning of the role of women in procreation, the role of women in marriage and the institution of marriage itself. My analysis of the magazine *Nara-Naree* revealed that women were aware of different procedures of birth control and were inquisitive about sexual health, pleasure and

autonomy. Here women appeared to be participating directly and indirectly (through face-to-face conversation or epistolary confession) as trusted confidants and empathizers. Thus, female scholarship about contraception and sexual knowledge promoted both the direct and indirect participation of women rather than being passive recipients of filtered information through their husbands:

*With the root of prejudices being destroyed, the ‘moral burden’ is declining. They (women) are learning to think differently, explore new things and live healthily and scientifically. They do not become embarrassed or redden with shame while listening to information regarding birth control. (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1346 [1939–1940], p. 6)*

Experts in *Nara-Naree* realized that as long as married women were subject to their husbands’ sexual desires and as long as there was no way to regulate fertility, women would be subject to repeated childbirth and the managing of a large household. So, reform in the domain of conjugal sexuality was interlinked with the emergence of the Modern Girl and the New Woman, who were noticeably different from the ‘traditional’ woman, the sign of procreative middle-class femininity within the terms of heterosexual marriage.

Contributors to *Nara-Naree* often projected a positive representation of women as subjects of knowledge. In one article by Tripti Roy, the female protagonist, Ela, in “Nischit Nirnoy” [“Confirmed Detection”], (1347b [1940]) attempted to dissipate the secrecy, shame and silence around women’s bodies and make them active participants in creating and sharing knowledge to reclaim their bodies from hierarchical control. She talked about new discoveries and scientific inventions relevant to women’s health and sexuality and is a representative of the cosmopolitan modern women who had an understanding of the world beyond home. She argued: “I cannot agree on the issue that marriage is the final conclusion of a woman’s life, rather it is the beginning,” and she started a school for circulating birth control information (Roy, 1347a [1940] p.137). Ela explained



various strategies of birth control, such as the Ogino-Knaus<sup>11</sup> method (T. Roy, 1347a [1940]) by calculating the safe period. She also emphasized modern scientific discoveries about the confirmation of pregnancy through the Aschheim-Zondek test<sup>12</sup> and highly praised this “European-American technique” (T. Roy, 1347b [1940], p. 336). These articles marked a distinction between procreation and pleasure by upholding women as active, knowledgeable agents who could make their own decisions about their conjugal satisfaction and procreation. Many readers asked about contraception and desired to delay childbirth. In reply to women readers about modern contraceptives and family planning, Bengali advocates presented an array of options, such as birth-control tablets, pessaries, the sponge, condoms, calculating the safe period, barrier methods, coitus interruptus, applying spermicidal jelly or cream, the diaphragm or cervical cap, sterilization and discussed their usage, methods of application, advantages and disadvantages in detail (“Prescription,” 1357 [1950], pp. 382–383). This modern knowledge about contraception highlighted how global sexology impacted upon conjugal and sexual practices in Bengal and influenced transnational modernity.

Maya Gupta (1355 [1948]) quoted Norman Haire and delineated various strategies of birth-control devices from the very beginnings of civilization in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Japan, Arabia, Asia, Africa and Australia (pp. 274–275). With the rise of transnational modernity and the slackening of moral prejudices, Bengali women’s eagerness to learn about sexual knowledge and birth control was found to be increasing and thus necessitated a movement on sexology and contraception (Bhattacharya, 1347 [1940], p. 523; P. Mukhopadhyay,

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<sup>11</sup> The Ogino-Knaus Method (named after Kyusaku Ogino, a Japanese gynecologist, and Hermann Knaus, from Austria) is a calendar-based method for estimating the fertile and infertile phases during the menstrual cycle. By using it, a woman tracks the days of her periodic cycle and gets the resulting likelihood of pregnancy on particular days of the month. This method can be used either to conceive or to avoid pregnancy.

<sup>12</sup> This test was used to determine pregnancy in a laboratory by injecting concentrated urine of the woman in the body of a mouse.

1346 [1939-40], p. 6). Thus the preoccupation with sexual and social reform was concentrated on and directed towards modern women.

Women were represented as ideal subjects for receiving, circulating and controlling contraceptive knowledge. Women's conscious choice to use birth control was conspicuous in the questions which appeared in the 'Prescription' section:

*I have been married for one month. I don't intend to have children right now ... I would like to live freely as long as possible. I would be obliged if you could prescribe some medicine and explain its application. But I would be happier if you could suggest some other natural methods instead of medical potions as I am afraid that a negative reaction might create other complications or ailments ... I am looking forward to your recommendation for medicine or any other natural method in this regard.*

(*"Prescription,"* 1353[1946], p. 491)

This eagerness to learn about contraception illustrates the popularity of Western biomedicine and the individual assertion of women's sexuality which demarcated the institution of motherhood from conscious reproductive choice. Many articles focused on improving the quality of life and upgrading the standard of living, which is directly linked with managing the modern lifestyle. So becoming modern was linked with women's contraceptive choice within the conjugal sphere. In the intertextual space, Western and Bengali birth-control advocates argued that control over one's own body was the most basic and inviolable fundamental aspect of being an individual. Contributors to *Nara-Naree* often emphasized that the emancipation of women must also involve the choice about whether, when and how often to become a mother. They also insisted on the benefits of birth control for individual women: it could relieve women, both married and unmarried, from the fear of pregnancy and thus allow them to enjoy sexual relations more fully. Advocates wanted to encourage women to choose different processes of contraception instead of depending on their husbands for managing reproductive sexuality (Nandy, 1353b [1947], pp. 81-84). It was believed that in order to

have control over their own bodies, sexuality and fertility in a patriarchal domain it was necessary to highlight the issues of sexual compatibility and birth control as this would ensure that married women were not defenceless against the sexual demands of their husbands:

*Women's natural hesitation is mostly responsible for their plight and misery. One kind of woman endures the untoward and overbearing demands of her husband for fear of displeasing him, and there is another type of woman who does not take recourse to scientific measures for fear of jeopardizing her physical and psychological health and even religious or after-life repercussions. (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1346 [1939–1940], p. 6)*

Although contraceptives were advised in order for women to retain autonomy over sexual activity, in some articles marriage and motherhood were scientifically considered to be highly beneficial for women's health (Nandy, 1353b [1947], p. 81). Motherhood was championed as 'Nature's law' to benefit a woman's body and that she was best suited for this purpose as a complementary physiological necessity, and needed to be prepared for such a mission. It was presumed that motherhood paved the way to sexual maturity and cured sexual anomalies. Some Western references were cited in this regard (Nandy, 1353a [1947], p. 46). So, even though discourses surrounding scientific sexology emphasized birth control, the link between motherhood and biological fulfilment was found to be indispensable in both the Bengali and Western contexts of sexual reform.

Myriad instructions were provided to women for good birth and good living which highlighted the link between domesticity and fertility. Women were considered to be the mothers of future progeny and required to produce strong leaders of the nation (B. Mukhopadhyay, 1347 [1940]). Women were prescribed to depend on some specific scientific measures for the birth of healthy babies:

*Science should reign over the mother's mind and she should be instructed to be careful during menstrual period,*

*pregnancy and postpartum stages keeping the thoughts about the unborn baby which she would deliver.*

*(B. Mukhopadhyay, 1347 [1940], p. 349)*

Since it was discovered that the private domain was impacting upon the public life of nations, it could not be left unsupervised. The sexology movement was deemed as urgently needed to educate the men and women of the country and Bengali advocates gave importance to the wider dissemination of contraceptive knowledge. Furthermore, the relationship between health and governance ensured an engagement with global scientific modernity and in this context the importance of a healthy lifestyle was highlighted. Advocates of birth control wanted to ensure the propagation of a ‘fitter’ race of people. They were often concerned not only with the quantity of the population but also its quality. In a prayer on the eve of New Year one author proclaimed:

*May we be exhilarated with the birth of ‘balaban’ (vigorous) babies in the household. May our race thrive with the renewed glamour of eternal vitality and vivacity. (Kumar, 1346 [1940], p. 67)*

Additionally, some contributors to *Nara-Naree* indicated that women from working-class families suffered from production of more children than their families could properly maintain (Roy, 1347a [1940], p.137). So, the increased demands for the wider dissemination of birth control information and technology allowed educated men to speculate upon the intimate domain of procreation and conjugal relations. Sanjam Ahluwalia (2008) highlighted how the complex understanding of Western bio-medical discourses on birth control influenced the debates on population size and the health of the people. The objective was to reformulate the norms and functions of middle-class family life as a site of moral and cultural restructuring of the nation and create educated compatriot-wives who would bring discipline, order and hygienic practices into middle class homes.

Therefore, the promotion of birth control could not be unproblematically linked with the expressions of individualism,

progress and development in the context of Bengal; rather, it was associated with various paradoxes and problematic notions regarding conjugal happiness, women's emancipation and the national cause.

## 5.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have analyzed how Bengali writers and sexologists maintained the scientific management of sexual desire. Western texts were adopted and interpreted within the Bengali cultural context of sexuality. The contributors to *Nara-Naree* adapted scientific theories from Western sexologists in order to reform conjugal relations in Bengal and encouraged women to express their own opinions about the female body and sexuality. This chapter also shows the gendered nature of sexual reform as it was co-constructed by Bengali and Western writers. Notions of differences in the nature of male and female sexual desire and pleasure became biologically determined. Like those of Western sexual reformers, the responses of Bengali sexual reformers were also not unanimous. Some were preoccupied with women's sexual fulfilment as wives and mothers and some championed women's autonomy, pleasure and desire in unambiguous terms with the promotion of contraceptive choice. Women participated as empathizers, trusted friends, companions and confidants amidst the male monopoly on sexual reform and operated as agents of social change. This indicated a major shift in the male-oriented reform movement. But the overall concern was to confine all expressions of sexuality within marriage and motherhood.

This chapter answers the first research question and in the next chapter (Chapter 6) I will show how discussions about the Modern Girl and the New Woman in *Nara-Naree* were intertextually interlinked with the sexual reform that was a part of the global discourse. In this connection I will address the development of a cosmopolitan vision and how the sexual reform project was ambiguous in its definition of women's sexual autonomy.



## **CHAPTER 6. CONTENTIOUS COSMOPOLITANISM: MODERN GIRL, NEW WOMAN AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PASSION**

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the Bengali writers in *Nara-Naree* dealt with modern notions of the female body, desire and conjugality as affected by global sexual reform. In this chapter I will answer the second research question by investigating how the reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality contributed to cultural tensions and changes in the portrayals of modern women. Here, I will explore the gendered and paradoxical nature of modernity in *Nara-Naree* and highlight the contested connotations through the images of the cosmopolitan Modern Girl and the New Woman, who challenged social taboos and cultural barriers for their subjectivity. In this connection I will also consider the tensions and overlaps in the cultural contact between Bengal and the world in the processes of making a modern nation and examine the ambiguities within the contentions of traditional ideas about the body and sexuality of Bengali women between 1939 and 1950. I will focus on various issues, ranging from sex education and politics to fashion and liberality and address how women started to reappropriate their own modernity. I will focus on an intertextual analysis of the distinctive and overlapping characteristics of the Modern Girl and the New Woman and this study of the changing social contexts for Bengali modern women will underscore the complex global dynamics and cultural hybridity that shaped modern femininity across geopolitical locations. I will also concentrate on the problematic negotiation of modernities that was associated with the apprehensions of rootlessness that accompanied the conceptualization of a global modernity. I will focus on the social transformation that took place in Bengal and ambivalences regarding the demands of femininity and the rise of feminism, the construction of a new sexual morality and the desire for transgression. In this context I will explore how the contributors to *Nara-Naree* negotiated cultural tensions and

changes in the representation of the cosmopolitan Modern Girl and the New Woman and how nationalism and cosmopolitanism intersected. The writers also tried to consolidate an alternative modernity with the image of the cosmopolitan New Woman. While attempting to bridge the gap between the home and the world through cultural intermingling, they critically examined the challenges in negotiating the women's question. In this context I will register the dichotomies between cultural identity and modernity that lurked throughout the magazine and highlight how notions of modernity originated and were contested in the encounter between Bengal and the West.

### **6.1. THE 'WESTERNIZED' MODERN GIRL IN BENGAL AND THE ATHLETIC SPIRIT**

*This is the story of a girl whom the elite society recognizes at its best. The High Society Blues<sup>13</sup> of the city are head over heels in love with Maya Bose. She truly possesses the qualities to be popular. Maya is pretty, and was educated at the Loreto convent; she is the only beloved granddaughter of the retired physician P.K. Bose. In addition, Maya has learnt dancing, not oriental coy postures but Western tap dance. Maya is an expert piano player; she knows the skills to ride horses; she drives motors and plays tennis brilliantly. She is the one who lifted the trophy this year at the tennis competition in college ... In the middle of the drawing room, in the midst of the party, the girl who is performing a tap dance in tune with the piano and wearing black trousers and white shirt, she is Maya.*

*(P. Roy, 1347b [1940], p. 407)*

Maya epitomized the quintessential characteristics of the Modern Girl and was emblematic of the melodies and maladies of modernity. The Bengali word "Maya" means to mesmerize. In the story Maya's bobbed hair, black trousers and white silk shirt went well with the

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<sup>13</sup> *High Society Blues* (1930) is a Hollywood film which deals with the manners of modern life.



descriptions of American ‘tomboys’ who arrested criticism as “The Mannish Girl” (Marks, 1990, p. 3). Maya was portrayed as a convent-educated urban figure and an impulsive, audacious, impatient, street-smart and boisterous tomboy with a passion for clubbing, hunting, big game shooting, motor racing, tap dancing and tango. Her hobbies not only highlighted the characteristics of Western pursuits, but also aggravated the tensions between a traditional woman’s submissiveness and a Westernized Modern Girl’s playful assertiveness. She organized evening house-parties, or *adda*, with a group of male friends and surpassed socio-cultural barriers against women’s participation in a male-identified gathering. Maya became the muse for modern boys, who were enthralled by her intellect and enchanted by her enthusiastic nature. Her charismatic all-rounder attitude made her the centre of attraction, but she was hard to attain. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2001) described it, the meaning of *adda* or *majlish* as an assembly or rather an informal male space for uninhibited conversation which clearly demarcated the public from the private, Maya was an exception in the predominantly patriarchal domain. She was the “queen-bee” (Chakrabarty, 2001, p. 161) in the elite beehive of cosmopolitan modernity. Fascinated modern love-struck youths held her in awe as they were occasionally stung by her witty barbs and sharp sarcasm, rational disposition and sportive demeanour. Her flirtatious behaviour amplified her enigmatic charm and the crowd of infatuated fans fed on her fantasy and clamoured in unison in all praise for her beauty, intelligence and curt presence of mind. But to their utter disappointment, she ridiculed romantic proposals from her sycophants. In commensurate with critical understanding, here the modern girl could be identified as a woman fraught with contradictions: “looking for love but scorning men, valuing social change but pursuing trivialities” (Larson, 1998, p. 138). So, the characterization of Maya embodied the conflicting emotions and aspirations associated with the problematic conception of modernity, its correlation with female sexuality and the changing gender ideology. As the story required, the Modern Girl needed to be warned about the ‘excesses’ of modernity and her socio-sexual autonomy. Maya’s energetic and androgynous traits and unruly behaviour were deemed to be unbecoming of a lady. So, an adamant New Man was required to represent Bengali modernity

by domesticating her rebellious spirit. The humiliated New Bengali Man who was portrayed as ‘shabbily dressed’ and mocked by Maya came along and slapped her to put an end to her unrestrained adventure spree and grind the spirit of the spinster. Interestingly enough, Maya was portrayed as fascinated by her humiliation at the hand of the ‘self-esteemed’ strong man who dared to make a dent into her vanity and it implied that it was necessary to resist the colonial forces of Western desire and female ‘sexual laxity’ through proper training. The process of appropriation in accordance with heteronormative ideals of femininity clearly indicated the unacceptability of a tomboyish appearance. This ending emphasized the implication that this modernity was not Indian, Bengali or indigenous modernity. Thus, cultural identity was constituted through gender difference by constructing normative notions.

For exhibiting feisty independent spirit and breaking traditional gender codes and conventional social norms, tomboys in the West have been “variously viewed as icons of feminist defiance” (Abate, 2008, p. vii). Despite social control, Bengali Modern Girls, like their Asian and Western counterparts, rebelled against patriarchal norms. They broke through a number of gender barriers and denied to be confined by the chains of femininity and evinced little interest in returning to the confines of heterosexual marriage. The trope of the Modern Girl was prominent throughout *Nara-Naree* but her Westernized appearance was often criticized for the overt transgression of gender boundaries. During the 1940s, Modern Girls were visible alongside the nationalistic and mature New Woman and the good wife, good mother rhetoric. Articles had previously carried implicit messages about the ‘evil’ or ‘negative’ effects of Westernization, but in later years Modern Girls became more commonly perceptible even though there was social tension around their sexual activity. Modern Girls were seen as playing football with their brothers and male friends and falling in love and expressing desire (“Pratham,” 1356 [1949]). The Modern Girl’s active spirit, physical efficiency and desire to break down conventional norms helped her transcend gender and social boundaries.

In Chapter 2 I highlighted the emergence of the Modern Girl and the subsequent global debates. The trope of the Modern Girl testified to the ‘fantasies of universality’ that “imagined different people in different parts of the globe reaching identical or nearly identical ways of living and looking” (Ramamurthy, 2008, p. 320). In a radical departure from a bygone era, women were suddenly seen to be working, driving, playing sports and their new behaviour indicated that women were capable of doing anything that men could do. With the rise of modern feminism in the West, while Amy Johnson and Amelia Earhart flew airplanes across Asia and the Atlantic, the young and sportive Bengali women also aspired to fly jets, join the army and police force and engage in various athletic pursuits. In the universalizing dimension of global modernity, the Modern Girl contested taboos associated with gender-defiant behaviour. Modern Girls set the stage for analyzing the highly debated issue of women’s socio-sexual reform and the willingness to transcend cultural barriers. By seeking more autonomy in their personal lives, gaining formal education and training, and pursuing careers, Modern Girls were moving away from traditional and patriarchal power. Like their vigorous and athletic American and Asian counterparts, the modern Bengali women joined outdoor activities and adopted western attire and sports costume. Sports became a liberating experience which offered women the opportunity to become accomplished athletes by developing strong and healthy bodies and defying societal views of females as physically and psychologically unsuited for sport and acrobatic dance (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]). While the white European, American, Russian and Chinese Modern Girls were depicted as swimming, sunbathing, golfing and, especially, playing tennis and badminton, Bengali Modern Girls were also portrayed as tennis and badminton players, swimmers, athletes, runners, participants in Irish drill, parades, marches etc. (Arabi, 1356a [1949], pp. 337–344; M. Bhattacharya, 1356b [1949], pp. 345–350). Surely these independent and mobile women were reminiscent of the ‘Modern Girl’ who was “singled out as a marker of ‘modernity’” (Weinbaum et al, 2000, p. 7). Modern Girls were perceived as wearing Western dress such as shorts, swimming costumes and short skirts and their sexual behaviour became constant source of debate, discussion and criticism.

Tennis players Khanum Singh and Pramila Khanna challenged the gendered nature of sports and exhibited tomboyish traits of athleticism, while Nilima Ghosh displayed commendable performance in all-India athletics (Arabi, 1356a [1949]). The portrayal of Khanum Singh's character (Arabi, 1356b [1949], p. 251) depicted her as an emotionally, physically and intellectually strong and self-sufficient individual. With her vigorous pursuit of freedom of dress, of sport and of choices in love she disrupted the rigid dichotomy separating 'good' and 'bad' female conduct by mixing uninhibitedly with male companions.



*Figure 6-1: Depicts a modern girl practising yoga postures in shorts, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Poush [December-January], 1357 [1950], p. 55.*



*Figure 6-2: Portrays modern girls with short hair, wearing swimming costume and with exposed arms, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Falgun, 1356 [1950], cover page.*



*Figure 6-3: Highlights participation in sports and games in modern attire and shorts, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Bhadra-Ashwin [August-September], 1356 [1949], p. 343*



*Figure 6-4: Depicts sports women Nilima Ghosh and Tapati Mitra standing together in a tournament, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Bhadra-Ashwin [August-September], 1356 [1949], p. 344.*



*Figure 6-5: Shows tennis player Khanum Singh posing with Pramila Khanna in sporting dress, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Ashwin [September-October], 1356 [1947], p. 341.*



Figure 6-6: Shows Khanum Singh playing tennis in shorts in an aggressive mood, *Nara-Naree* [Man-Woman], *Shraban* [July-August], 1356 [1947], p. 255.

The imperative of maintaining women's beauty and health in various articles highlighted the emerging focus on body consciousness and described the importance of physical flexibility through exercise (L. Chattopadhyay, 1347 [1940], p. 249; Halder, 1347b [1940], p. 497; P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940], p. 356). Bengali writers consulted a plethora of health columns published in several foreign magazines, and women were encouraged to take up classes in swimming and exercise by citing examples of the record-breaking champion American swimmer Helen Madison, Olympic champion Fanny Blankers Koen from Holland and other Western runners and athletes who managed to achieve prominence in public space (Dronacharya, 1347 [1940]). *Nara-Naree* was replete with various visuals and biographies of female swimmers across Europe, America, Bengal and the rest of the world. Champions from India, and particularly Bengal, emphasized the significance of maintaining healthy body through

yoga and exercise. Bengali writers marvelled at the display of women's gymnastics and physical culture parade in Moscow. *Nara-Naree* also portrayed Australian girls practising skipping in their school grounds (Ranjitbhai, 1355 [1948], pp. 360–366). These intertextual references to outdoor games became frequent as sports gradually became more popular. The names of Bengali champion swimmers like Lila Chattopadhyay (1347 [1940]), Bani Ghosh, Ela Ghosh (1352 [1345]) and Arati Saha (Arabi, 1356a [1949]) were cited along with short biographies. Western sportswomen and swimmers were duly praised with a stress on the link between a healthy body and mind. Thus, Bengali writers appreciated Western women's individual achievements, which suggested the delimitation of territorial boundaries and encouraged Bengali women's sportive spirit when “many disregarded women's athletics” (Roy, 1355 [1948], p. 306). Therefore, a sense of “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah, 1998) was celebrated by acknowledging dynamic global networks.



*Figure 6-7: Highlights the calibre of Helen Madison, the champion American swimmer, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], 1347 [1940], Bhadra [August-September], p. 373.*





Figure 6-8: Projects Lila Chattopadhyay as the acclaimed Bengali swimmer who used to take part in swimming competition alongwith men, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], 1347 [1940], Jaishtha [May-June], 1 (6), p. 247.

Modern Girls were depicted as carving out a new identity and championing equality with men in their desire to explore the brave new world. Their expanded life options included moving into the professional world of work and the growth of professionalization could be understood as the application of rationality to occupations. Bengali women were compared with their European, American, Chinese and Russian counterparts and army training was given to them. Women were travelling with men in tram and bus, driving motor vehicles and competing in the professional world (M. Bhattacharya, 1356b [1949], p. 345). Panchugopal Mukhopadhyay (1347b [1940]) and Malabika Bhattacharya (1356b [1949]) analyzed how gender differences were socially constructed and with the promotion of educational and social reform for women, they soon occupied all the ‘manly jobs’ and male-dominated sport. So, Bengali

Modern Girls' physical fitness highlighted how they had broken away from conventional institutions and traditional modes of behaviour.

On the other hand, women's experiences were closely linked to notions of their bodies and their sexuality was seen in relation to an ideal femininity. The most compelling reason for young women to abandon tomboyish behaviour was the pressure to get married and become a mother, thus abandoning their tomboyish independence. The rejection of the tomboy image by the Bengali writers was closely related to the observations of Western sexologists. Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing viewed sport and adventure as intrinsically male and thus considered these outdoor activities as a sure indication of the "Manly Woman" (Jeffreys, 1985, p. 105). Anxiety about the persistence of tomboyism into adulthood also aroused concern over women's future reproductive health or feminine gender identity. While male writers applauded the new strides taken by women, some of them also proposed to segregate gendered behaviour. One article pointed out the common perception among Western writers, who considered sport and gymnastics to be harmful to women's health and reproductive functioning (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]). Some Bengali writers were also perturbed about the fertility question of female acrobats. But soon these myths were discarded and sport was promoted by dismissing all anxieties and prejudices related to the loss of feminine charm and fertility. But at the same time marriage and motherhood for sportswomen remained indispensable. There were various intertextual references to Olympic sports stars like American tennis player Helen Wills, American swimmer Helen Weinright and American figure skater Beatrix S. Loughran, who emphasized the relation between a healthy body, sports and motherhood (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940], p. 358). So, an emphasis on the ability to be good mothers ran parallel with the capability to be the good sportswomen who were cited with Western references.

In addition, the purpose of women's sport was considerably different from men's sport. Women's sport was supposed to preserve a healthy body and feminine grace. It was not intended to reduce the natural sex appeal of the female body (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940], p. 359).

So, the construction of women's bodies through exercise included several gendered factors. Women who were interested in angling, exhausting physical exertion, smoking, cropping their hair or thinking critically and logically were deemed to be acting like men by overstepping the strictly traditional boundaries of power relations (M. Bhattacharya, 1356b [1949]). The Bengali woman's body was contrasted with the masculine physique and slender American 'tomboy' image (Chakrabarty, 1346 [1940]). So, women's bodies were the sites of both interracial intimacy and racial politics in conjuring up images of the gender-bending female figures that became ubiquitous between 1939 and 1950.

## **6.2. AESTHETIC HYBRIDITY AND THE PRODUCTION OF DESIRE**

Contributors to *Nara-Naree* mixed classical aesthetics with eroticism and highlighted the free-flowing model of feminine sexuality and the ideal female body, which were set in contrast to the representations of 'manly' shape and slim figure and often juxtaposed with contemporary Western 'tomboys' (Chakrabarty, 1346 [1940], p. 62; D. Mukhopadhyay, 1346a [1940], p. 123). Shaila Chakrabarty (1346 [1940]) analyzed the 'acceptable' form of female beauty by disapproving of the 'slim and trim' 'tomboy' image and hailed the ancient Indian paragons as projected in Kalidas's Sanskrit poetry. Some editorial columns in *Nara-Naree* championed the sexual vitality of women by citing alluring and voluptuous classical female beauties who overpowered valorous heroes. The aesthetic merits of classical dance and its sheer bodily sophistication (Desai, 1347 [1940]) were embraced and espoused with much enthusiasm.



*Figure 6-9: Highlights Manipuri dance, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Ashwin [Sep.-Oct.], 1347 [1940], 1 (10), p. 452*



*Figure 6-10: Features the dancer Menaka in the image of Urvasi, a seductive courtesan in heaven, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Ashwin [Sep.-Oct.], 1347 [1940], 1 (10), p. 451*

Sexually captivating characters were juxtaposed with the contemporary skeletal, bespectacled, and anaemic native women. Independent and educated women were often ridiculed as being devoid of erotic sexuality and it was deemed necessary to prepare them for marriage instead of wasting energy and vitality on other works. Modern women's weak and dwindling bodies and minds stuffed with bookish knowledge drew a sarcastic comparison with the goddess of learning, Saraswati:

*But the modern Saraswatis were devoid of her heavenly charm and graceful demeanour. The modern women seemed to have managed to memorize the lessons on history and logic, the literature of Shelly, Milton, Keats, Rabindranath, Kalidas, but that could not earn them a degree in health, and, as a result, they failed miserably in this discipline.*

*(Editorial, 1346 [1939-1940], p. 6)*

Sexually enticing characters, curvaceous goddesses and mythological legends were regarded as the epitomes of beauty, and these were juxtaposed with contemporary Western beauty care and simultaneously highlighted the heightened tension regarding the ideal Bengali female body:

*I could not find that Bijoyini [from Tagore's characterization of a beautiful and victorious damsel] at whose feet Basantasakha [the god of love, Cupid] laid down his flowery bow... Urvashi [a luscious seductive courtesan or apsara in heaven] has become civilized and educated; and she has not given up the habit of dancing either, sometimes 'empires' stand as proof of this practice. But where did that amazing lustrous beauty and glorious youth vanish? Even modern toiletries from Paris fail to cover up the hideous lack, conspicuous in their bodies. (Editorial, 1346 [1939-40], p.1).*

Thus women's sensuality and sexuality were prominent concerns for Bengali sexologists who compared the beauty of contemporary women with the erotic depictions of ancient literature.

While *Nara-Naree* enthusiastically promoted healthy beauty, it also began to advocate nudity. Debdas Mukhopadhyay (1347 [1940]) created the transnational linkages and emphasized that the notion of shame, particularly about women's bodies, was not the specific characteristic of a particular culture. Pranab Roy (1347a [1940]) highlighted how puritans in Europe banned all suggestions of sexuality and kept their bodies fully clothed from head to toe. Putting off clothes during bathing was also not permissible. An incident was

recounted when a girl was arrested barefoot on the beach on the pretext of the violation of public decency for not covering her ankles. European women were described as revolting against these strict moral codes. Malabika Bhattacharya (1356b [1949], p. 345] described how women's dress evolved through generations and recalled that the people who mocked Western Modern Girls who were wearing half pants and cycling in the streets of London for the first time, could be overwhelmed by their granddaughters, who were roaming around Brighton and the Riviera in ultra-modern clothes. In this context, the essay "Nari" ["Woman"] (N. Chattopadhyay, 1347 [1940]) is significant as it portrayed the dilemma of a man who was weighed down by the moral inhibitions imposed on women's sexuality. The story was unfolded in ancient Egypt, in the country of the river Nile surrounded by pyramids, but its universal significance surpassed boundaries. Thus, *Nara-Naree* in all its characteristics signified a movement where the modern woman and the modern man will cooperate with each other to replace the old order and form a new nation.

Another issue [P. Roy, 1347a (1940)] referred to the naturist movement in Europe and detailed the establishment of nudist camps in America and Europe, including photographs of nude men and women. The articles also included examples of nudism as a practice by tribal and indigenous people. Many tribal cultures have a positive attitude towards nudity, and it troubled Western explorers to confront the 'embarrassment' of viewing complete nakedness, which they dubbed as savage or inferior. But the wave of nudism had reached the elite class of Europe, America and England and 300 nudist clubs mushroomed. In 1900 the 'Nacktkultur' or 'Back to Nature' movement started in Germany and by 1928 the total number of nudists and naturists was 60,000. They were systematically persecuted under Nazi rule. Pranab Roy (1347a [1940]) crystallized the logic of the nudists in Europe and America: 1) the half-clad body is more alluring than the fully nude, 2) nakedness is the artistic manifestation of the sacred as exemplified in the statue of Venus de Milo, 3) the therapeutic value of light as invented by Niles Finmen and testified to in the sanatorium (situated in Switzerland) of Dr.

Rollier (the writer of *Sun Cure*) espoused the positive facets of nudism.

On the other hand, pictures of nude European and Indian women were in high demand among readers. Attractive covers were used to increase sales and women were featured nude far more often than men, which seemed to promote “heterosexual taste for heterosexual men” (Cooper, 2000, p. 69). Thus *Nara-Naree* celebrated the ancient ‘liberal sexual culture’ and emphasized heterosexual desire:

*Visuals of bathing women act as the special attraction for any monthly magazine, and I was mesmerized and overwhelmed by the exotic female figures which formed part of Rabindranath’s ‘Bijoyini’<sup>14</sup> to Bengal’s one lakh poets’ exhilarating lyrics that are steeped with such thrilling and imaginative depictions from times immemorial. (Editorial, 1346 [1939-40, p.1])*

Cosmetics also played an important role in Modern Girl culture. Some writers in *Nara-Naree* noted how in medieval Europe women’s ‘beauty culture’ was highly criticized, as perfumes and cosmetics were thought to aggravate tensions about moral laxity and promiscuity among women (C. Debi, 1347 [1940], p. 414). *Nara-Naree* also argued that Indian beauty and clothing styles had continuously evolved throughout the course of history. In ancient India various body decorations were used to stress the distinctive status of wives and seductive beloveds and differentiated their intentions and potential for attracting lovers and pleasing husbands. The journey from clothes made from bark and leaves developed into the dyed and embroidered garments of the age of Kalidas and later modernized beauty clinics sprang up in cosmopolitan cities (C. Debi,

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<sup>14</sup> The inspiration for this poem came to Tagore from an episode in the Sanskrit prose classic of the seventh century, *Kadambari* by Banabhatta. In Tagore’s poem the bathing woman did not fall in love with anyone; instead she seemed to score a victory over the god of love himself. Vanquished by love the mischievous god of love appeared in person, ready to shoot his floral arrow, but was then so overwhelmed by her that he laid down all the tools of his trade at her feet as an admission of defeat.



1347 [1940]). Beauty columns exhibited a keen and intensified interest in modern fashion and scientific beauty culture. One article “Angarag” [“Beautifying Body”] (1347 [1940]), highlighted how American beauty parlours could transform the modern woman to such an extent that a husband might fail to recognize his wife. Cosmetics companies played a central role as global mediators of Modern Girl culture and commodities. Chandrabati Debi (1347 [1940]) discussed Western beauty treatments and her beauty columns acquainted readers with scientific aesthetics such as plastic surgery, face-lifting, mud-baths, body-brushing, medicated bandages, body-massage, electric rays etc. In the depictions of the Modern Girl and cosmetics, Madeline Y. Dong (2008) recorded that the importance of bodily self-fashioning was repeatedly highlighted to arrest the lover’s or husband’s desire. Thus make-up assumed a prominent place in the sphere of cosmopolitan modernity and this was how femininity was constructed. While *Nara-Naree* celebrated the Modern Girl’s sexuality as a conscious agent, on the other hand, mirror gazing also suggested the Modern Girl’s constant obligation to judge herself against the social standards of beauty presented in advertisements and thus to adjust accordingly. So, the image of the Modern Girl bore the marks of the processes of gendering, which created new social and sexual norms and her bodily self-fashioning recorded the national and transnational processes through which the archetype emerged.



Figure 6-11: *Features body-brushing in an American beauty parlour*, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], *Ashwin* [Sep-oct.], 1347 [1940], 1 (10), p. 417.

Thus, it revealed the complexity of the global and cultural processes and the ways in which bodily self-fashioning became a strategy for acquiring social status and power. As a modern, urban citizen of the world, the Modern Girl captured the essence of cosmopolitanism marked by the transnational processes that were rapidly transforming the world: consumerism, technology, urbanization, and intellectual and cultural exchange through the rapid circulation of popular media (Lewis, 2009). Western scientific beauty treatments were supposed to be a combination of science and arts and one female Bengali writer hugely praised the scientific techniques for beauty treatment (C. Debi, 1347 [1940]). There was no longer any doubt that the Modern Girl was global, “her skin, brows, teeth, body shape and sexuality—in short the Modern Girl’s technologies of self—are recognizable across contexts, whether the cosmetics ads are targeted at consumers in Johannesburg or Shanghai, New York or Bombay, Beijing or Berlin. Cosmetics companies played a central role as global mediators of Modern Girl culture and commodities”. (Weinbaum et al, 2008, p. 50)

The Modern Girl's "hybrid body was a zone of contact where the global inherited in the intimateness of a body language of dress, make-up, deportment, and fashionable accessorization as much as new ways of being and belonging" (Ramamurthy, 2009, p. 218).



Figure 6-12: Features the advertisement for hair oil modelled on the heavenly courtesan *Urvashi*. Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], *Poush* [Dec.-Jan.], 1346 [1939-40]

The Modern Girl emerged in cities everywhere as a worldwide phenomenon consolidated through the newly international media and cinema. Modern Girl film stars were visible on screen and their style was emulated by the new generation of Bengali women. Priti Ramamurthy (2008) highlighted the interracial intimacy between the American film star Clara Bow, known as the 'flapper', who was a freewheeling, convention-flouting persona, and the film stars of

Indian cinema. In *Nara-Naree*, Bengali female film stars and sex sirens epitomized cosmopolitan fashion in their modern lifestyles and looks. They also adorned themselves in varied modes of Western and Indian dress, symbolizing cosmopolitan modernity.

Film critics in *Nara-Naree* often printed commentaries on Bengali cinema stars, and snippets on Hollywood, European and other foreign stars, who received similar admiration and adoration. Amita Debi, Mira Sarkar, Nilima Das, Kanan Debi, Srilekha Debi, Sadhana Bose and Nasim Banu were presented as mesmerizing, cosmopolitan and seductive icons who performed hybrid identities. Hollywood actress Betty Grable was praised for her healthy body, sensuality and sex appeal. Her short skirt and exuberant lifestyle were typically symptomatic of the metropolitan Modern Girl culture. So these stars highlighted a shared, multi-ethnic mode of belonging rooted in the globalist environment.



Figure 6-13: Betty Grabble, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Ashwin [Sep-Oct.], 1347 [1940], p. 419



*Figure 6-14: Actress Meera Sarkar, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], 1356 [1949], Ashwin [September-October], p. 355*



Figure 6-15: Actress Sadhana Bose, *Nara-Naree* [Man-Woman], *Baisakh* [April-May], 1347 [1940], p. 240

### 6.3. DICHOTOMIES BETWEEN MODERNITY AND TRADITION

Following from the previous chapter's discussion, it is obvious that sexual reform in Bengal brought with it the near-universal relevance of modernity and this prompted Bengali writers in *Nara-Naree* to evaluate the universal stance in the process of modernization in order to advocate emancipation from strict norms of sexual conduct. It is also extremely important to understand how *Nara-Naree* negotiated

the tensions around these social changes that were reflected in the new constructions of Bengali modern women. Some articles in *Nara-Naree* expressed anxiety over negative ‘foreign influences’ which might undermine Bengali womanhood by compromising cultural and national boundaries. With the reappropriation of the ideas about the female body and sexuality, Bengali writers were concerned that modern women were likely to engage in romantic relationships outside the traditionally established family system. There were some questions from readers about the character of the wife that indicated premarital and extramarital affairs (“Prescription,” 1347a [1940], p. 429; “Prescription,” 1347b [1940], p. 488; “Prescription,” 1355b [1948], pp. 314–315). As women’s sexual agency was championed there developed a prevalent and persistent phobia about modern women’s moral character. When women started to talk about bodies, desires, contraception and love marriage, their frank opinions raised social anxiety. Thus, it registered moral tensions inherent within the very construction of modernity itself.

In the initial years of the publication of the magazine, modernity came with strings attached. Sexual morality was juxtaposed with ‘sexual immorality’ and debates ensued over socially condemned behaviours, such as pregnancy in unmarried women. Premarital relations were often restricted by cultural and societal norms. In this connection, an article entitled “Parinay” [“Marriage”] (Halder, 1347 [1940]) recorded the predominance of premarital relations across social classes.

Bengali writers often castigated love marriages as being a Western influence, precipitated by blind love, which was supposed to be the cause of frequent divorces. Since European-style clubs, dance halls, gymnastic centres and jazz clubs became favourable sites for the development of cosmopolitan modernity, there arose curious paradoxes. Citing the freedom of women in the West, some Bengali modern men attempted to persuade susceptible women to engage in premarital sex without taking any responsibility:

*You have become very cold and dispassionate in this age  
Shibani. Learn to be a bit lively and playful. Do you know*



*that American girls are jumping and running in excitement and passion in this age? In this season they sing and dance in the fields amid daisies and daffodils. (Doctor, 1347 [1940], p. 475)*

Moreover, some articles highlighted problematic issues related to unintended pregnancy, induced abortion and social ignominy. An anonymous reader in the ‘Prescription’ section (1347 [1940]) confessed about an undesired pregnancy, which revealed the actual prevalence of premarital intimacy. She was advised by the doctor (“Prescription,” 1347 [1940], p. 524) to take care of her health, shift to a solitary place and opt for a safe delivery, instead of risking her life by attempting abortion. The ‘Prescription’ section also received several questions from readers about their premarital experiences and the advisors often asked lovers to restrain their sexual desire until marriage. So, sexual outlets outside the ambit of marriage were frowned upon and the sexual behaviour of unmarried couples was often monitored by their parents and society. An article in *Nara-Naree* also incorporated the assumption by Western sexologists that parents were more efficient in choosing “safe husbands” for their young daughters (Sen, 1346 [1939–40], p. 55). So the cosmopolitan lifestyle represented deep-rooted fears of modernity.

Modern women also challenged pre-existing ideologies of female subservience and self-sacrifice. Their desire to select their own partner (“Prescription,” 1355d [1948], pp. 316–317) and to delay or avoid marriage transgressed and reworked modern heteronormativity. Furthermore, their socially risky behaviour included the visibility of unwed mothers in public. Some articles in *Nara-Naree* emphasized the point that a vast number of Modern Girls in the West bore children out of wedlock and a reference was made to an unmarried adolescent mother from Rhineland (“Sankalan”, 1347 [1940], p. 260). In this regard an article by an American author, Ms. Smithson (1347 [1940]), dealt with the case studies of Martha and Helen, who happened to be delinquent minors and highlighted the need for proper social integration. Ms. Smithson noted how girls having an adventurous disposition or a penchant for thrills fell in love and were caught in danger. Interestingly, Ranjitbhai (1356 [1949], p. 303)

noted ‘Western individualism’, the economic freedom of women and divorce as being among the causes of delinquency.

An article “Test-Tube Baby” presented an account from a single American woman’s diary and highlighted the complicated socio-moral aspects and stigma associated with the choice of having a baby without getting married (Anonymous, 1346 [1939-40]). On the other hand, Modern Girls’ disinclination for motherhood also became a subject of concern for the doctors (Doctor, 1346a [1939-40], p. 20). Thus, the sexual autonomy of modern women became the subject of speculation.

Bengali writers’ anxiety about the emergence of a distinctly modern culture was enhanced by the state of socio-cultural flux of norms and traditions. Essay competitions such as “My first love” revealed the prevalence of premarital affairs beyond marriage. Gradually, *Nara-Naree* recorded the prominence of love marriages among young couples who were ready to go against social convention and indulge in premarital relationship. So there was a shift from conceptualizing non-marital relations as ‘inappropriate behaviour’ to the vindication of love marriage as the ideal way forward (“Prescription,” 1357 [1950], p. 384, “Prescription,” 1355b [1948], pp. 165–168).



Figure 6-16: Women wrote letters about their intimate experiences, Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], 1356 [1949], *Bhadra-Ashwin* [Aug-Sep-Oct.], p. 263

Furthermore, Bimalendu Chattopadhyay (1948 [1355]) refused to consider women as asexual beings who reluctantly consented to sex in order to bear children. He argued that desire in female consciousness was usually restricted and regulated in the traditional domain. Diganta Roy [1355 (1947–48)] was a radical writer who unequivocally championed women's cause. He challenged the double standards of morality and acted as an avowed champion of the women's question. He strongly opposed patriarchal society where men are free to maintain relationships with other girls and visit prostitutes. He concluded with the remark:

*You might assume that I am supporting the polyandrous instinct in women. But this is not the fact. My main concern is that the degree of monogamous instinct prevalent in women should be applicable to men as well. Then it will end all discussion and debate. (P. 389)*

These views were also severely criticized by a reader who considered the writers to be too progressive and believed that their ideas about women's empowerment based on the 'Western model' did not match the Bengali Indian culture (Chakrabarty, 1355 [1948–49], pp. 31-32). In reply, the writer elaborated his opinion in this regard and highlighted the fact that men were never subjected to social calumny and ostracism for their moral frailty. He was in favour of the equal treatment of both genders in relation to marriage and strictly against social hypocrisy. He also advised women to demand monogamy from men and ask for similar punishment in cases of adultery (Roy, 1355 [1949], p. 93).

Tarapada Mukhopadhyay (1346 [1939–40]) identified monogamous marriage as a social institution that treated women as private property and placed the sole liability on the father or husband to sexually restrain women before and after their marriage. His article revealed a profound anxiety about women's sexual autonomy and unpretentiously highlighted the need for marital reform. He also discussed the possibility of the abolition of compulsory marriage and the concept of 'free love' was introduced by identifying another group of unmarried and independent women who were able to operate with free will in choosing their preferred sexual relations.

The issue of safe abortion also remained a highly debated topic which formed part of many articles (Nandy, 1353b [1947], pp. 81–84). Debiprasad Chattopadhyay (1357 [1950], pp. 233–238) highlighted various serious issues regarding the legalization of abortion, especially in Soviet laws, and cited examples from different Western countries. He stressed women’s economic independence as the decisive factor in the medical termination of pregnancy. He neither considered it immoral nor encouraged it, but opined that to prevent the circumstances leading to abortion, contraceptive knowledge and maternity benefits needed to be circulated.

A woman reader was also urged to rethink her decision to have an abortion:

*You want to abort. But how? ... abortion without the help of an expert surgeon and the scientific process is very risky and life-threatening. Abortion also entangles some ethical issues regarding law, society, morality and doctors rarely perform it even in the case of married women and under reasonable circumstances. (“Prescription,” 1357 [1950], p. 384)*

Thus, women’s sexuality became a highly controversial topic in the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree*.

#### **6.4. THE NEW WOMAN AND ACTIVE ZEAL**

The conceptualization of global modernity brought with it conflicting aspects and apprehensions of rootlessness. So, Bengali writers started to consolidate an alternative modernity through the images of the New Woman, a modern model of emancipated womanhood. Even though there were commonalities in physical appearance between the Modern Girl and the New Woman, according to Sarah E. Stevens (2003) the two characters could be distinguished by a close investigation of their *functions* within the literary text (p. 86). The Modern Girl was clearly distinguishable from the archetypical New Woman of the anticolonial movement, who represented ‘civilizational progress’. In *Nara-Naree*, the representation of the New Woman became prominent during the nationalist movement. The New

Woman participated in the army and excelled as doctors, writers, artists, experienced midwives and social reformers by breaking the shackles of home and receiving a modern education. Bengali writers also focused on the glorious achievements and role expansion of the New Woman, who shared the characteristics and intellectual ambition of the Western New Woman. To consolidate a new modernity, Bengali writers encouraged the emancipation of women and self-emancipation by women. *Nara-Naree* rejuvenated the role of Chitrangada, as recreated by Rabindranath Tagore from the epic *Mahabharata*, and thus rediscovered “ancient wisdom for a new age” (Burton, 1999). The role and evolution of Chitrangada as a modernizing trope was often discussed in the magazine and her cross-dressing was traced to mythology. Rabindranath Tagore’s portrayal of the warrior princess who used to dress in man’s attire and acted as protector of the land was glorified and her androgynous identity was explored in ‘E Juger Chitrangada’ [‘Chitrangada of this Era’] (P. Mukhopadhyay, 1347b [1940]). Chitrangada, the warrior princess, symbolized an alternative modernity as she transgressed gender roles and her androgynous gender identity and active physicality were celebrated in a number of articles. Modern Chitrangadas revealed revolutionary qualities and exhibited equivalent gusto in the promotion of sports, games and an active lifestyle.



Figure 6-17: Two women in full army dress. Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], *Bhadra-Ashwin* [Aug-Sep-Oct.], 1356 [1949], p. 345



Figure 6-18: Shows flag parade in army camp. Nara-Naree [Man-Woman], Bhadra-Ashwin [Aug-Sep-Oct.], 1356 [1949], p. 346

In the nationalist vision the New Woman embodied revolutionary qualities:

*Startled, I noticed that not only men but also our women have swarmed into the troops. They are wearing tin hats and colourful saris of different brands like 'Bhagya chakra' ('fortune-wheel'), alochaya (light and shade) and Kananbala-blouse [which was popularized by the Bengali actress Kananbala], earrings and lipstick. Gun in one hand and vanity bag in the other. My eyes became moist with pride. Bengali girls have also learnt to be on a par with their menfolk by holding rifles in their tender and artistic bangle-adorned hands. Nothing to be surprised about, as*

*they are not fallible women to be left behind, but courageous wives and mothers, the, epitome of Shakti [powerful goddess]. (Editorial, 1347 [1940], p. 366)*

Thus, some male Bengali writers tried to construct an alternative modernity and adopted a pedagogical function by teaching women about which models of femininity they should emulate and which they should distance themselves from. In this context a writer quoted nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose's speech in Tokyo (November, 1944):

*We want to build a new and modern nation on the basis of our old culture and civilization. (Gupta, 1947, p. 9)*

But this alternative modernity, despite allowing room for the recognition of female agency, was not necessarily liberating. The New Woman was subjected to a new patriarchy in order to locate the position of the woman in the 'modern' world of the nation (Chatterjee, 1989). Although the cultural image of the New Woman was largely a product of imaginations, manufactured by enthused male intellectuals, a new breed of women was also able to forge their own subject positions.

### **6.5. THE BENGALI NEW WOMAN AND SEXUAL REFORM**

The concept of the 'New Woman' signified the changing ideas about female sexuality. In Chapter 5, I noted how the discussions about contraceptive responsibility required women to be active advocates of sexual reform. *Nara-Naree* recorded the male-initiated reform movement to modernize the society and women began to participate in an effort to expand their world and life-choices as the intellectual peer.

As the Modern Girls partook in the pleasures of social life, Bengali women's sexual autonomy constituted a large part of the debate. Male advocates believed that New Women's collaboration and active roles in socio-sexual reform would make them educated companions for their educated husbands, co-writers and colleagues. Marital compatibility and gender equality were pronounced in the article

“Sovieter Dampatya jiban” [“Soviet Conjugal Life”] (Vistinetski, 1947–48, p. 47). In this context the writer discussed the importance of the great October socialist revolution (1917) in the Soviet Union, which brought drastic changes in the social consciousness and depicted how women had achieved equality within marriage and freedom to move into public space. So, gender equality was seen as a mark of progress, a parameter by which they judged themselves in contrast to others. Another example given was modern China, as the socialist revolution paved the way to women’s empowerment with the abolition of feudal society (Sen, 1950 [1357], pp. 486-487). This heralded a new age in China as women gained equal rights in social, political, cultural and educational representations as well as within the sexual and marital realms. One article highlighted how society is biased against progressive modern women and sought to dissipate the myths and negative views regarding independent and autonomous working women (Gupta, 1356 [1949], p. 13). In this context of modernization of Bengali women, Ghulam Murshid (1983) highlighted how the modern women boldly stated that she had an opinion of her own which she was ready to express.

The New Woman in the West emphasized that education constituted the most salient characteristic of modernity and insisted on venturing into the outer domain, which was largely external to the world of women (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). Education became an agency for social change worldwide. College education aimed to draw young women out of the domestic mindset of their mothers and grandmothers. Therefore, modern women had moved quite a distance from traditional women in redefining their lives in the light of new ideas. Similarly, Bengali women’s entrance into the public sphere and social reform helped to reconfigure the private domain by challenging the older ideology of strict separation between domestic and public life. Male writers popularized information regarding birth control and Bengali women quickly joined the public discourse. In their quest for self-determination, they became explicitly concerned with the effects of social and sexual autonomy. There was an emerging consciousness in public space, where female-administered schools on sex-education were becoming a popular space for public discussions on the body and sexuality. Female scholarship about contraception and sexual



knowledge promoted both direct and indirect participation by women rather than being passive recipients of information filtered through their husbands. As women began to be articulate about their rights over their bodies, male writers also felt the urgency of sex education. In the ‘Prescription’ section of *Nara-Naree*, sex-education was advised to be initiated from childhood in order to ensure future healthy behaviour. One reader also made a request in this regard (“Prescription,” 1347b (1940), p. 487):

*Q: My daughter’s age is only six years. Does she need ‘sex-education’ from this age and what is the proper way?*

*A: sex-education is necessary and it depends on the nature of her juvenile curiosity.*

One article, “Lajja” [“Shame”], provided the instance of Russian women attending public lectures and debates on sexuality, as referred to in the Russian writer Maurice Hindus’ *Humanity Uprooted* (published in 1929, qtd. in D. Mukhopadhyay, 1347 [1940], p. 123). Women became increasingly interested in the right to control their own bodies and to freely discuss crucial issues such as contraception, marital reform and sex education, which became an indispensable part of social reform. Contraception was perceived to help women in achieving their dreams, desires and aspirations, an individual vindication of herself, the right to be the owner of her own body and to live life to the fullness of its potential. With available contraceptive information, modern women focused on careers and skipped marriage:

*In the modern age many women are working outside with men equally. For these women, pregnancy and motherhood are deterrents to their professional development. Besides, they would not be able to provide adequate childcare if they become mothers. They can opt for birth-control to fulfil their ambitions.* (Nandy, 1353& [1947], p. 46)

So, women’s social autonomy was also interlinked with their sexual autonomy.

Bengali women started to speak out on issues like adolescent and reproductive sexuality, menstruation, marriage and maternity. Women formed emotional ties and friendships with other women to converse about complicated problems. Mothers were advised to deal with their adolescent daughters with special care, to understand their emotional needs and sensitively handle the changing ways of new-era girls. Bani Halder (1354 [1947–48], p. 18) narrated the stories of fifteen-year-old Meenu and fourteen-year-old Maya who started to exercise their independence by rebelling against domestic confines, spending time with their friends at Dalhousie Square in Calcutta and having more attachments with male friends. They exhibited signs of autonomy and peer-attachment and their behaviour often drew social disapproval.

Instructions were provided about how to deal carefully with the training of adolescent girls, who embodied the conflicting traditions of a society that was coming to terms with the changing ways of the new generation of Modern Girls. Parents were advised to be compassionate during puberty and to deal tenderly with adolescent girls, who were likely to develop an attraction towards the opposite sex. The discourse of proper guidance on sexual morality highlighted a note of caution, as Modern Girls were believed to fall into danger, resulting in ‘illegitimate’ pregnancy outside wedlock (Roy, 1357 [1950], p. 381). Sublimation of natural instincts was supposed to be an effective strategy to guide them towards science, literature, dance, music, crafts etc. Another article (Smithson, 1347 [1940]) also emphasized the process of sublimation through which delinquent girls could be diverted to other energetic vocations and develop their future potential as mountaineers, scientists, inventors, academics, nurses, wives and mothers. So the intention was to make them active social agents or contributors and the necessity of modernizing sex education was felt with the need to re-direct potential energy through constructive work.

Like the New Woman in the West, who crossed generational boundaries (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 162), New Bengali women teachers devoted themselves to their New Women students, ardently cultivating the future. Conscious of being scrutinized by a dubious

world, they reached out to one another by forming intense bonds of shared identity. Teenage girls consulted the magazine and asked about initiating a movement to form a network. The central protagonist, Ela, in “Pratham Narittwa” [“First Womanhood”] (T. Roy, 1346 [1939-40]) made a starting point by founding a school to initiate dialogue with adolescent girls on the significance of positive discussions on health and sexuality, which was fundamentally crucial for dismantling traditional myths and taboos about menstruation and sexual hygiene. Challenging hypocrisy and double standards, Ela’s school aimed to develop a network between women reformers, students and readers. As a cosmopolitan New Woman, Ela embraced scientific healthcare and refuted religious taboos by citing intertextual references. She observed that light physical exercise would not cause any harm or impair reproductive capability as Western women used to play tennis and badminton during their menstrual periods. Even though the establishment of such a platform for discussion on sexual health gave voice to the silenced issues of intimate hygiene and sexuality, she operated in a rather limited area by confining the discussion of health issues within marriage and reproduction.

With the growing public exposure of women, social anxiety about sexual intimacy became exacerbated as some men tried to take advantage of the situation and some offered proposals (Cheleder, 1356 [1949]). In this respect, some women writers in *Nara-Naree* advised separating the ‘living room’ and ‘bedroom’ in order to manage love affairs. Srimati Manjari Debi (1347a [1940]), in “Simarekha” [“Line of Control”] shared some precious tips through the letter of an experienced lady to younger women who were troubled by the predicament of impending proposals from their male companions in the outer world, and advised them to maintain a firm divide between ‘bedroom’/sexual space and ‘living room’/informal meeting space in order to keep their chastity intact while striving to be ‘modern’. The new sexual and domestic arrangements were aimed at maintaining the balance between the public sphere and the domestic domain. In the initial years of *Nara-Naree*, male Bengali proponents debated about the segregation of the public and private spheres. While some advocates recommended women’s exposure to the public world they drew a moral barrier to guard the inner world

from the irresistible desire of ‘material temptations’. The contemporary culture of co-education and free mixing generated an apprehension of immorality and with moral predominance over women’s bodies a binary was established between the ‘chaste’ and the ‘unchaste’, the ‘pure’ and the ‘impure’.

Gradually, women exercised individual autonomy and the freedom to choose partners, thereby rejecting patriarchal authority. By that time the norm of arranged marriage was declining and being vigorously criticized as women began to cultivate bonds outside conventional structures and social arrangements. Expert writers in *Nara-Naree* encouraged and published various deliberations over the prospects of love marriage vs. arranged marriage and received numerous replies and letters. The bold educated women demanded dignity and respect from men before falling in love and having a relationship and men were required to match her equally in spirit and accept her for her personality. The number of professional women grew and they started scrutinizing traditional social norms. The traditional arrangement of marriage was criticized and some writers invited men to broaden their minds and embrace women’s empowerment to its full potential, within and outside marriage. Therefore, tensions between the old customs and new ways were very much in evidence in *Nara-Naree*. Nevertheless, the Western system of co-education and Russian comradeship made an impact on Bengali writers and they encouraged the equal participation of women. Moreover, changing gender roles and social norms impacted upon socio-cultural expectations:

*Not only in their country, but our men and women have also started thinking ... women do not intend to marry undesirable men only to relieve their fathers of the economic burden.*

*(P. Mukhopadhyay, 1346 [1939–40], p. 3)*

Debates on various issues, like divorce and contraception were highly contentious.

Some other articles in *Nara-Naree* encouraged friendship between women with the development of women’s networks and in their

correspondence women expressed various problems, especially about conjugal dissatisfaction, childlessness, menstruation and pregnancy. When women started to act as the agents of transformation within their communities and charted their transition from the old codes, their direct participation was encouraged by male intellectuals. Even though some male writers (D. Mukhopadhyay, 1346 [1940], p. 123) observed that progressive women were still embarrassed when listening to the subject of sexual science, it was noted as a positive sign that women were increasingly resorting to uninhibited expression. While in the West a sort of sexual revolution was taking place, Bengali reformers encouraged women's participation in the sexual reform movements to challenge sexual morality. Thus they performed a cosmopolitan identity in their daily lives by connecting with both global and local ways. Modern women were keen to break down the barriers of shame and it should be noted that a considerable number of adult women were confirmed to be regular readers and made up a large proportion of subscribers ("Prescription," 1347a [1940], p. 427, "Prescription," 1347b [1940], p. 487, "Prescription," 1347c [1940], p. 524). Women participated almost equally in talking about social anxiety and moral dilemmas while some of them hinted at initiating a broader channel for women where they could pour out their problems without any social hindrance or hesitation ("Prescription," 1355c [1948], p. 271).

Debate also raged over the necessity of including sex education in the school curriculum, and whether sexual science should be taught as a subject in schools and colleges (Chattopadhyay, B. (1355a [1948], p. 223; Das-Sharma, 1355 [1948], p. 222)). Modern women also expressed their eagerness to learn sexual science and explore scientific knowledge. Women readers of *Nara-Naree* focused on the importance of sex education and the dissemination of sexual knowledge was highly endorsed:

*The problem lies in our distorted perception about man-woman relationships. Sex education should be incorporated into the curriculum of higher classes in schools and at every level in colleges. (Sengupta, 1356 [1950], p. 275)*

Several statements were issued by female readers who used to read the magazine in a clandestine attempt to familiarize themselves with basic sex education, even though social inhibitions blocked their way and will to knowledge. The “Prescription” section revealed that adolescent girls often tried to read *Nara-Naree* by picking it out of their brothers’ collections and this highlighted that the magazine was not inaccessible to young boys. An intelligent and educated teenaged girl questioned social repression and the sexual double standard in “Dadur Chithi” [“Letter from Grandfather”] (Maitra, 1948-49 [1355]) and highlighted that even though she collected a copy of Marie Stope’s *Marriage Manual* and had read through it, she was puzzled by the scholarly language. She asked the magazine to enhance the circulation of modern knowledge:

*We want to know! We want to learn! Knowledge of my classmates about the subject is also limited like me. (Maitra, 1948-49 [1355], p. 29)*

Contributors to *Nara-Naree* were concerned with creating a conscious new generation and male writers also took the initiative. Growing liberality was deemed to be a mark of progress. Pravas Basu (1355 [1948], pp. 160–162) dealt with crucial information about the female sexual and reproductive function and disseminated sexual knowledge to his female students through educative sessions. But he carefully limited his advice to remain within a conjugal framework. So, sexual reform, sex education and sexual autonomy constituted a large part of the debate on identifying the characteristics of modern women in *Nara-Naree*.

## 6.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have highlighted how the portrayals of the Modern Girl and the New Woman embodied conflicts between the home and the world and how these dichotomies revolved around the highly debated issues of Bengali women’s sexual and social autonomy. The bodies of the Modern Girl and the New Woman became sites to negotiate the meanings of Western and Bengali modernities. The hybrid identity of the Modern Girl recorded the transgression of social boundaries and underscored the circulation of modernity

through transnational interconnectedness. Thus, *Nara-Naree* indicated the permeability of national/colonial borders and contributed to the development of a multiplicity of modernities. On the other hand, through the image of the nationalistic New Woman, the writers in *Nara-Naree* resorted to a selective assimilation of Western modernity in order to construct a new sexual morality. The Bengali New Woman was recast differently from other modern womanhood and women's bodies became the sites of contradictions. Women's sexual agency represented the progress of the nation, but at the same time it was felt that the nation and its women were synonymous and that it was necessary to control the home while thinking about the world. The overt points of contradiction and dichotomies in the process of negotiating modernity involved a critical surveillance of women's bodies. It portrayed ambivalences in disciplining sexuality and propagating sexual freedom in order to balance the modern world and Bengali cultural identity.





## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This research has been conducted in order to examine how women's sexuality, complex identities and changing gender roles were discussed in the monthly issues of the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* covering the decade spanning from 1939 to 1950. In summary, in this project I have argued that the contributors to *Nara-Naree* explored problematic discourses on the female body, conjugality and sexuality in the Bengali domain (1939–1950) and highlighted the gendered dynamics in negotiating transnational modernity and the changing roles of modern women. I have also discussed how *Nara-Naree* dealt with diversity and cultural authenticity in trafficking the notions of modern womanhood and how it created a cosmopolitan intertextual space that stressed the changing gender relations and challenges associated with it. The analysis of articles in the magazine (1939–1950) indicates that sexual reform and social change were continuing discourses and thus provides a broader understanding of the socio-cultural scenario and a thorough reflection of the tensions that surrounded the Women's Question and the changing roles of modern women.

This research is important because it provides an insight into the transitioning of the social scenario and the role expansion of modern women in Bengal and how the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* reflected the transformation of societal ideals for women during the early twentieth century. This thesis has stressed the fact that colonial encounters affected women in complex and contradictory ways, which often had multiple implications for ideological perspectives about the new womanhood.

This study proposed the following key research questions:

- i. In what ways did the contributors to the Bengali periodical *Nara-Naree* (1939-1950) renegotiate and reconceptualize notions of the female body, sexuality and conjugality as expressed in the global dialogue and transnational social movements on modern sexual reform?

- ii. How did the reappropriation of ideas about the female body and sexuality in *Nara-Naree* register cultural tensions and changes in the portrayals of the Bengali Modern Girl and the Bengali New Woman?

In answer to the first research question, the study discovered how the conceptualization of ‘conjugal happiness’ and scientific sexology in *Nara-Naree* led to the renegotiation of the female body and sexuality, which was influenced by ideas from the transnational movement on modern sexual reform. In *Nara-Naree*, tensions between sexual danger and sexual pleasure were apparent in most of the articles and female sexuality simultaneously became a domain of restriction, repression and danger as well as a site of exploration, pleasure and agency. Through this research I have found that the changing notions of sexuality and conjugality in Bengal were intertextually interrelated with the global sexual reform movement. The contributors to the magazine engaged in the global debate on the female body and sexuality by analyzing the content of various Western texts. The emergence of the new conception of marital happiness was interlinked with redefined conceptions of the female body, sexuality and desire. By tracing this transnational interconnectedness, the vernacular magazine *Nara-Naree* (1939–50) dealt with the scientific discussions and the works of Western advocates that formed a significant part of the intellectual dissemination and shaped the intertextual discourses on conjugal science and birth control. In addition, *Nara-Naree* reflected the doubts and contradictions not only within native sexologists but also the dichotomies that prevailed among Western advocates of sexual science. I have stressed that even though sexual reformers debunked normative notions of passive womanhood, the scientific discourses revealed a profoundly gendered construction of male and female roles within heterosexual relations. Sexual behaviours were thus understood to be legitimate sites for interrogation and the discourses on conjugal and reproductive sexuality highlighted problematic assumptions.

To answer the second research question, I have analyzed how the discussion on female sexuality within sexual reform is related to changes in the ideas about Bengali Modern Girls and the New

Woman. Contributors to the magazine conceptualized the roles of modern women through a combination of conflicting and heterogeneous ideas. The magazine focused on the dynamic flow of ideas and discourses across national boundaries that was triggering new gender images and practices. It opened up multilayered debates regarding women's social and sexual autonomy. Social issue—sexual issue—woman's issue—the triangle was formed. Here I have explored the contentious nature of sexual modernity and examined the paradoxes and ambivalences inherent in the initiative for social change regarding the female body, desire and subjectivity. Tensions between women's sexual emancipation and Westernization formed part of the discussion on the modernization of sexual reform. Thus sexual reform became a site of anxiety as well as of critical negotiation in mediating hybrid cosmopolitan experiences.

The analysis of the magazine also depicted the ways in which society was transitioning. Discourse on modernization was thoroughly problematic in the Bengali domain. The emerging ideas of the New Woman and the urban Modern Girl through the images and written contents in *Nara-Naree* provided evidence of the complex interrelationship between texts and shifting ideologies regarding women's social and sexual autonomy. The growing presence of sports such as tennis, cycling, swimming, exercise and others showed the sign of intertextuality and how women had increased their involvement in outdoor and athletic activities and started joining the professional world by breaking away from traditionally feminine preoccupations. But the ideal of true womanhood and the discourses on the good wife and good mother existed alongside these new portrayals. I also found that the emergence of the New Woman was globally interconnected and the increased attention to young women's college education was an important element which indicated the evolution of these interlocking ideas. So the varying kinds of images not only represented the colonial but also embraced the international and nationalist categories of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, portrayals of both the Modern Girl and the New Woman were heavily intermingled throughout the twentieth century.

As the Modern Girl and the New Woman represented a healthy and active lifestyle and sought their own enjoyment and satisfaction, the magazine portrayed women's increased presence outside the home as a reflection of what was occurring in the wider society. The idea of the New Woman and the Modern Girl challenged preconceived ideas about the traditional Bengali woman with the promotion of sexual reform. But at the same time, women were not completely abandoning their former way of life but rather expanding their reach to include activities and areas of interest previously considered out of their reach. In the case of *Nara-Naree*, the Western Modern Girl and the Westernized Bengali Modern Girl were often ridiculed during the late colonial period and apprehensions about their uncontrolled social behaviour and sexual autonomy aroused moral anxiety. After independence, women's images were nationalized with the aim of highlighting national accomplishments and transnational connections diminished. Furthermore, the portrayals of the Bengali Modern Girl and the Bengali New Woman became increasingly indistinguishable.

In summary, throughout my analysis of the magazine I have found that the active participation of women was encouraged in recasting sexual morality and conjugal sexuality. I have also explored the contradictory values regarding sexual autonomy as espoused in the magazine. How much freedom women need became a highly debated topic. The construction of good sexuality and the perils of 'bad' sexuality rested on defining what desires were permissible. In *Nara-Naree* this dividing line, even though unsettled, was deemed necessary in order to estimate the amount of control that was necessary over female sexuality in the process of defining the boundary between the local and the global domains. Contending ideals of womanhood revealed not only anxieties associated with the changing roles of women, but also anxieties associated with the conceptualization of a modern nation.

### **7.1. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION**

Concepts of cosmopolitanism, globalization, universalism and internationalism have become buzzwords in contemporary academia, but international connections and intellectual exchanges have a long

history, especially in the colonized non-Western societies, which are now “jostling for interpretive space in the new global, interregional and transnational histories” (Bose, 2010, p. 2). The colonial period provides fertile ground for the debate on the intersection between global and local processes and in this context the scientific magazines dealing with questions of sexual reform in the Bengali popular sphere is an important subject. In the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree*, the aspect of transnational exchange and interaction about the female body and sexuality indicated that there is a cosmopolitan pattern and internationalism inherent in it. The magazine *Nara-Naree* broadened the relationship of Bengal with the wider world and represented women’s emancipated roles as they began to noticeably change.

I have analyzed how the emerging Western-educated experts in the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* formulated a transnational framework, and the roots of cosmopolitanism are clearly evident. The significance of the research lies in the magazine’s emphasis on the transnational global interconnectedness of modern sexual reform in Bengal and cosmopolitan modernity in the intertextual emergence of the two intertwining figures of the Modern Girl and the New Woman and the paradoxical notions of women’s sexual autonomy.

My research attempts to internationalize the understanding of transnational connections from 1939 to 1950 by depicting the changes in the roles of Bengali women during that period. To my knowledge, there is no previous scholarly study of international sexual reform and the interlinking of the New Woman and the Modern Girl in Bengal. This study provides an important historical corrective by bringing in perspectives and analyses overlooked in the largely Eurocentric and Anglophone studies.

Modern women are central to the discourse of cosmopolitanism and an analysis of the magazine is very useful in the contemporary context. There is renewed international interest among Asian scholars in the history of modern women, who were breaking away from the ideals of domesticity in the non-Western countries during the early twentieth century. The early twentieth century discourses on the ‘New Women’ and ‘Modern Girls’ are now being re-read and historical

research is being carried out regarding similar figures in national and transnational contexts. Asian scholars have started analyzing the icons that came to represent the changing gender ideology and discourses on sexual reform. Therefore, being the first of its kind, the Bengali magazine *Nara-Naree* has an immense importance of its own although ironically it has been neglected and invisibilized in the vernacular history of sexuality.

## **7.2. RELEVANCE OF THE MAGAZINE IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT**

In this concluding section I will discuss how the critical issues highlighted in *Nara-Naree* can contribute to the contemporary debate on broader social changes and transnational dialogue on socio-sexual reform. The transnational appeal of the magazine remains relevant in contemporary society. In today's global village, what happens in one part of the world impacts on other places almost instantaneously. Long ago, before passports and visa were invented for travelling internationally, the magazine underscored the interface between different countries and cultures.

As India is currently going through a churning experience due to globalization and is being torn apart in conflicts between the old norms and the new ways, the magazine remains very relevant, not only because of its cosmopolitan features, but also for its bold handling of various problematic issues. *Nara-Naree* is significant in the contemporary age for its unequivocal espousal of freedom of expression as we understand it today. The Bengali magazine challenged the questions of obscenity, sexual taboos and social stigma in relation to sexual reform in Bengal and depicted the tensions that are prevalent even in today's society on a broader scale. The magazine also reflected the anxieties arising from a changing gender ideology and these contending images were associated with the concept of modernity and the creation of a modern nation by combining intensely local and global sensibilities.

Modernity is today a global experience and in the present age, with the popularity of transnational studies and the exploration of global interconnectedness, the domain of female sexuality cannot be left isolated. Sexuality is embedded in multiple sites and spaces—cultural, social, medical and political aspects and legal reforms. Rita Banerji (2008) emphasized that there was never a sexual revolution for women in India, the kind brought about by the feminist movements in the West which argued for the establishment of women's independent and individual rights and choices over their own bodies and sexuality. So, talking about female sexuality is challenging in this patriarchal world.

Worldwide connections have impacted upon the contemporary modern Bengali lifestyle where cosmopolitan characteristics are writ large in everyday modes of communication and the consumption of global images. Here I enlist the contemporary debates on sexuality and sex education in Bengal and their socio-cultural connotations. This example would provide a better understanding of how contradictory arguments about sexuality move from the private into the public realm in today's society. For example, from 2015 onwards sex education is proposed to be imparted in schools as a chapter in the syllabus on education, psychology and sociology across Bengal in order to tackle misinformation about unwanted pregnancy and sexual dangers. A similar effort was made in 2009 (after its proposal in 2003) to include sex education as a part of the school curriculum, which was then termed lifestyle education. But due to various cultural barriers, it was a total failure. According to the new proposal, issues such as gender relations, problems of adolescence, the correct attitude of students towards sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are to be taught in Classes IX and X (age group 14–16) and in Classes XI and XII (age group 17–18).

Paromita Chakravarti (2011) analyzed the continuing debates about the introduction of sexual and reproductive health awareness programmes and examined the controversies surrounding sex education. Even though *Nara-Naree* debated the necessity of introducing sex education into school and college textbooks, a paternalistic and stigmatizing attitude is still evident in the public

sphere. Hostility towards the public discussion of sexuality is resisting the implementation of sex education in schools. Proper sex education would contribute to social change by opening up a channel for discussion on adolescent sexuality with sensitive support in a liberal environment and would reduce the chances of harassment by sexual predators.

A deeply problematic attitude towards female sexuality in contemporary India has been highlighted by some scholars (Banerji, 2008; Basu, 2004; Bose, 2002; Bose & Bhattacharya, 2007, Phadke, 2013). However, Binda Bose (2002) asserted that even though there has long been, and still exists, a “conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality”, it may also be asserted that such a “silence—or perhaps, silencing—is being challenged in both academic and popular discourses” (p. ix).

In a modern society, pre-marital sex is not an alien term. But any discussion of sexual reform is still treated as scandalous and contentious. The problems that Indian women face mostly revolve around the idea of women’s chastity and the discussion of sexuality in any context except for procreation is reviled. Social repression rests on the belief that women’s sexuality is dangerous. A woman’s virginity still seems to be a big deal when it comes to marriage. On the other hand, men are never questioned about their sexual continence.

Indian society has always been obsessed with marriage and lays extraordinary emphasis on maintaining this institution. If a woman elects to lead a single life or does not deem it necessary to enter into the lifelong commitment of marriage in claiming legitimacy for a relationship, she comes under fire. Social norms are subject to change and increasingly important clarifications are being issued on live-in relationships by High Courts. There was a landmark verdict by the Supreme Court (March 24, 2010) about legalizing live-in relationships in India. The Apex court found that “if two sound-minded adults of the opposite sex seek to live together without getting married the question of a ‘criminal offence’ does not arise at all.” Recently, the Supreme Court also ruled that children born out of



prolonged live-in relationships could not be termed “illegitimate” (*Times of India*, April 24, 2014). So, the question of legitimacy and the social acceptance of sexual relationships outside marriage are two significant issues in this regard.

Even though the cultural dynamics are in motion, sexual freedom and social autonomy for women are still a long way off. Debates continue to rage on freedom of expression and censorship and many people still argue that the expression of female sexuality corrupts and taints the moral and social fabric.

### **7.3. A FINAL THOUGHT**

This thesis started with my own narrative about my engagement with the second-hand book-sellers during my search for the source and research materials that I needed about the transnational focus on the female body and sexuality, and how I started to explore some of the problems regarding the public discussion of socio-sexual reform and sexual morality in the years from 1939 to 1950.

It is clear that there are many openings for future research in this area. Additional research could be conducted to examine similar changes in the content of other Bengali magazines of that time and this would provide further evidence about cosmopolitan characteristics in the conception of modern women and the global interconnectedness of sexual reform and social change. Research could also be conducted on different illustrations, cover art and the internal content and articles.



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