



Evolution and Significance of a Saree as an Expression of Women Empowerment and Nationalism in Modern India

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ABSTRACT

Saree is a timeless garment worn by women in India for centuries. It is a garment with a rich history and has evolved with each period of time according to the needs of women. The period of this discussion is based in modern India, i.e., the period of colonial history until before India's independence in 1947. During this time, with the advent of British rule in India, there were significant changes in the morals, ethics and way of living of the Indian folks especially the elite educated society. The saree was the main attire of the Indian women and became the symbol of their identity, strength and resilience. It became the voices of the nationalists and the social reformers against colonialism and social evils. Saree acted as a symbol of women empowerment when the Indian men along with the British rulers were in a mission to modernize and civilize the Indians. With the foundation of the Indian National Congress and the independence movement, freedom fighters encouraged Indian women to wear the saree in order to distinguish themselves from the British and give the people and a national identity. Hence, the saree was consistently proved itself to be much more than a garment but rather an identity that represented a community, a nation and its women.

Keywords: Saree, Nationalism, Nationalist movement, women empowerment, women

Introduction

Sarees are a garment that has been worn by Indian women for centuries. They are an important part of Indian culture and have been a symbol of beauty, status and pride for generations. The topic for this paper, "Evolution and Significance of Saree as an Expression of Women Empowerment and Nationalism in Modern India", focuses on the legacy of saree as it changed and adapted itself with the changing needs of women. The main time period of this discussion is based in modern India, i.e., the period of colonial history until before India's independence in 1947. During this time, with the advent of British rule in India, there were significant changes in the morals, ethics and way of living of the Indian folks especially the elite educated society. This new lifestyle also affected the attire of these people. Although, men were always in the forefront of every social change, women weren't spared from the influence of colonialism or the anti-colonial ideas that emerged later on. The saree was the main attire of the Indian women and became the symbol of their identity, strength and resilience. This paper mainly talks about four main aspects where saree acts as an expression of women empowerment and nationalism in India. Saree as a garment not only becomes the voice of women but also, the voices of the nationalists and the social reformers against colonialism and social evils. Firstly, the legacy of a saree shows through the eyes of several historians the versatility of a garment that has survived through ages and with time had adapted to the new standards of modesty for women. The main example of this phenomenon in the British Indian period is the introduction of the blouse and the petticoat under the saree which was quite uncommon in India, particularly in parts of Bengal. In order to accommodate themselves in the new standards of modesty that was respected and followed in Britain at that time, the women of the elite families in India normalized wearing the saree with blouse and petticoat thereby covering their bodies in a way that was considered to be 'decent'. The second aspect when the saree acts as a symbol of women empowerment is when the Indian men along with the British rulers were in a mission to modernize and civilize the Indians including both men and women. This was a period where women's education was promoted and encouraged, thus many new schools and colleges for women were constructed. This meant there women made more public appearances than they had ever made in several centuries before. So, in order to look publicly presentable, there were changes in the way women wore their garments including the staple piece of clothing that is the saree. So, changes were introduced in the way the saree was draped and also the material through which they were made. The third aspect includes the emergence of nationalism in India especially after the formation of the Indian National Congress. During the Independence movement, political leaders of the freedom movement wore the garment and encouraged Indian women to wear the saree in order to distinguish themselves from the British and give the people and a national identity. Lastly, Gandhi's influence in the Indian national movement also impacted the status and contribution of women, their lifestyle and their attire. Gandhi encouraged the khadi movement and the use of swadeshi items in order to fight colonialism. Women were mainly active in this protest and this was reflected in the way they dressed. The use of simple white sarees that represented simplicity was a form of expression of women's identity who wanted to keep up the pure and austere image of an Indian woman. Hence, the saree was consistently proved itself to be much more than a garment but rather an identity that represented a community, a nation and its women.

Legacy of Saree

Saree is one of the world's oldest and perhaps the only surviving unstitched garment from the past. The saree forms the core of history and legacy as it is an important part of Indian culture and have been a symbol of beauty, status and pride for generations. Sarees are a form of wearable art, embellished with intricate embroidery and magnificent textiles. On the other hand, sarees are also a symbol of strength and resilience that empowers women and celebrates their femininity. It is an everlasting reminder of India's rich culture and heritage. The word 'saree' is derived from Sanskrit word 'sati', which means "a strip of cloth". The origin of this word is from the Prakrit word 'sattika'. Prakrit is an ancient language which was mainly used during the age of Buddhism and its spread in India. The word "sattika" is mentioned in Buddhist literature and it basically means women's attire. This word later developed into the word 'sadi' which can be further translated into 'saree' a much more Anglicized word. Saree is an unstitched long piece of cloth, which is draped in various styles. The typical length of a saree varies from four to nine yard. The history of this famous Indian ethnic piece of clothing is quite interesting and shows the culmination over thousands of year civilization in India. The first mention of Saree was found in Mahabharata in 400 BC, when Lord Krishna protected "Draupadi" by blessing her with a saree that did not end. Around 1st century AD, the Sari can be found in its earliest form. The records of this garment were found in the sculptures from that period. The first real life evidence of a garment similar to the saree came from the Indus Valley civilization around 3200 BC to 2000 BC. People in Indus Valley civilization used to cover themselves with a long piece of cloth, found mainly around the Western part of the Indian subcontinent. The first portrayal of the draped shawl resembling the Indian saree was from statue of a male described as the "priest king" from Mohenjodaro. Ajanta cave murals (around 500 AD) showed women wearing sarees that cover the entire body.

The saree was the predominant garment worn by women in the mainland Indian subcontinent till the advent of the Muslim rulers. The Muslim dominance in India marked the introduction of stitched clothes in the form of the petticoat or a skirt which was known as a 'ghagra' and the blouse. The 'ghagra' was a full length gathered skirt. The Muslims also introduced advancements in saree materials such as intricate hand embroidery and embellishments. During the era, the changes in the saree were well documented through use of miniature paintings and hand-illustrated manuscript, showing the evolution of the basic garment into the gracefully draped intricate range of saree. The advent of British rule in India around mid-18th Century brought changes in costumes and garments as well. These changes in the Indian costume especially brought variations in the manner of wearing a saree. The final drape as is seen today, came about only during this period when women's garments went through major revolution. Since then, till present date, this aspect of wearing a saree has remained constant through time. The drape of the saree differs from region to region and is further accentuated by diverse culture, tradition, patterns, weaves, structure and embroidery. The "Nivi" is the most popular style of draping the saree. (Kaur & Agrawal, 2019)

Modernizing the Saree

From 1858 when the East India Company turned its rule to the British Crown till the time of independence in 1947, India was a British colony. British rule had an immeasurable impact on Indian culture and society as a whole and exerted its influence into every aspect of life in India. Diverse regions and cultures were codified and restricted by British colonial authorities in their attempt at complete authority. A key example of this can be seen in the sari or saree. (de Zoysa, 2015) In the age of colonialism, the British authorities implemented an entirely new way of living which caused a shift in the fundamental practices of people in India. The British colonists were looking to control India at every level. The colonizers placed the sari at the forefront of Indian culture and then asserted British ideas of chastity and modesty into it. In this way, the British were able to artificially control Indian culture. The British placed themselves above Indians while simultaneously asserting their beliefs onto Indian culture. This idea is crystallized through the emergence of the 'nivi' sari as a 'universal' drape that replaced other regional styles. Also, the inclusion of a blouse and petticoat underneath of a style meant to represent India as a whole shows how the British influenced the sari in order to suit their idea of India. This conformity to the British-filtered ideal Indian woman, then, created the modern sari with its blouse and petticoat. As colonial rule met cultural resistance, the modern sari was created as a result.

The use of sari as a form of protest by lower castes is almost subverted by the use of the sari as a tool of influence by those in power. Even pre-colonization, Indian women, particularly of the affluent classes, adopted new features of wearing the same garment. (Kaur & Agrawal, 2019) While this demonstrates the employment of various external influences to the sari, it also reveals how that influence grew through those in power. This effect was only amplified once the British completely ruled India. The women belonging to upper-class Indian society sought to exemplify the British ideal of an Indian woman: 'native' enough to be fetishized and dehumanized by the West, but modest enough to respect British standards. The nivi sari's creation can be accredited to Jnanadanandini Tagore, whose family's involvement with the Brahma Samaj afforded her great societal influence under colonial rule. She was the wife of Satyendranath Tagore, and sister-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore. Due to the influence of the Victorian morals of modesty among women that were being imposed on Indian society, the saree was considered "immodest" as the upper body was left bare. Thus, Indian dressing changed to adapt to these new moral sensibilities and create a style that would conform to the new sensibilities by incorporating the blouse and petticoat. The point of this style was to fit in while maintaining a distinct Indian identity. She was greatly influenced by the Parsi way of draping the saree. Later on in her life, she also published advertisements in the Bamabodhini Patrika (a women's magazine) to teach other women to wear the saree in her style, and it quickly caught on. This shows the deeper-rooted influence of the British on the sari: simply by being in power, Britain was able to create a new standard for the upper class that altered Indian society. (Kaur & Agrawal, 2019)

As the sari evolved within the context of colonization it became more than clothing and grew to represent the influence of Britain on India's culture and politics. The British influenced the sari by using their power to mold a new standard for Indian women. As "the burden of upholding morals of tradition fell upon women" Indian women were forced to mediate competing influences in a rapidly evolving society. In this way, Indian women themselves

altered the drape of the sari to suit their own ideals although those ideals did not face any external influences, British or otherwise. While the sari remains diverse across India, the British influence on it remains ubiquitous.

Women's Education and Change in Attire

In colonial times, the upper class and middle class Bengali women avoided the public sphere for the most part and they were confined to the clearly demarcated world of their home. The city of Calcutta was a British capital till 1911, and therefore became the heart of the colonial mission of civilizing and modernizing the Indians. This process of civilizing also included the emancipation of native women of India as desired by the English educated Bengali elites, known as the Bhadrakol as well as the British colonizers. This led to the establishments of new schools and colleges and the implementation of the model of formal female education in Bengal that followed the educational frameworks of the contemporary English missionaries, educationists and administrators. This model of women's emancipation became an ideal for the upper and middle class women that were governed by the colonial education and Victorian ethics. The female education system was the outcome of the Victorian ethics which believed in the construction of the "new woman" who was educated, and at the same time, cultivated courteous norms and domestic virtues. Under the influence of the liberal Western education, the urban elites were made to realize the need of social reforms and the eradication of certain Hindu customs which paved the way for subjugation of women in Indian societies in the name of religion, customs and tradition. Thereafter, schools and other female educational institutions were opened by the Bengali urban elites. John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established Calcutta Female School, the first school for girls in Calcutta with the help of Raja Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghosh, and Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar in 1849, with 21 girls on its roll. In 1879 it was developed into Bethune College, the first women's college in India. By the turn of the century, women started attending schools which began to develop in the metropolitan cities from the mid-nineteenth centuries, and which took them away from domestic confines, giving them a public identity beyond the familial. They were also admitted in the colleges and universities, receiving degrees in the sciences and arts, much earlier than the English women were allowed those in Britain. Sending a girl child to school necessitated the disavowal of the traditional custom of purda or the veil. It is important to note that the women who received formal educational institutions belonged to the upper and middle class families.

Women's public presence in the city necessitates a change in the conventional dress code of the Bengali women. Traditionally, they wore a single saree without a blouse and a petticoat whose texture was equated with the economic status of that household. But the fine sarees worn by women in the elite families were often transparent enough to reveal their body outlines. Fanny Parks in her writing in 1850 marked this traditional attire as a hindrance in exposing the woman to the men other than her husband. The women who travelled to European cities often dressed themselves in western gowns and shoes. But the way in which the Bengali traditional saree was draped needed a change to allow women to move about in the city. This evolution was introduced by Jnanadanandini Devi in her way of wearing the saree which she created while staying in Bombay (present-day Mumbai) and Ahmadabad with her husband. She followed the Parsi way of wearing saree when she stayed with the Manekji family in Bombay. But she used to put the "anchal" on the left side which was different from the Parsi way of placing the "anchal" over the right shoulder. She wore her saree with a blouse, petticoat and a jacket. This style of draping the saree became immensely popular among women in the Tagore household. Jnanada was, however, not entirely satisfied by changing the sartorial style in her in-law's family alone. In her first writing in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, she advertised herself as a guide who could help others in wearing the saree in this manner. This fashion which became popular in the Brahma households, gradually came to be known as the "Brahmika Saree". Another woman, Suniti Devi, also used this model of saree and wore it with a "kuchi". This mode of wearing the saree with a "kuchi" (pleats) and "anchal" is still followed today. Thus, Jnanadanandini Devi played a pioneering role in defining women's public appearance in the city, by using her unique sense of fashion which harmoniously combined tradition and modernity. In the traditional Hindu household, the women were also prohibited from wearing shoes. Only the prostitutes and the women in Brahma families defied this taboo. This posed another hindrance for women, stepping out of their homes. Their travels outside the domestic space, however, brought shoes into fashion. Jnanadanandini also wore shoes when she first travelled to Bombay. Not only that, she advocated the use of shoes by women in opposition to the prevailing custom in her letter to *Bamabodhini Patrika*. Therefore, the evolution in women's attire in the colonial city brought in considerable modernization, altering the lives of Bengali women by gradually replacing the old customs with new ones that were consistent with the changing times. (Chakraborty, 2017)

Indian Nationalism, the Modern Women and a Saree

Women began playing a significant role in Indian nationalism during the period of British colonialism. Under British rule, 'Indian women were defined as seductive, sensual, and exotic', whereas men were viewed as effeminate, passive, and undersexed. Therefore, the rise of Indian nationalism often took the form of men asserting their masculinity through their control over their women and the redefinition of Indian women as chaste, modest, and pure. Historians have argued that women's clothing in India during the colonial period was connected to the regulation of sexuality, the public sphere of life, and women's roles. In colonial Bengal, the project of re-dressing women was part of a larger movement for the social reform of the family. This project of 'covering' Indian women was further enhanced by Victorian morality and the 'civilising mission' of colonialism. Many nationalists have celebrated the Hindu nation by emphasizing women's adherence to a Hindu tradition that kept women in the home – despite nationalist reforms. Partha Chatterjee's work on the women question in Indian nationalism makes a similar argument; namely, that the spirit of the Indian nation was seen as being kept alive by women in the private domain. As discussed below, the role of women as mothers (of the nation and of sons in particular) has also been used to justify their participation in the public sphere, political movements, and nationalist protests. Scholars have argued that the saree is an image of both family life and resistance, invested with a wide range of cultural and social meanings. As the British promoted their own textile factories at the expense of the Indian

textile industry cloth and clothing were profoundly implicated in colonialism and nationalist resistance. The importance of the sari for Indian nationalism and national identity is due to its relationship to the ideal of femininity at the centre of the Indian nation. The role of sari as a symbol of womanhood is connected to the religious traditions of India through the well-known images of the Hindu goddesses painted in the nineteenth century by Indian artist like Raja Ravi Varma. All of the goddesses are depicted wearing saris, reinforcing the identification of the sari with ideals of Hindu womanhood. (Wilton, 2012)

Partha Chatterjee explains the central role of women within post-colonial national imaginings by connecting women with the inner domain of Indian life that housed the nation. Women were imagined as part of nations and were highly symbolically important in differentiating India from the colonial powers. However, women were not involved actively in the 'imagining' of the nation; instead, they were confined to playing a passive role as symbols of the nation. The conceptualisation of women as associated with the home and the 'inner domain' of the nation remains influential, permeating contemporary visions of the Indian nation and continues to offer opportunities for both the empowerment and subordination of women in India. (Wilton, 2012) With the call for independence during the opening years of the 20th century, however, began the nationalist phase of eliminating regional differences of dress and identity as part of the anti-colonial struggle and search for a pan-Indian nationalist imaginary. The nationalist reclamation of culture and aesthetics generated a narrative of nation that was intimately linked with, and in fact inscribed upon, the sari which became the site for the articulation of 'tradition' through the reproduction of gender specific dress codes in modernity. By the early part of the 20th century, the emergent ethos of nationhood was premised on a discourse of tradition feminized and visually represented through a national iconography of divine womanhood whose virtues were vital to the preservation and sustenance of 'national culture'.

Women were designated in the nationalist discourse to be in service to their male counterparts at the helm of the colonial onslaught, as well as to the nation now imagined as motherland in the epitomic 'mother' inspiring her 'sons' (citizens) to sacrifice their lives in the relentless struggle for freedom. Indeed the feminine embodiment of nation as 'Mother India' not only mediated between tradition and modernity but provided a powerful unifying symbol of national territory. The rhetoric of freedom frequently invoked by nationalists indexed Mother India's sari as a material symbol of nation, draped and duly contained from rapid erosion by English mill-made fabrics and the tyranny of colonial rule. National space was thus mapped as a feminized and divinized sari-scape via the image of Mother India and represented consistently as a desexualized, fair-skinned woman of an unspecified ethnic identity. Mother India and her sari were now instruments of territorial integration, symbolizing the freedom struggle and the burgeoning of a nationalist spirit established upon a feminine ideal. In the early years of nation-building, the nationalist ideology was largely integrationist and sought to use India's diverse regional textile traditions, evident in the continued presence and resilience of the hand-woven sari, as a marker of India's cultural unity. The creation of a new national dress thus involved the incorporation and refinement of regional and local sari (textile design) traditions while adhering to an emergent modernist ideal and sartorial conception of the Other, predicated upon a rhetoric of nation based on 'unity in diversity'. By postulating stitched clothing as the attire of foreign invaders of the ancient land – Mughals and the British, the discourse established an unbroken legacy and indigenous preference for the 'unstitched' or draped garment as emblematic of the emergent, primarily Hindu, nation. It now also featured the twin processes of specialization of India's regional diversity, on the one hand, and the development of a trans-regional, unifying dress, on the other. While Gandhi called for the wearing of coarse khadi (hand-spun and handwoven) saris as a united nationwide symbol of opposition to British manufactured clothing, as part of his programme for self-rule or swaraj, elite women members of the freedom movement sought to promote handloom saris from different regions as a means to reiterate India's cultural distinctiveness from the West. Social reformer and craft revivalist, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya for instance, is known for providing new markets for artisanal products from remote corners of India. She is well known for her role in the creation of numerous cultural institutions dedicated to regional handicrafts, handlooms and performing art traditions in independent India. She used the sari as a visible symbol of women's participation in the freedom movement and insisted that women Congress party workers wear bright kesaria or saffron orange saris in contrast to the white ensemble worn by their male colleagues for their political work while also encouraging elite women, still entrenched in roles denied by patriarchy, to contribute by patronizing local weavers and dyers for their customary sari selections. (Kawtra, 2014)

Saree and the Swadeshi Movement

The Swadeshi Movement marked the beginning of a nationwide participation of women in the national movement. However, it is important to note that even this public participation was dictated and controlled by the nationalist leaders that encouraged this participation. These mainly Hindu nationalists played a huge role in shaping the kind of participation women would have access to in the political field of colonial India. The image of women was also used as a rhetoric that facilitated the nationalist image of the movement initiated by the freedom fighters. The women coming from middle and upper middle class families were asked and expected to choose their attire in a certain way which would also shape the image of a nation. Clothes played a major role in the cultural politics of colonial India and acted as a symbol of visual identity for not only the women in general but also the men who taking part in the freedom struggle.

When Mahatma Gandhi entered politics, clothing practices of women were again given new images associated with national identity. Gandhi introduced the wide scale use of khadi in order to challenge the western manufactured goods and promote simplistic lifestyle among Indians. Khadi became so significant that it is often known as the "fabric of Indian independence". In the 1920s, Gandhi urged women to participate in his khadi campaign as it was a kind of protest both men and women could be a part of. The Swadeshi movement started by Gandhi was not just a simple nationalist struggle against the British rule but it also signified Gandhi's beliefs, according to which a simple way of living was also a means to attain liberty. Thus, the use of spinning wheel or the charkha was promoted to control over consumption. This would help Indians to be self-reliant and thereby free themselves from both economic and political cages of the British rule. Following Gandhi's ideology, many women donated their jewellery and fancy clothes. Sarees made of linen and silk were discarded and replaced with simple, handmade khadi sarees symbolizing simplicity as the attire of Swadeshi. The reformers and

nationalists wanted to organize the wardrobe of middleclass Hindu women. A magazine known as the *Hindustani Shishtachar* even argued that imitating a foreign way of dressing destroyed the ancient pride of Indians, which would thereby lead to the loss of independence. Swadeshi clothing was shown to be not only economically more feasible, but also signified a return to past glory and freedom through the bodies of Hindu women. Women's clothing was also a cultural weapon against the west. Hindu nationalists tried to introduce changes and new norms of dress, by making them longer and thicker, leaving no parts of the body, including the navel, exposed. Swadeshi, symbolised in khadi, was not just a cloth, it was a principle, an ideal, a symbol of a highest societal order. Dressed simply, women could ensure regeneration of the home and by extension of the nation by practising swadeshi. On the other hand, since, many women did not want to wear white cloth as it was associated with widowhood, some chose to embroider, fix borders, dye or tailor their khadis to beautify them. Feminist historians consider this as an element of coercion, often required on the part of the nationalists, to make women accept the new rules of clothing. Moreover, while a section of women selectively adapted to new swadeshi gendered dress practices, a large number of them remained immune to the campaign. Stated another woman writer, 'Fashion for me means what makes women comfortable, presentable and beautiful at the same time'. (Trivedi, 2007)

In the British Colonial era, machine made sarees became popular as sarees typically were made of plain cotton, silk or muslin fabrics. These sarees were often decorated with diamond or spade block prints and self-designs, as well as outlines of British motifs like figures, peacocks, chintzes, and bullion fringes. In contrast to this, during the resurgence of the Indian freedom movement, saree contained vibrant colours, hand-embroidered Patriotic motifs like fluttering flags, chakra designs, and folk inspired motifs were popular in designs. During this period, Indian art also began to become a part of saree illustration designs, with works of M.F. Husain and Jamini Roy making their way into fashion. One popular example of such patriotic print is the famous painting of Mother India by P.S. Ramchandra Rao. In the painting, the sari as producing the geo-body of the emergent nation is evident in this poster produced possibly to celebrate the country-wide electoral victory of the Indian National Congress. Not only is Mother India installed as and within the cartographic outline of the nation, even her sari is the tri-coloured flag of the party espoused by M. K. Gandhi in the 1920s, a version of which later became the Indian national flag. (Patel & Vajpayee, 2023)

Conclusion

The saree stands as a timeless emblem of India's rich cultural heritage that weaves together tradition and artistry. The saree is not just an attire but the identity of Indian women for centuries. The saree has transcended time and geography to become a quintessential expression of femininity and grace. The discussions on the evolution of a saree from ancient civilizations to the modern times display its versatility. The role of a saree lies in its ability to empower women through ages and especially in the modern period. The evolution of the saree under British colonial rule reflects both the external influence of colonial powers over women's garment and the measures taken by Indian women in navigating to complex societal shifts. From the imposition of British ideals of modesty and chastity to the emergence of the 'nivi' drape and the incorporation of blouse and petticoat, the saree became a battleground of cultural negotiation and resistance. The British, in order to assert control over every aspect of Indian life, targeted the saree, a symbol of Indian culture and imposed their own notions of femininity and propriety. The British manipulated the saree to align with their vision of an ideal Indian woman, perpetuating a colonial narrative of superiority and cultural hegemony. Amidst this colonial imposition, Indian women adapted the saree to reflect their own ideals and identities. Figures like Jnanadanandini Tagore played a crucial role in popularizing new draping styles that combined Indian tradition with Western influence, ultimately shaping the modern saree as we know it today. In colonial Bengal, the evolution of the saree mirrored broader shifts in societal norms and women's emancipation under British rule. As the British sought to civilize and modernize India, they imposed their own ideals of femininity and propriety, influencing everything from education to dress codes. The establishment of women educational institutions marked a pivotal moment in the quest for women's emancipation. Modeled after Victorian ethics, these institutions aimed to mold a "new woman" who was educated and virtuous, yet subservient to colonial ideals. As women gained access to formal education and ventured into the public sphere, traditional attire underwent significant transformation. By embracing new customs and attire, women asserted their agency and embraced a sense of modernization that transcended colonial constraints.

Thus, the role of the saree in Indian nationalism reflects a complex interplay of colonialism, patriarchy, and cultural identity. The saree, as a symbol of femininity and tradition, became both a site of resistance and a tool of nationalist ideology. As women began to play a more active role in the nationalist movement, the saree emerged as a potent symbol of cultural unity and resistance to colonial oppression. However, the nationalist discourse also perpetuated gender norms and stereotypes, relegating women to passive symbols of the nation rather than active participants in its creation. The image of "Mother India" draped in a saree became a powerful symbol of territorial integrity and resilience, but also reinforced traditional notions of femininity and domesticity. Gandhi's call for khadi sarees and elite women's promotion of handloom textiles, the saree became a tangible expression of India's cultural heritage and resilience in the face of colonialism. As a symbol of tradition and resistance to colonialism, the saree became a potent tool of nationalist ideology, embodying the virtues of sacrifice and cultural unity. Despite these complexities, the saree remains a timeless symbol of India's rich cultural heritage and resilience in the face of colonial oppression.

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