

NPTEL
Nation and Narration

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Week 3 Lecture 17
Transcript from the Video

Hello everyone, welcome to the third week of the course Nation and Narration. This week, I plan to introduce you to five lectures.

The first lecture of this week deals with the question of family and modernity. Here, I show how the institution of the family underwent a drastic change during the colonial period under the influence of the notion of modernity. When British rulers described Indian homes as dirty and messy, Indian reformers felt the need to change how homes were managed. They believed that discipline — a big part of British power and way of life — should be brought into Indian homes, mainly through women. Homes became important places where Indian leaders could show some independence and control, even under colonial rule. By making households more organized and disciplined, Indians were not just answering British criticism; they were also trying to show that they could govern themselves. This shows how ideas about discipline, women's roles, and national pride were all connected in shaping Indian society. The texts that I am primarily using in this lecture include Dipesh Chakravarty's "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?" and Sudipta Kaviraj's famous work "The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas."

The second lecture of the week will focus on the changed image of woman in India in the colonial context. In this lecture we will see how a new category of woman called Bhadramahila was formed. The creation of the bhadramahila was deeply tied to social reform movements that aimed to "modernize" Indian society while preserving its distinct identity. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocated for women's education, arguing that educated women would strengthen the family and, by extension, the nation. However, this education was carefully controlled; it focused on religion, literature, home management, and moral values, rather than promoting independence or professional careers. In many ways, the bhadramahila became a symbol of the "new" Indian woman — someone who could manage the home with modern efficiency while upholding the spiritual and cultural essence of India. While she gained greater respect and recognition compared to earlier generations, her freedom was still limited by expectations of domesticity and virtue. The ideas that are used in this lecture are primarily drawn from Partha Chatterjee's famous essay "Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonized Women: The Contest in India."

While the second lecture focuses on the idealized figure of the respectable, educated, upper-caste Bengali woman in colonial society, the third lecture will examine the portrayal of the bhadramahila in Satyajit Ray's cinematic adaptation of Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* which can be translated into English as *The Home and the World*. The film offers a rich and layered depiction of the conflicts experienced by Bimala, the central female character. Through her story, we witness the complex interaction between the domestic sphere (*ghar*) and the outside world (*baire*), mirroring the broader social and political changes unfolding in early 20th-century Bengal.

The third lecture of this week focuses on the idea of *lajja* which was developed as the desirable quality of an ideal woman in colonial India. The text that I am primarily using in this lecture is Himani Banerjee's famous essay "Textile Prison: The Discourse on Shame or *Lajja* in the Attire of the Gentlewoman in Colonial Bengal." The idea of *lajja* (shame) was not just about a feeling. It was used to control how women behaved and dressed. A woman who wanted to be seen as respectable, called a *bhadramahila*, had to be modest and follow strict rules about how she wore her clothes. Wearing a sari in a proper way showed that a woman was respectable. The idea of shame helped the Bengali middle class create its own identity. It made them feel different from both the British rulers and poorer people. At the same time, it also supported patriarchy by keeping women inside the home and limiting their freedom. People saw women as carriers of their community's culture, so women's clothes and behavior had to show the values of their society. Bannerjee explains that *lajja* acted like an invisible rule. Women followed it not because they were forced to, but because they were taught to feel it very deeply. In this way, women also helped continue the same rules that controlled them. Bannerjee's work shows how gender, class, and colonialism worked together to create a special kind of discipline through *lajja*. It shows how a simple feeling like shame was used to push women into narrow roles and protect cultural identity during colonial times.

In the fifth lecture we will look at how modernity changed important things like marriage, family life, and relationships between husbands, wives, and children. The colonial period was a major turning point in the history of many countries. European colonialism brought big changes to societies, cultures, and institutions. As we discussed earlier, modernity was a key idea during this time of change, affecting all parts of life. It changed not just politics and the economy, but also everyday life. One of the clearest places where these changes showed up was in the home, where old ways of living, family relationships, and home spaces were completely transformed. The major texts that are used in this lecture are Rochona Majumdar's "Marriage And Modernity: Family Values In Colonial Bengal" and Sudipta Kaviraj's "The Invention Of Private Life - Literature and Ideas." Having seen the overview of the lectures, let us now get into the lectures.