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Raisa Rafaela Serrano Muñoz
Ph.D. Student, Department of
Doctoral Program in
“Languages and Cultures”
University of Córdoba, Spain

Tackling the construction of a conservative femininity in ‘An ideal girl’ by Soumya Menon

Raisa Rafaela Serrano Muñoz

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Abstract

The current research work is titled “Tackling the construction of a conservative femininity in ‘An Ideal Girl’ by Soumya Menon”. The main purpose of this is to describe how the author Soumya Menon in ‘An Ideal Girl’ responds against the dominant nationalist discourse proposed by Hindutva, during the Indian post-independence, presenting counter-current femininities about what the concept of an ideal girl should be. There is still a conservative discourse subordinating women, proving a step backward regarding gender equality. Under the doctrine of Hindutva, during the post-independence period, the government started to install a series of educational charts called “An Ideal Boy” in schools. They are a series of posters illustrating the good behavior of an ideal boy, raising awareness of male citizenship. At the same time, the charts show female characters in the background serving the ideal boy and doing the house chores. The article focuses on one of the fourteen graphic narratives published in the Indian anthology of comics entitled *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back!* (2015) edited by Priya Kuriyan et al., entitled ‘An Ideal Girl’, by Soumya Menon, a feminist author fostering an alternative construction of gender, out of the Indian canon imposed by the ideology of Hindutva. Drawing on the ideal girl’s preset notion, the illustrator depicts a deconstruction of the concept of femininity represented in the “An Ideal Boy” posters settled in state schools during the post-independence, and reaching the present day.

Keywords: Femininity, education, graphic narrative, hindutva, gender

Introductions

The term was coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923 in his book *Essentials of Hindutva* (1923), retitled afterwards famously as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1928). Hindutva discourse visualizes the resurrection of the Arian Empire, arousing nostalgia for its glories. During the colonization, India suffered an invasion of its faith, culture, and values. In 1858, the British Raj was the colonial government of the Indian subcontinent. It lasted until 1947, and on the report of Borreguero (2004) ^[3].

It spread over India a pattern or organization that significantly contrasted with the native lifestyle. The unequal treatment that women received, the religious worships became deeply embedded in superstition, and the poverty of rural population were some of the situations that illustrated with examples the backwardness of India for the English population (p.49).

The British Raj considered the English culture, especially the English language essential among the Indian citizens, so they promoted the constructions of new schools, whose students were mainly boys. The government implemented English as the official language for the following educated generations, “between 1850 and 1947 British colonial power and its related institutions reshaped the indigenous childhood of educated English Indians in ways that continue to be of significance today” (Walsh, 2003, p.2) ^[21]. The British colonial movement focused on transforming Indian society, empowering the dominant role of men against women and in the words of Mohanty (1991) ^[8] setting:

A dynamic, necessary relation between understandings of class/caste and patriarchies under British rule. For instance, some of the effects of colonial policies and regulations are the re-empowering of landholding groups, the granting of property rights to men, the exclusion of women from ownership, and the “freezing” of patriarchal practices of marriage, succession, and adoption into laws” (p.18).

During the post-colonial period, the nationalist government takes advantage of the remarkable scarcities of the British Raj. It makes Hindutva’s doctrine flourish, promoting false ideas about the culture, race, religion, and policies of what real Hindu should be. Some of these ideas are collected in a nationalist pamphlet by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1969) ^[16],

Corresponding Author:

Raisa Rafaela Serrano Muñoz
Ph.D. Student, Department of
Doctoral Program in
“Languages and Cultures”
University of Córdoba, Spain

that would influence the post-independence contemporary Hindu nationalism. Based on his work “Hindutva is that a Hindu is a descendant of Hindu parents, claims to have the blood of the ancient Sindhu and the race that sprang from them in his veins. This also is true of the different schools of religion of the Hindus; for they too being either founded by or revealed to the Hindu sages” (Savarkar, 1969, p.53) ^[16], Furthermore, Hindutva creates a false sense of belonging to those who revealed against the British Raj and looked for their ancestral roots, “who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence” (Savarkar, 1969, p.55) ^[16], Finally, the only two reference of women in the Hindutva ideology is the motherhood arranged to the strong feeling of caste and their compulsory devotion to religion encouraging the pure Hindu race as “the first cradle songs that every Hindu girl listens to are the songs of Sita, the good. Some of us worship Rama as an incarnation, some admire him as a hero and a warrior, and all love him as the most illustrious representative monarch of our race” (Savarkar, 1969, p.46) ^[16], In the course of the Indian educative system's reformation, many new schools were opened throughout the last years of the colonial British Raj and the post-colonial government. The vast majority were enrolled by boys, leaving the house-chores for women, Srivastava (1998) ^[17], mentions that:

If 'home' was the sacred domain of Indianness which was to be kept 'pure' at all costs [according to the nationalist discourse], and if, 'through the identification of social roles by gender,' women belonged at home, then 'our' women must not be allowed to fall prey to western ways. Home, women, and 'tradition' must become synonymous concepts in this argument (p.98).

Following this trend, it was essential to bring new generations children up undercover the Hindutva discourse, prospering a patriarchal society, creating campaigns centered on the values of how boys should behave inside Indian culture. In response to the promotion of a robust national identity instilled on the supremacy of specific religious values/creed of Hindutva, which provides a step backward regarding gender equality in the secular and modern country of India, many women started to liberate from the oppressions of religion, bestowing them democratic rights. ‘*An Ideal Girl*’ by Soumya Menon confronts this discourse offering an alternative construction of gender, out of the Indian canon. Drawing on the ideal girl's preset notion, the illustrator depicts a deconstruction of the concept of femininity represented in the “An Ideal Boy” posters, as a heritage of the British Raj settled in public schools since the 1950s and reaching the present day.

Education during the British raj government (1858-1947) in India

The place of women in Indian education has been scarce along with their history. After colonization, India was a heterogeneous country containing “communities up to 2399 -excluding the untouchable caste” (Borreguero, 2004, p.22) ^[3] organized by relations of power within each community. On the other hand, at the beginning of the colonial period, “from the late eighteenth century, the missionaries had begun to attack a range of 'degenerate' Hindu practices, majority of which were directed expressly against women. The missionaries brought out a volley of tracts and

pamphlets directed at the British government and public, giving dramatic and empirical details of practices” (Wolf, 1992, p.31) ^[22]. The British Empire suspected the Indians to be wild, and they provided the “necessary politics to illuminate the awake of national awareness that fought against the power which engendered it. The Anglo-Saxon established an organizational model that contrasted what they considered the chaos and native entropy” (Borreguero, 2004, p.37) ^[3] and, for this reason, one of the missions of the British Raj was to promote and reform a new educational system with the opening of new schools and high schools, “earlier suggestions or schemes for introducing compulsory primary education under the British Raj came from William Adam, Captain Wingate, and T. C. Hope” (Mondal, 2017, p.3) ^[9]. However, due to India's enormous size, no realistic projects could be funded by the British. It was not until the age of 1870 that “a vigorous demand for laws to be made to make four years of primary education compulsory was made by Dadabhai Naoroji and Jyotiba Phule from Bombay Presidency in their evidences before the Indian Education Commission, 1882” (Mondal, 2017, p.3) ^[9].

Nonetheless, in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the British arrived and started to establish, they met the native “education [was] no exotic in India. There [was] no country where the love of learning had so early an origin or [had] exercised so lasting and powerful an influence” (Thomas, 1891, p.1) ^[16]. Before the arrival of the British to India and their development of a new scheme of education, “both the Hindus and the Muslims had their own education systems. Both the systems went into oblivion gradually and suffered a setback because of political turmoil and lack of a strong centralized political authority and want of suitable patronage” (Purkait, 1992, p.45) ^[14], although, being the colonizing dominant Empire, they imposed their modern educational system “at the cost of the traditional indigenous system” (Mondal, 2017, p.1) ^[9]. In this way, the nineteenth century was a period of constant changes and contrasted with bright and dark spots. The British did not create a new educational system but reformed the one that was running in the country by the native population. “As such, the social reform movement can be characterized as playing an important part in the formation of a new set of patriarchal gender-based relations, essential in the constitution of bourgeois society” (Kumar, 1993, p.8) ^[6]. The British provided a scenario not only to transform Hindu education, culture, and religion but also to contribute to the development of a nationalist authoritarian “re-former dominant group under [them]” (Kumar, 1993, p.8) ^[6] that would reveal against the Anglo-Saxon invaders culminating with the Independence of India (1947) at the end of the post-colonial period.

It was not until the nineteenth century that women education started to be a social concern thanks to the East India Company (a trade company between West and East), which “acknowledged women's education and employment” (Nath, 2014, p.44) ^[10] and “some Indian reformers belonging to Brahma Samaj, a group founded at the middle of the nineteenth Century promoting, among others aspects, the importance of the female education as a way of developing the country and the Independence from England” (Val, 2010, p.188) ^[20]. The British civilization caused an inflection point in India, obliging its society to evolve and change laws and regulations, “as far as we know, the importance of educating women was first discussed publicly

in Bengal by the Atmiya Sabha, founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1815; in the same year he wrote the first text attacking sati” (Kumar, 1993, p.8) ^[6], a historical sacred ritual in which a woman sacrifices herself at the funeral pyre of her dead husband. “Yet the campaign for the abolition of sati garnered mainly British support, and was short-lived, while the women’s education movement was ‘Indianized’ over the course of the century” (Kumar, 1993, p.8) ^[6] stood up for the “Indian Renaissance” (Borreguero, 2004, p.54) ^[3] that “opened a new era for the Indian population, promoting the principles of individual freedom, national unity, solidarity, and social relations” (Prakash, 1997, p.197) ^[13].

One essential step forward for the progress of Indian reform was the elimination of the sati practice, “if the sati abolition movement provided one of the ‘reasons’ advanced in favor of reforming women’s education movement was to provide another” (Kumar, 1993, p.14) ^[6]. On the other side, the appearance of the Indian bourgeoisie boosted the first steps for the development and independence of the country. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a chaotic period of transition, reform, and rebellion of Indian society when the first women’s endeavors for an integral education launched an initiative. It “is the historical context in which middle-class Indian feminist struggles arise: nationalist struggles against an imperial state, religious reform and “modernization” of the Indian bourgeoisie, and the consolidation of an Indian middle class poised to take over as rulers” (Mohanty, 1991, p.20) ^[8]. The British Raj was the trigger for the growth of education, creating new schools, and being a different model for the Indian population. According to Kumar (1993) ^[6], British and American missionaries opened new schools for girls during 1810. The Female Juvenile Society published the first text on women’s education in Calcutta in 1891, and by 1827 missionaries run twelve schools for girls. Furthermore, Kumar (1991) suggests the movement for women’s education was formed by the need for a rising middle-class to adapt women to a Western prototype. Initially, the majority of women enrolling in schools were low, making the evolution of the educative system slow too.

First feminist movements concerning Indian women’s education under British raj regulations

During the late nineteenth century, India was under a tense environment oppressed by the British. The feeling of losing their identity as a nation started to disturb the Indian middle-class’s mind across the whole country. As it is mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, India was a heterogeneous nation. However, the claim of that nationalist feeling “did not negate the fact that there were indigenous differences of class, caste, and gender; but people were able to launch struggles which blurred these divisions and stressed the commonality of national identity against the foreign enemy” (Basu, 1995, p.95) ^[2]. Due to their loss of identity’s feelings, traditions, and power over their land, in 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded. It was a political party whose main concern implied recovering their sense of belonging to their ancient country before the British Raj, achieving independence.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, until the Indian Independence in 1947, the first women’s movements appeared, taking advantage of the transition period. The power Indians were gaining, with associations such as the Women’s Indian Association (WIA), founded in 1917, or

All India Women’s Conference (AIWC), founded in 1927. Kumar (1993) ^[6] affirms that the WIA was based in Madras. It was probably joined by some ladies who attended the 1908 Ladies Congress and was described as “the first purely feminist organization to arise in India” by the activist and politician Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in 1932. Kumar (1993) ^[6] also comments that WIA was the first women’s organization to consider women’s workers’ issues such as maternity leave or benefits for women.

Kumar states (1993) ^[6] that ten years later, in 1927, the Irish-Indian educationist Margaret Cousins, was the one who established the first AIWC, sending a letter to several Indian women’s organizations to invite them to the conference to discuss women’s education, “as problems connected with girls education are different provinces and localities, it is thought necessary that there should be a women’s conference on educational reforms in each province and clearly defined districts” (Kumar, 1993, p.68) ^[6]. The feminist movement’s challenging struggles were notable in the succeeding years as women began to work, especially in the textile industry. Firstly, as Basu (1995) ^[2] explains, the vast majority of women attending AIWC represented the urban, upper-class English-speaking women. However, later on, the nationalist movement brought into its fold poor, illiterate rural and urban women. Finally, “the AIWC expanded rapidly, growing to be the one organization representing the women’s movement of the 1930s and 1940s” (Kumar, 1993, p.71) ^[6].

Indian post Independent: “An ideal boy” educational charts.

In 1947, India reached its Independence. Although the feminist organizations had been propelling the inclusion and improvement of women in education, “it was confined only for a small section of people in society, so the literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% only in 1947” (Nath, 2014, 44) ^[10]. After the Indian Independence, the patriarchal concern about the role of women was still alive; the womanhood consisted of the house chores, taking care of the males at home, or pray. In fact, in November 1948, the government held an act to reform the educative system appointing a University Education Commission led by academic Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. As stated by Pandey (1985) ^[11], The University Education Commission submitted a report in August 1949 explaining that:

Women’s present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability. The present system of women’s education, based as it is upon men’s needs, does not in any way makes them fit for coping with the problems of daily life. The modern educated Indian woman is neither happy nor contented nor socially useful. She is a misfit in life. She is highly suppressed and needs opportunities for self-expression. The new education must provide this opportunity (p.401).

Some months later, in 1950, the Indian constitution was approved, whose laws included, as Pandey (1985) ^[11] explains, many vital provisions which had a direct and indirect bearing on education. In 1952 the First Five Years Plan was carried out. In this program, “the Central Government set up a Central Social Welfare Board with the object especially of assisting voluntary agencies in organizing welfare programmes for women and children and the handicapped groups” (Konwar, 2019, p.65) ^[5].

Concretely, the Government of India in the women's education section, the planning commission determines that: While women should have equal opportunities with men in all fields of education, special facilities should be provided for them in fields for which they have special aptitudes. [...] At the secondary and even at the university stage women's education should have a vocational or occupational basis as far as possible (p.102).

Despite this apparent reformation of the regulations in the educative system, yet these attempts were at best partial, and to many the years after the Independence seemed the site of a severe setback for feminists [as it] was heavily opposed by a number of influential Congressmen including the president of India [Rajendra Prasad]! (Kumar, 1993, p.97) [6].

With a fragmented feminist movement in India during the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, and the raising of the nationalist atmosphere, the government started to install a series of educational charts called "An Ideal Boy" in schools, especially popular from 1950s to 1965. They are a series of posters illustrating the good behavior of "An Ideal Boy", raising awareness of male citizenship. Simultaneously, the charts show female characters in the background serving the ideal boy and doing the house chores. The nature of the "An Ideal Boy" is unknown and the accurate date when it was published too. However, it was published by The Indian Book Depot (Map House), a publishing house that provides Indian schools with educative supplies such as books, charts, maps, etc. since 1936. In the several charts, we see "the figure of the Ideal Boy, conceived and circulated within the state education system" (Doron, 2016, p. 732) [4]. For instance, some of the good habits illustrated in the strips include actions such as studying attentively (surrounded by other boys), joining NCC (National Cadet Corps), taking meals at the proper time (with his mother serving him), or taking part in sports (with other boys), among other activities. According to Doron (2016) [4], "the boy was viewed as an effective vehicle for imparting ideas and practices about personal and domestic hygiene—essential for the cultivation of the future model citizen. "An Ideal Boy" was projected as the ultimate specimen of health, physical, social, and moral perfection" (732).

Given that from 1951 the First Five Years Plan was being carried out by the government in India, including men and women in education equally, marginalizing and denigrating the role of the female, being reduced to a secondary character developing the house chores and serving the male seems quite contradictory. As described before, these scenes make sense when analyzed, taking into consideration the patriarchal traditional nationalist movement (enhanced under the doctrine of Hindutva) that surrounded the Indian population. "The majority of men in the Congress and others involved in the freedom struggle subscribed to patriarchal values and resented any challenge to male authority within or outside the family" (Basu, 1995, p.105) [2]. The reform of education was an excuse to restart Indian inequalities under the nationalist discourse of the country's emancipation from the British, going on with the differences of gender and castles previously established. As appears from Doron, "the original 'Ideal Boy—Good Habits' poster series was part of a larger ordering project driven by the state to foreground the child as the embodiment of a modern secular state. Women were largely absent from such

renditions, at best portrayed only as subservient mothers or sisters" (Doron, 2016, p.720) [4].

Although the educative charts were especially influential during the decades of the fifties and sixties, there are still reminders of the posters in some Indian public places. The actor and comedian Stephen Fry published one of the last contemporary fuses in his twitter on January, 21st saying "decidedly odd of my doctor to hang this in his surgery. I've tried to live up to it, though. Haven't managed to "Pray Almighty" or "Join NCC", otherwise I'm getting there" (@Stephenfry) and adding the picture described before.

Soumya Menon tackling the conservative femininity in 'an ideal girl'

The durability of this campaign and the remainders reaching the twenty-first century catch Soumya Menon's attention. In her blog, Menon (2014) describes herself as an Indian animation filmmaker and illustrator trained at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. She loves traveling and, after a brief residency in New Delhi in April 2014, she decided to create a graphic story answering to everyday sexism and violence against women there. The story is named 'An Ideal Girl' and was published with another thirteen graphic narratives in *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back!* (2015) edited by Priya Kuriyan et al., [7] a book that encourages the struggle against gender violence, shadeism, sexism, and classism in India.

In 'An Ideal Girl' graphic narrative's prologue Menon (2015) writes that she rediscovered "An Ideal Boy" posters when she was a student and collected them, founding a warped perspective because the girls in the posters were serving the boy, in the background, doing the household chores. In the graphic narrative, she turns things around, illustrating the steps an ideal girl follows to set free.

The story is divided into six panels. The approach is similar in all of them, except in the last one, where she turns the role of the conservative femininity into a real contemporary ideal girl who is free and takes her own decisions. Following the same structure than the original "An Ideal Boy" charts, Menon starts drawing a boy showing a good habit, with a caption behind the strip, describing his good behavior. The difference in 'An Ideal Girl' posters is that, after describing the first good habit of the boy, she introduces "between-the-panels exploration of some of these preset notions of the ideal girl" (Menon, 2015, p.36). It means she illustrates the good preset behavior established by society in the ideal boy, illustrating the same behavior in an ideal girl. Some panels between these male and female strips showing the number of activities an ideal girl carries out behind the same final habit. Menon (2015) explains she "wanted the Ideal Girl to tell her own story". While "An Ideal Boy" posters show a good habit without further ado, 'An Ideal Girl' presents the same one, besides many habits behind it that aren't taken into account as significant activities just because a woman develops them.

Focusing on the first chart, there is a first strip described as "the ideal boy is well educated and cultured" Menon (2015, p.37). The panel continues with seven more strips before showing the same behavior as the boy. Menon (2015, p.37) "The Ideal Girl was well educated, of course [strip 2]. Yet they encouraged her to pursue her hobby [strip 3]. Not as an art, though [strip 4]. Or even a skill [strip 5]. But just a role like any other [strip 6]. For tradition decreed [strip 7], this was the prospective bride's way of earning her dowry [strip

8]. The Ideal Girl is well educated and cultures too [strip 9]”. Along all the strips the author describes the patriarchal path the girl should follow to be an example for other girls. Between the panels, Menon analyses the steps she is obliged to follow to be considered equal to the boy. Sewing is an essential household-chores developed mainly by women in India as a tradition of the nation. In this way, dowry is related to education in India, “if dowry is interpreted as a price that clears marriage markets, then higher education could substitute for dowry payments as more educated brides enjoy higher valuation in the marriage market and hence have to pay lower dowries to secure the groom of their choice” (Sanchari, 2013, p.26) ^[15]. Parents have to compensate the new husband for his bride’s shortage of knowledge so he can invest more money in her wife’s education. To reduce the dowry, parents invest themselves in their daughter’s schooling and “[they] switch from dowry to education to compensate daughters across cohorts” (Sanchari, 2013, p.26) ^[15]. Behind the same strip for males and females, women must complete more vital stages to be considered equal to men.

In the second educative chart, the ideal boy (Menon, 2015, p.38) is presupposed to be “well settled.” However, the designer includes ten strips in between showing the extra effort the female must do to be in the same position (Menon, 2015, p.38), “The Ideal Girl juggled her household, family, and job very well without any help from the Ideal Boy who showed up from time to time to take away her earnings making her wish he stayed away for good. She could certainly do without him. The Ideal Girl is very well settled”.

Menon depicts all the functions developed by the female, in an atmosphere and a time when it is supposed there is an equality status among men and women. The reality is that women must carry out accomplish the household chores, educate children, and look after them, serve the ideal boy, and maintain social status, working for others without keeping her savings. This time the author shows not only the hard job an ideal girl develops to be considered the same as a man, but also the role she plays behind the ideal boy. He is not doing any of these activities just because he is supposed to have good superficial habits, but he needs the ideal girl to be the ideal boy, not the other way around.

In the third chart, Menon (205, p.39) writes, “an Ideal Boy respects family”, while in the ten next strips in between, “The Ideal Girl studies well. So well, she was accepted into one of the country’s best universities. Yet she was told that she had to think of her brother, the Ideal Boy, who would soon be applying to university. Two university courses were too much expenditure. Of course, she should study, at a local college perhaps, and be a good sister. And Ideal Girl, too, respects family”. In this case, the comparison between happens between a male and a female sibling. The boy is assured of going to the university even if his parents have savings for one of the siblings. In the case of the female, although as well as her brother, she respects family, she must take care of the essential member of the family, fight to be accepted in a university and study hard to be the best. Going back to the First Five Years Plan and the following ones that went on until publishing the graphic narrative, the plan states that women and men should have equal opportunities and that women should be provided special facilities for the fields with special aptitudes. Unfortunately, India lives under a nationalist discourse extolling the role of

the woman as a procreator, career, mother, wife, and sister. Even if all these fields are covered, continuing with social status and trying to be independent become an arduous task. In the fourth chart, there is an example of the famous refrain prevention is better than cure. The author (Menon 2015: 40) shows and writes in the captions, “An Ideal Boy protects his sisters. Ideal Boy decided to prevent crime”. A male soldier appears in the second strip, with a bubble saying “for their own safety, women ensure home by nightfall!”. Hindutva’s patriarchal discourse suggests women are vulnerable, and instead of confronting possible criminals, this ludicrous ideology exposes women as defenseless victims, who need an ideal boy to protect them. The strips (Menon, 2015, p.40) continue with the woman’s vision in these cases, and the society’s view “Ideal Boy decided to prevent crime and protect girls. And so, the girls commuting in the city who disappeared into thin air was the girl who became another statistic that reinforced the diktat to protect girls by ensuring they were home by nightfall or better still, that they stayed put at home. The Ideal Girl is protected by her brothers”. In these panels, the girls are just passive objects who received the action of protection by the male dominant. In the sixth strip, which is in black, a murder is suggested. The conservative discourse dodges the issue pointing out the woman as the source of the problem because she should have always been behind the male, although she has been killed by men paradoxically.

The fifth chart shows the violence women can suffer in their homes by men if they complain or ask the male to share the tasks. In the first strip, the ideal boy appears angry, although, in the caption, it can be read “Ideal Boys don’t complain”, maybe because they don’t have anything to complain about. In the between strips, the situation the girl is the absence of freedom to express herself and have her voice because it would be a bad habit, so she merely serves the boy, the family and doesn’t talk to anyone (Menon, 2015, p.41) “when Ideal Girl asked Ideal Boy to share the household chores, they [referring to the family] were all surprised! Even shocked”. For Ideal Girl was not in the habit of talking back to her elders. She was not in the habit of talking at all. Ideal Girls don’t complain, either”. This is the conservative discourse women fight against. The feminist movement in India denounces the strategy of silencing women’s voices because the Ideal Girl is just a patriarchal standard imposed by men supported by Hindutva glorifying those times when the Arian Empire organized society and women had no rights within it.

In the last educative chart, Menon offers an alternative femininity construction and proposes the girl as the main character of the story and the one who makes decisions upon her life deconstructing the concept of the preset ideal girl (Menon 2015, p.42) “The Ideal Girl walked long distances every day to get to work. They [parents] told her that there was no need for her to work. She refused. They asked her to find work closer home. She said she liked what she was doing. They got her a bicycle so that she could get back home sooner. Instead, she cycled further and further away. She decided she had had quite enough of being the Ideal Girl”. Menon empowers the female character offering a new habit of women: making their decisions. In the last strip, there is a letter saying “you are leaving city limits” which can be interpreted as a metaphor of breaking the barriers of the conservative nationalist discourse of Hindutva, limits established by a society in which men are

the central role and women are left behind with challenging chances to be independent.

Conclusion

India is a heterogeneous country which has suffered from several invasions. Two of them have been crucial for its development in the twenty-first century. The first one was during the Golden Age, with the Arian Empire's invasion, promoting social divisions into the castes, extolling the pureblood or religion. The second one that influenced India notably was the British Empire, which established the British Raj along with the country, trying to change Hindu traditions just because they considered Indian citizens as wild people who had to be domesticated by the Western literate and educated civilization. Due to the British Raj's oppression and the contrast between the two cultures, India reached its independence in 1949. The side effect was that during the British Raj government, a nationalist discourse acclaiming the Arian myth started to emerge among the Indians since there was a sense of loss of belonging and identity during all the invasions. Conservative influential men took advantage of the situation in the middle of the British Raj. For instance, Savarkar defined Hindutva for the first time in 1923; a term offered to represent the subsequent doctrine after the Independence of India lasting until the twenty-first century. In the twenty-first century, the government still promotes a robust national identity using a conservative political discourse that is allied to Hindu traditions and morality. It opened the gap of alternative responses in popular culture is crucial to promote an education of quality and equality, liberated from the oppressions of traditional stereotypes which does not encompass male and female.

On the other hand, before the Indian Independence, while the nationalist patriarchal discourse started to flourish, the first feminist organizations were settled in the capital and urban area. The feminist Indian movement was not as strong as the nationalist one. It was a new movement tacking not only a conservative Hindu society but also questioning the Western lifestyle and culture and defending an egalitarian society keeping folklore and abolishing castes, and offering alternative femininities and masculinities. However, even in the same country, India, women have different attitudes and worries, so they use different methodologies when they fight for a unique common project: the elimination of the abuse and discrimination, that is why it is essential to speak about inclusive, and intersectional feminism.

Soumya Menon draws a graphic narrative criticizing traditional educational charts of the Ideal Boy's good habits. She uses her sarcastic panels between the main strips that show the supposed good habit and illustrates the arduous effort women should develop to be considered at the same level than a man. Even when they 'reach' that level, they are criticized, victimized, and blamed. Furthermore, Menon exposes males are the ones that need women to carry out their good habits; they need to be served, they need to be obeyed, they need someone to take care of their families). Only in that way they can be the ideal boy, having plenty of time to develop their vital stages.

To conclude, the feminist theory drives scholars, independent artists, and writers to abolish the predominant patriarchal standards in India, responding and providing alternative approaches to gender-diverse identities. By publishing their graphic novels and posting them on the

Internet, they provide people worldwide and especially the Indian population, an alternative education. *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back!* (2015) contains all kind of references related to Hindi culture as well as balloons in the Hindi language, and fighting for the common goal of eliminating the abuse, sexual violence, and discrimination in India.

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