

LOCATING GENDER IN THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS
IN INDIA

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Edited by
MANJEET BHATIA



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla

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MANJEET BHATIA

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Introduction

Manjeet Bhatia

The concept of class has been classically approached by Karl Marx and Max Weber.

Although Weber does not challenge Marxian concept based on materialism and class contestation, he insists (Liechty, 2003), that '*class position*, (economic power) is distinct from...though often tied to ... *social status* (honour or prestige' (Liechty, 2003, p. 13). Social status is frequently related to class position but is not determined by it alone. Weber distinguishes between economic function of an individual or a group on the one hand and lifestyle based on education, socialization; training and inherited prestige on the other. Though, Weber never spelled out clearly the theoretical mechanism (Liechty, 2003) with which social status and class position are linked, it is important for our purpose that he gives us to understand that even while power is grounded in economic privilege, 'it is also always exercised and reproduced culturally.'

Liechty further notes that this understanding is also historically driven by the new class dynamism that was emerging in Europe by 'abundance of mass produced consumer goods ... [that] was beginning to defuse earlier forms of overtly class-based politics by opening up a space for a new middle class' (Liechty, 2003, p.14). The new middle class did not own the means of production of a capitalist class but were offered 'other forms of property: consumer goods, autos, even private homes'. Increase in services and professional labour sector opened spaces for absorption of working classes in to the middle classes. Owning goods and property became the basis of identity of this rising class. Along with it the lesser known shift according to Liechty, is that in western societies "the same shift also charts the

move...away from politics of interclass antagonism (analyzed by Marx) towards an increasingly dominant middle-class ethos of intra class status competition (analyzed by Weber).” (Liechty, 2003, p.15) In the era of globalisation, Indian economy grew with 5-7% growth per year and has become one of the 10 fastest growing economies of the world. (Gurcharan Das, 2002). Indian middle class is growing with an estimated growth of 5-10% per year, whereas the overall population has registered growth rate of only 1-5% annually¹, implying that many working classes have had upwardly mobility (Saavala, 2010).

Rationality and democracy had been the markers of modernity in European middle class. Whereas India, having missed industrialisation (Gurcharan Das, 2002) has not completely grown out of the feudal ways thus continuing practicing socio-economic based distinctions. Globalization though, has opened the possibilities of new formulations of modernity. Distances have shrunk and new ways of communications produce local effects of long distance events and ideas. ‘Modern and global’ appear to be the ‘flip sides of the same coin’ (Appadurai, 1997).

Modernity

Modernity as understood by Arjun Appadurai (1997), is happening at multiple sites and is “... decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced” creating “... a general break with all sorts of pasts” (Appadurai, 1997, p.3). It is not a single moment of rupture with the past. Media and migration, he argues are the two major interconnected markers that jointly “... effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity”.

Imaginations in the ‘post electronic’ world for Appadurai, (1997) play a significant role on three accounts: i. as against any fantasy, it has projects to be completed and does not follow any automatic logic. Imagination when it becomes collective can become fuel for action;² consumption of mass media in current times is a type of

¹ National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCEAR), 2005.

² People through social media came in support of net neutrality in India.

'drudgery' that forms part of 'capitalist civilizing process'. Masses are not completely at receiving end and controlled by media. If they are appreciating and enjoying such consumption their agency is involved. iii. collective experiences of mass media, especially films, videos can create 'sodalities of worship and charisma'- sport etc.

Juxtaposing these three factors with the outcome of Saavala's study (Minna Saavala, 2010), that women 'embody changing India' clearly indicate that women are an important category who would be actively using/used-by this imagination, and would be the important site to locate 'modernity at large'.

This theory has the modern project in making not achieving. It is not teleological, it does not offer any central point of social engineering but is the everyday cultural practice through which the work of imaginations is transformed. It thus has, I think, space for new projects that intend breaking away, for instance from patriarchal control on the one hand, imagining and through practice modifying culture on the other.

New Middle Class

D L Seth has argued that it is during the Congress rule after independence that ritualistic identity and hierarchical characters of the castes had faded. Congress had established political alliance with the landowning communities, (Patidars in Gujrat, Marathas in Maharashtra, Reddys in Andhra Pradesh, Jats in Uttar Pradesh) during long period of its rule and, 'in the initial two decades after independence, the hierarchical caste relations were processed politically through elections'. These landowning dominant yet lower status castes were upwardly mobile and their political alliance with

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, (TRAI) received over 1 million feed backs on its consultation on the issue of net neutrality in India. Supreme Court struck down 66A of IT Act thus upholding freedom of speech. It is a great support to millions of users of social media. Social media was used aggressively in mobilising support at the time of Nirbhaya's rape and murder. Free app like *whatsApp* is increasingly being used by all generations to create chatting groups.

national elite ensured 'for Congress a political consensus across castes'.

The representational power rested on the collaboration of the two types of elites. Interestingly, around this structure of power emerged a small middleclass. The ruling national elite though they belonged to the 'dwija' castes had become detached from their traditional ritual status and functions. They acquired new interest in planned economy and lifestyles which came through modern education, non-traditional occupation and a degree of westernisation that accompanied this process.

The dominant castes of regional elite still depended more on sanskritization than on westernization in their pursuit of upward mobility. They encouraged their new generation to take modern, English medium education and to new professions. Thus several rural lower castes through acquisition of new power in changed rural economy and politics, succeeded in claiming social status equivalent to the middle class 'dwija'.

Thus, class and traditional status got fused through the complex formation of new power groups in independent India. Middle class emerged around formation of new power structures that were politically representing and occupationally took to modern jobs. This change of fusion of traditional status and class though remained 'restricted to the upper rungs in the ritual hierarchy'. As this group used the power in 'establishing their own caste-like hegemony' over the rest.

Politicization of caste (through many state policies) with spread of urbanisation and industrialisation had led to new type of 'stratificatory system' in which old middle class has not only expanded; it has begun to 'acquire new social and political characteristics'.

Classisation of caste, according to Seth, has occurred and that has changed the characteristics of caste. Classisation is a process through which individual members more than the caste relate to categories of social stratification that is different from the caste stratification. The process is crisscross of- a) losing the traditional identities and religiously sanctioned economic engagements and b) connecting their interest and identities with organisations 'relevant to urban-industrial system and modern politics'. The ritually determined

vertical relationships have now given way to 'horizontally competing' power blocks, resulting in 'fluid system of social stratification'.

Thus, new middle class is new because its emergence is directly traceable according to D L Seth, to disintegration of caste system; it has made it much more diversified as compared to the old middle class that was much more upper caste oriented. Both rituality and sanskritisation have lost their relevance in the formation of the new middle class. Its membership is more to do with new life styles, ownership of economic assets and self consciousness of belonging to this class. Yet it cannot pass as a pure class category for some elements of caste survive in its formation. Entry of an individual in to the middle class is facilitated by the collective political and economic resources of the caste the person belongs to.

Resources of the upper caste and reservation policy for the lower caste have come handy to enter the new middle class. Owing to the Congress party politics, this class also has significant rural component.

"The middle class in India today is not a simple demographic category comprising of certain ritual-status groups. It is a social cultural formation in which individuals from different castes and communities enter, they acquire new economic and political interests, and life styles, in common with other members of that 'class'. Within this new middle class, caste identities of its members survive, but operating in conjunction with the new, overarching identity of middle class, they acquire a different political and cultural meaning." (D L Seth, 1999 p. 2509)

Other scholars have studied the new middle class from many different approaches.

Scholarly works done on the new Indian middle class include Leela Fernandes, 2006; Minna Saavala, 2010; Amita Bavaskar and Raka Ray, 2011). Leela Fernandes specially focuses on the economic aspect of the new middle class. She has analysed structural effects of liberalisation with which the new middle class has risen. She values studying this class to understand political dynamics in contemporary India following economic reforms.

Fernandes refers to the rise of new middle class being under the process of 'construction' as its dominant nature,—being continuously shaped by 'internal and external differentiation'. The point according

to Fernandes is that, with the advent of new middle class identity there is a political shift; aligning with such an identity seeks to displace opposition to liberalizing policies. (Fernandes, 2006, p. 226, note, 10). Outcome of the 2014 general election confirms such a political shift in Indian polity, at least for once, when both left and left to center political parties have got defeated. It is the aspirations of the rising social 'class' that seem to be endorsing the globalisation and opening of the economy.

Fernandes (2006) observes that with the advent of post-industrial society, service sector and information society gain primacy. With it demands for educated and skilled workers rise for wage employment. It is in this background that more people consider themselves in this category in post-industrial and third world countries. It is the service sector in India that has expanded and offered new opportunities for economic upward mobility. Such a class lies in between the elite and the labour class which depend on economic and political elite for the conditions in which they exist. They constitute whole range of status. Most value education and adopt English language but they differ on more than one account. (Fernandes, 2006)

Minna Saavala observes that, economic determinists approach to see culture of economic driven new middle class leading to some sort of 'global cultural homogenisation' does not account for complicated picture of the 'globalising world'. 'Economies are structured by socially-organised meaning-giving functions' (Saavala, 2010, p.7). Like Lietchy (2003)³, Saavala maintains that class struggle in the middle class in case of India is more about 'belonging- acceptance- than about distinction'. In Asia middle class realities are less captured by class struggle between 'haves' and 'have-nots' than by the struggle between different layers of middle class—'the vigorous struggle for social belonging'. (Saavala, op.cit p.8)

Middle classes, Saavala understands are, '... a social phenomenon in which moral propriety is central.' Even if a particular life style becomes almost defining without the required 'social capital', such a social group cannot be considered as middle class. It is the action

³ On his study of middle class in Kathmandu, Nepal.

or conduction of a class that is of more interest- what class *does* than what it *is* (Liechty, 2003).

Newness of the class lies in its being a recent phenomenon (Saavala, 2010) and the process of creating socio-political identity that represents and claims benefits of liberalization (Fernandes, 2006).

Most analysts agree that the emergence of the new middle class in India was the inevitable result of economic reforms. Liberalisation of the economy in the decade of 90s in India has provided the push to an already socio-culturally diversifying middle class. In India the new middle class is seen as a departure in many ways from the old middle class of the pre-globalised India. In the context of economic liberalisation, the middle class has been reinvented as the 'new middle class' due to a discursive production of its new cultural image that rests on the socio-symbolic practices of consumption and new aspirations of education, employment and leisure. Interestingly, women in particular are on the move with the advent of this class. What are the impacts of more women seen in public spaces; what are the enabling factors for such a change to happen? And how are these affecting gender relations in the new middle class were some of the questions that led to the organising of an international seminar on *Locating Gender in New Middle Class in India*. Scholars of established repute from different fields with gender interest in the rising new middle class in India along with some young scholars participated in the seminar that was organised by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla to which Women's Studies and Development Centre, University of Delhi collaborated. Papers were presented in seven different subthemes locating the sites of change in gender relations and identities, laying bare new processes of gendering that are underway.

New Middle Class and Gender

Women who have received some education in particular, are on the move to take advantage of the changing socio-economic environment. New middle classes are allowing their young daughters to work in public. Women, though, face dilemma of maintaining the

traditional ideals with working in unfamiliar environment. Highly educated women may be better equipped to strike the balance; lower caste habitus is likely to pose greater challenge for women of this category (Minna Saavala, 2010).

Saavala discusses 'paradoxes of control' in the new middle class on the issue of marriage, procreation and letting daughters work for salary. Drawing on others and her own study she observes that, it is not difficult for lower castes and upper castes groups to take the plunge and let their daughters work. Lower castes women had been traditionally working by selling their labour and it gives them an advantage to take to other available jobs by enhancing some enabling skills such as education. Higher castes that were valuing higher education could now see their daughters doing prestigious jobs as their men. It is the in-between castes (OBC) that struggle to welcome income and to socially make space for their working daughters. Women working for wages have to juggle between domestic roles and working in public spaces whereas those who have acquired higher education and are working in IT sector are finding it comparatively easy to perform this balancing act. (Smitha Radhakrishnan, 2011)

There is increase in urban migration of women. More women are migrating to bigger cities for employment. It is observed in and around Delhi that most of these women are staying near new job hubs in the national capital region as paying guests and in sharing accommodations. The government agencies collecting statistics (Census and NSSO) do not give clear picture through collected data of women migrating for work⁴, National Sample Survey Organisation

⁴ "The design of data collection efforts on the part of Census and the NSSO has resulted in available data that does not allow for fully ascertaining the true scale and nature of internal migration within India with respect to temporary migration and more so of temporary and non-familial-related migration among women. Women migrants, who represent the majority of all internal migrants, are thus greatly under-represented in official government statistics with respect to their motivations for moving and economic activities at their destination." <http://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/>

(NSSO) report⁵ on migration covering the period 2007-08, though shows a growing trend of migration to urban areas among women. Migration (for marriage and with family) rate (1999-2000 to 2007-08) for educated women and those that belong to higher income brackets is higher as compared to the less privileged women.

Public spaces though are not conducive enough for women to traverse. The security concerns of women in public spaces have received greater attention by public, media and government. It has become an important issue for new middle class that at least once displayed public outcry around it.

Brutal rape of a para-medical student in Delhi on 16 December, 2012 got nation's attention and saw unprecedented uprising of people of all classes and social categories. Young people camped on Delhi roads in winter nights and days. Similar protests had soon caught-up in many Indian cities and abroad. Protesters faced water cannons but refused to budge from Raisina Hill. Continuous protests and crowds waiting for medical briefs thronged the hospital where the victim was under-treatment. Apart from young girls and boys, many families and activists joined the protest.

Especially young people could identify themselves with the victim and felt disgusted over the shameful violence against the young student. They felt it could happen to anyone of them. New entrants in to the middle class from rural and small towns who aspire to gain from changing economy could also relate to the anguish and became politically alive. There was anger against the ineffective State. The techno-savvy new middle class used social media to express anger and muster support. Rape no longer remained a taboo word in the public domain.

For once, stratified middle class politically converged on women's issue and owned it publicly. All three are milestones in the history of independent India.

Shameful rape of first generation professional degree student,

ASSETS/iss/Documents/Research_and_projects/IDRC-MGSJ/PB-08_INDIA-with_credits.pdf

⁵ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-10-24/india/30315667_1_urban-areas-urban-women-rural-areas

working hard to gain skills to take up new generation job; hope of her parents, who sold land for her education, was also a reflective moment. Globalizing, policies of liberalization of the economy have hardly paid attention to the support structures needed to facilitate women to work. It further showed that a woman's primary identity remains that of a woman first, stripped of relational identity⁶ she is only seen as a sexual object. This remains a chilling reality even for the new middle class. Security of women in public places remains a challenge for the government, anxious concern of citizens, especially that of women who aspire to be independent. Studies (Raju, this volume, Phadke) show that women are always anxious in public places,⁷ their body language remains meek and conscious. 'Women ...move across space from one point to another in a purposeful movement...Women occupy public space essentially as a transit between one private space and another.' (Shilpa Ranade, 2007).

Public uprising against failure of the State in more than one way in protecting women against violence in public places led to setting up of the Justice Verma committee to recommend modifications in the laws. Committee invited large number of representatives from all walks of life before finalising its recommendation in a month. A major modification of the law followed. Law against Sexual Harassment at Work Place and modification in rape laws were the highlights. Debate around lowering the age of juvenile offender followed.⁸ Progressive laws are essential for facilitating women to work. Yet,

⁶ Woman was seen at Delhi road in the night with a male friend which is not an acceptable norm, though more and more women would like that freedom.

Sanjay Srivastava submits that women are permitted to use/occupy public spaces only if women behave as women. If occupying 'unnatural' spaces such as night-clubs in provocative clothing. Then they forfeit the right to be protected. (Essay- "Masculinity and its Role in Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces" in the book *The Fear That Stalks: Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces*, edited by Sarah pilot and Lora Prabhu, Zubaan books, 2012)

⁷ 45% of women workers (more in rural than in urban), do not travel for work, *The Hindu*, 14 Nov, 2015 based on Census, 2011.

⁸ According to Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act,

apathy of the law enforcing officials about the sexual violence against women remains a disturbing reality.

91% of the 86% of Indian population working in the informal economy⁹ are women. Low income women in informal economy are particularly vulnerable on many accounts. ‘...-(a) irregular work, (b) low economic status, (c) little or no bargaining power, (d) lack of control over earnings, (e) need to balance paid work with care for children and homework, (f) little or no access to institutional credit, training and information, and (g) lack of assets. Unequal gender relations play a very important role in defining their insecurities.’ (Mohapatra Kamala Kanta, 2012).

Sincere implementation of progressive laws can be the key to secure and gender friendly environment for women to achieve economic independence, that, which is only partially available even to an elite minority of women workers. Bad working conditions can lead to distress and isolation of a worker, even of well educated woman worker due to prevalent ‘patrifocal’ culture.¹⁰ Yugantar Education

2015, a juvenile in conflict with law in the age group of 16-18 involved in heinous offences can be tried as an adult.

⁹ Indian economy is largely unorganized and women’s participation in the labour force is steadily declining. According to data from National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), Female labour force participation fell from a high point above 40 per cent in the early-to-mid 1990s to 29.4 per cent in 2004-05, 23.3 per cent in 2009-10 and 22.5 per cent in 2011-12. Decline in female labour force participation over years is more in rural (49% in 2004-05 to 36% in 2010-11), than in urban areas. Experts offer multiple explanations for low (ranking India at 120 in 139 countries) FLFP in India that include- scarcity of jobs relative to working age population and change in composition of job away from agriculture; nuclear families and increase in income in urban areas; and stringent criteria of calculation by NSSO (for anyone to be included in labour participation, that person should be looking for job at least for six months in the year of data collection. Women working in MEREGA (that guarantees 100 days work in a year) are most likely be shown as unemployed).

¹⁰ Patrifocality is specific to the Indian hierarchical and primarily agricultural society, and has been more common among the ‘upper’ sections of society in North India. Due to several pressures from home, women’s mobility with respect to work gets restricted and she has to adopt

Society report (2003) shows that gender stereotypical environment in which women's primary identity of a sexual being, who has to behave as 'good women' (adhering to culturally prescribed norms), is widely prevalent. Women have to continue to fight battle against general gender stereotypical attitudes of men at work place where her cultural identity overrides that of a worker, colleague or a professional.

Are women workers entering new middle class aware of these pitfalls? Do they understand sexual harassment? Are they aware of cultural baggage that they may be carrying to work place? National level surveys and industry specific research are needed to be undertaken to answer these and many more questions.

On a different note, more women working in public spaces has also opened up the possibilities of love marriages,¹¹ which according to Saavala are underway, but possibly given the garb of arranged marriages. Her Hyderabad based study shows that in case of marriage, '...kin-based approach' is retained 'while simultaneously transforming the institution [of marriage] from within.' (Saavala, 2010, p.59). Such a change, I think, is also evident in north India. More and more young people are finding their partners during long years of education or at work. Except for marriages in certain groups and communities with which such alliances are still not acceptable (Saavala, 2010), otherwise suitability of the individual is the main criteria in choosing/ accepting her/him as partner.

These changes are particularly seen in upwardly mobile new middle class; otherwise, strict traditionality is evident in rural areas on the issue of marriage. Women do not have freedom to even mix freely with boys/men.¹²

With marriage, the process and choice in procreation and reproduction needs to be considered since changes are evidenced

a submissive attitude to survive in the workplace. . Namrata Gupta and Arun K.Sharma(2002) *Women Academic Scientists in India*, Social Studies of Science, Vol. 32, No. 5/6

¹¹ <http://weddings.iloveindia.com/features/arranged-cum-love-marriage.html>

¹² Manjeet Bhatia,(2014) *Marriage, Autonomy and Engendered Violence: A Study Of North West India*, Women's Studies & Development Centre, University of Delhi, Project Report

here. New reproductive technologies are available in India at a price and new middle class women are using them to offset biological clock, follow career (Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta, this volume) and also as a strategy to avoid hassle when she wants rest; and women's own perception of the feminine body that cannot take pain of normal deliveries (Saavala, 2010). Son preference and importance of procreation also makes this class boldly use technology for 'sex selective abortions'¹³ (Saavala, 2010) that indicates 'how the role and conceptualisation of the feminine body are changing among the Indian new middle classes...'

Changing Trends

With the rise of new urban middle class, a silent revolution in gender relations is underway. Sites of this revolution are many. There is a greater behavioural gap between work/public environment and that at home/domestic level. Work/public environment could be as global as in IT sector/malls/gated communities (Govind, Raju-Tanushree, Krishna—Rachna, Sanjay, this volume) and traditional at home and insecure/violent on the streets. New sites that women traverse offer greater autonomy and possibilities in that closed space of work or of leisure as against the world outside and a traditional home. Imagination (Appadurai, 1997) with social media and interaction with different classes in the hybrid environment of malls, restaurants and work culture opens possibilities of change in gender behaviour that has ripple effect on the other closed space, that of home.

At present it is a retractable modernity (Sanjay, this volume) in which women traverse a secure public space and return to the traditional home. Yet, the possibility is that autonomy experienced at these places especially at work would start affecting the home due to economic contribution of women and their agency unleashed. A good number of these women have migrated to these hubs of new upscale jobs from smaller cities and negotiate modernity and traditionality on a daily basis. Many of these workers travel abroad on

¹³ Sex ratio in four Metropolitan cities of India is—Chennai-989; Kolkata-908; Delhi-868; Mumbai-832. Census-2011

assignments and get greater exposure that can open new possibilities and imagination in relationships.

Women are visible in public spaces and in electronic media. More and more women are working as news reporters on the private news channels. They are seen on daily/regular basis and even their names and images get familiar. Yet the general image of 'new woman' targeted by media is that of a consuming woman, (Pamela Philipose, this volume). Market forces have even appropriated rituals of Indian tradition to create this 'new woman'. *Karva chauth* was initially celebrated by married Hindu woman mainly in north India to pray for long life of her husband by fasting the whole day only to break it after moon rise. This tradition has been appropriated by market in many ways—selling couple packages, offering special discounts, and urging husband to gift costly jewellery items to his wife etc., and is now celebrated almost throughout the country. Women feel celebrated as individuals and markets reach out to their consumers. Small entrepreneurs also take advantage of such celebrative environment; late night arrangements on the streets for women to get their hands, even legs, decorated with *mehndi* (henna), special park arrangements for evening '*pooja*', a general feast organised by many residents' associations and dance on music played by hired disc jockeys till the moon shows up, when the fasting women can break their fast. The flip side of this marketisation and festivity getting attached with the ritual is that young couples have started fasting together thus setting new cultural trends.

We now have women only branches of banks. Women are taking up jobs that were taboo for the earlier generation. More women are engineers today: Delhi Metro train's first driver was a woman. These changing trends with women in new generation of jobs are almost ignored, as is the change in aspirations of sub-urban groups which are missed by the targeted media (Sanjukta Dasgupta, this volume).

The aim of the book is to encompass the sites of change in gender relations/roles/identities and to explore whether middle class is getting to address political issues. The book is about 'modernity at large' and registers the sites of change as new gendering processes are underway. At the same time it reflects whether the theories of modernity have tools to address women's suppression?

Consumption that defines the new middle class is the running thread of most of the papers in this volume. Fifteen papers included in this anthology give a range of changing sites of gender relations beginning with home to politics. There are qualitative studies bringing with case studies the details of different locales—of home, educational institutions, work and leisure whereas hardcore data is used by economists and sociologists to empirically test hypotheses around the change post liberalization change in gender relations.

I have tried to place the essays according to their contribution in locating the change/status quo in gender relations/identities in the new middle class. Belonging to interdisciplinary subject of gender, papers can easily fall in more than one theme; however I have placed them under five themes- home, space, media, work and politics.

Section I – Women and Home

Feminists have long established that home is the primary site making gender roles. Therefore, it is also the site for any change in gender behaviour. Relationships, work load and patterns of social freedom, or taboos get their bearings here and are reflected as changes in society. Fathers seem to be playing a greater role in supporting their young daughters to challenge gender norms and be the achievers across social categories. Mothers, on the other hand, are playing the buffers between their working daughters' career requirements and traditional household roles. Yet, the general picture of intra household gendered structures and social scripts they practice are yet to change even with increased income. Papers in this section try to focus on different gender aspects of home/households with the help of case studies and hard data and mirror these changes in the new middle class.

Alice W. Clark in the chapter, 'Family Aspirations for a Decent Life: The Role of Young Women in the Newest New Middle Class', argues with the help of case studies of young women, majority of whom belong to backward caste and lower economic class, that habitus after all is not that much a hurdle, capability of an individual can be enhanced with greater opportunities.

She focuses on education of these young women and how,

though placed in different contexts, these women are assertive on questions of their desires. Vasanthi is a final year student of Master of Management Studies at Mumbai. Her family belongs to a caste which traditionally sells milk. Her father was selling milk for some time even after migrating to Mumbai. She has not only financially supported her education but also her parents. Her laying out conditions of marriage shows the confidence and innovating thinking, breaking prescribed gender roles. She states that she would like to marry a boy who would accept her prime condition that half her salary would always go to her parents.¹⁴ The boy should be independent and she would be happy to live with his parents.

Alice shows that the fathers, though having different means, have played important role in supporting their daughters to achieve and become what they want. 'Gender is located at the crux of the solution and hope'. As these case studies demonstrate that gender roles and behaviours are beginning to delink for women who are aspiring to use new opportunities, building new identities with supportive parents particularly fathers, from patriarchal gripping.

The paper on 'New Meanings of Motherhood in Globalizing Middle Class Homes in India' by Shelly Pandey and Manjeet Bhatia focuses on two generations of mothers to explore how the new middle class aspirations have impacted different gender roles. The role of a mother has always been important in the patriarchal set up of Indian society, where the motherhood meant being a mother of a son. This paper, though argues that the consumption patterns around motherhood in the new middle class make the identity of the young mothers beyond being mother of a son. The focus on her slim body and medicalization of childbirth makes the self-image of mother important. On the other hand the senior mothers facilitate aspirations of their young unmarried working daughters in ways never observed before. The chapter argues how these mothers play a crucial role in making their daughters escape the patriarchal division of labour inside home. Though, senior mother continues to face

¹⁴ A stand, even the new middle class women employed in upscale job would find difficult to take.

increasing disadvantage in the intra-household gender practices, she may also be fulfilling herself through her daughter's aspirations.

The paper finally argues that global forces are touching the lives of people belonging to different generations, which is also adding to the construction of gendered identity. Through these changes the image of motherhood is undergoing a change that reflects a more modern way of being a mother, for both the generations.

Here a general picture of the Indian middle class households becomes necessary to put gender relations in right perspective lest it reads as all is well.

Sonalde Desai, notes with Derne' (2003), that in many ways globalization has enhanced male privileges and boundaries of male, female spheres have remained intact. It becomes imperative then to understand empirically if there are any changes in these gendered structures in Indian households.

In her paper, 'Doing Gender Vs. Doing Modernity: The Dilemma of Indian Middle Classes' in this volume, Sonalde focuses on the two contending scripts in the changing ideologies/structures, namely, 'doing gender vs. doing modernity', that may shape in particular middle class women's behaviour. Gender performance would involve women's absence from public spaces and respect for traditional behaviour by the household and the women; whereas modernity would be seen as giving up such behaviour in favour of appropriation of agency on the part of women. How far the 'cosmopolitan impulse' (Appadurai, 1996) reaches the women between the age of 15-49 and they prioritise modernity over doing gender is the focus of this paper.

Sonalde uses Indian human development survey-II (20011-12) data for 40,000 households spread over 33 Indian states to examine the relationship between household income and three behaviours. She chooses to spotlight intra-household relationships that reflects women's agency vis-a-vis other family members. For this analysis along with her team she interviewed 28,998 never married women that belong to diverse segments of Indian society and households of different income groups. Households practice certain cultural scripts. She focuses on the three: need for permission to go outside the home to four different locations; ability to go alone to these

places; and primary decision making in a set of seven minor and major decisions. The other cultural script that she included is that of households, members of which are also members of some traditional religious organizations.

She finds that with increase of income of the household, women face greater inequality. Women of higher income bracket households continue to face greater inequality with conspicuous display of gender behaviour. Similarly, women of household that are members of traditional religious organisations are predicted to having greater inequality than the women of households of highest income bracket, whose members are not member of any traditional organisation. Thus, it is doing gender script that has sway over doing modernity for women of Indian middle class households. The paper also underlines that modernity may be 'emphasized' in the top 1-5% of Indian households those form elite, and not middle classes, and are not included in the present analysis.

Quantified picture of the Indian households reiterates practices prevalent in the gender script. The urban context may show some change, where women are mobile yet constrained. Mobility and space are two sides of the same coin that is intercepted by place (lived spaces). Mobility in real terms, controlled mobility and mobility in career intersect with gendered spaces. Controlled mobility of women expressed through delegated moral agency, their mobility in Malls (the artificial market spaces that produce a hybrid of space and place to create/facilitate the target consumer) and women as semi agents, caught in the mesh of space and place, not free for upward mobility in career are all present on the urban scene.

Section II – Gender and Space

Now that more women are seen in public spaces in urban India, gender and space has received greater attention by the academics. With more new middle class women traversing public spaces for work and leisure, therefore different approaches have emerged to address the subject.

Negotiating public spaces by women had been a concern of

the feminist in India. Have we arrived enough so that 'loitering'¹⁵ by women in public places, suggesting a free agency of women is possible? Not really! Three papers in this section tell a different story. Globalisation processes have brought in 'spatial flows' of local and distant; private and public; material and virtual; yet, the distinction of place and space have not collapsed enough for women to own and freely engage with public space. She continues to carry the burden of lived reality of place in all spaces.

Their presence though is bringing some change. Security¹⁶ remains the major concern in public space especially for those women who use private transport for going to work. Private transport in Delhi and the national capital region is increasingly seen displaying the caption seen in the rear of this taxi in the picture that declares awareness on the part of owner of a private transport (p. 20). Be it a business motivated strategy or of ideology, such a change has potential impact in the public space.

This section deals with different public-spaces that middle class women traverse.

The 'public-ness' created by the gated community; modern world of workplace at Information Technology, (IT) and IT Enabled Services (ITES) and of leisure; and new market place of mall, home and the travel space between them.

Saraswati Raju and Tanusree Paul in the essay, 'Public Space and Place: 'New' Middle Class Women in Urban India' draw on literature to establish the concept of space and place and to locate gender in the changing spaces of IT hubs.

The paper bases gender negotiation with spaces on the study of Kolkata based 360 young women in organised retail; IT and IT

¹⁵ Shilpa Phadake's recent presentation at Nehru Memorial Library and Museum, New Delhi, picturing this wishful possibility through young women claiming public spaces- 'loitering'

¹⁶ In both the drives (January, 2016 & April, 2016) by Delhi government to control pollution, the odd-even number of cars being allowed on alternative days exempted women drivers from such an order for want of sufficient security of women on roads.



Caption at the rear of the taxi displaying owner's commitment to safety and respect for women, in Gurgaon, hub of new generation jobs.

enabled services, (ITES). It also draws upon available literature in discussing this engagement on the part of women.

Space and place though resist definition; it is the interplay between the two that mutually constitutes them in a context. It is through the IT professionals' negotiation of home and workplace, placement in workplace, choice of work in these 'new generation jobs' that Raju and Paul try to understand the gendered interplay of space and place. They find that, mobility of married women remains the stumbling block in their career advancement, as a result women continue, even in the new generation jobs of IT industry, at the entrance level. In ITES and organised retail sectors, women interviewed wanted to take backend jobs. Front end ones are more 'tedious' and 'less lucrative'. Women mostly are working in the front end.

In the day to day negotiations of the public space in the upscale business hub of Kolkata, (Salt-lake – Rajarhat), authors argue that such spaces are no less masculine than other core business hubs of the city. Men move freely in the streets of this "modern" space whereas

body language of women walking these streets are quite restrained and conscious. Women are seen comparatively comfortable in new leisure spaces of cafeteria and restaurants as these are 'respectable' and 'secure'.

How the expected change of relationship between gender and space occurs in a context and what elements of surveillance need attention, 'pose challenge to the entire discourse.' Authors suggest to further problematise the seeming access of urban educated women to masculine world of paid work and leisure to understand these linkages.

Sanjay Srivastva in the paper, 'Gated Spaces, Commodity Cultures and the Politics of Gender' analyses women as new consumers in the background of the 'hybrid modernity' in an upscale gated community. He describes in detail the coming up of the giant builder- DLF, and with it the gated spaces.

Taking example of the changing role played by the resident's welfare association, (RWA) of Essex Gardens, DLF city, Gurgaon, Haryana, in the celebration of holi and religious functions in which women participate in an unusual manner, he describes a 'public-ness' created that is facilitated by the market forces. Where young and middle aged couples dance to the Bollywood tunes played by the 'Disc Jockey' and partake in *Janmasthanami* celebration that is using high end technology 'with the laptop uniting the Essex Gardens space with an American one.' Based on the field study of this gated community, Sanjay Srivastava explores the link between 'proscribe' image of consuming women of the past and the image of new consuming women. The central question is how can this public, consuming women belong to the world and to home; Home thus remaining the fundamental context of identity building.

Sanjay argues that, unlike men, women's access to public spaces is tied to their commitment to the private sphere: they must both be 'modern' and 'traditional'. In the post Nehruvian developments of that of new forms of housing, leisure, consumption and gender relations, middle class exhibits 'moving in and out of realms of modern and the self-proclaimed ability to return to tradition'. He terms this as 'retractable modernity', exhibiting control through consumption.

‘Consumerism speaks of autonomy of different kinds, including the sexualized self’, women are at the centre of this consumption. Women had no public identity, that they would now loose with ‘public-ness’, at the same time, they have choices but not agency. Women’s accounts reveal a more ambiguous space of freedom. They may partially own and control this agency to remain fitted in the cultural framework. The choice is evident: ‘women should be safe in public spaces, but this also entails ‘proper’ conduct on their part.’

Consumerism is the bases for making of the moral middle class and a politics of gender wherein, women are not determined by modernity. They can participate in it and return to the traditional domestic role when ever required. In this modified ‘fraternal social contract’ women, in a way, are in it as well as out.

Mall is yet another peculiar space created by market forces like an island of modernity surrounded by ocean of traditional space.

Krishna Menon and Rachna Johri have analysed and compared the three spaces traversed by the women working on the floor of the mall in the paper, ‘In the Middle’: Mediating the Mall, Home and the World Outside.’ Mall which itself is a unique space that has emerged in the neo-liberal economy.

With the help of interviews of the women working in lifestyle shops, the authors tried to engage with materiality of making of the new middle class as well as the very differently gendered spaces of the mall, space between home and mall and that of home. Class hierarchies are subdued in malls as it opens up a space that is more relational. The mall that represents ‘as spaces associated with particular lifestyles... {that} assume normative quality’; Mall also provides a space, that is empowering, which these young women enjoy and look forward to work in for various reasons. Learning new styles of consumption and the standards that they strategies to meet in some way while they physically and mentally traverse the spaces that of home and of Mall. The paper gives first hand accounts of these experiences. One of the women working in a garment store expresses the happy space of the mall, “In malls there is nothing to be scared of. We feel unburdened. We are totally relaxed. We can be or do whatever, the world outside should be like this too. Malls have changed India”.

Media has enormously changed with liberalisation and has been active agent of creating, consuming new middle class.

Section III – The Changing Media and Its Impact

Globalisation has seen unprecedented growth of media in form as well as in content. Those who have witnessed the rapid transition from government owned media to plethora of television and radio channels with so many private channels, find it difficult to assimilate the change. Those born during this change or later would find it even more difficult to imagine a media of slow pace, controlled information, few national dailies, media representing dominant cultural ethos and complete lack of individual imagination or individuation of communication.

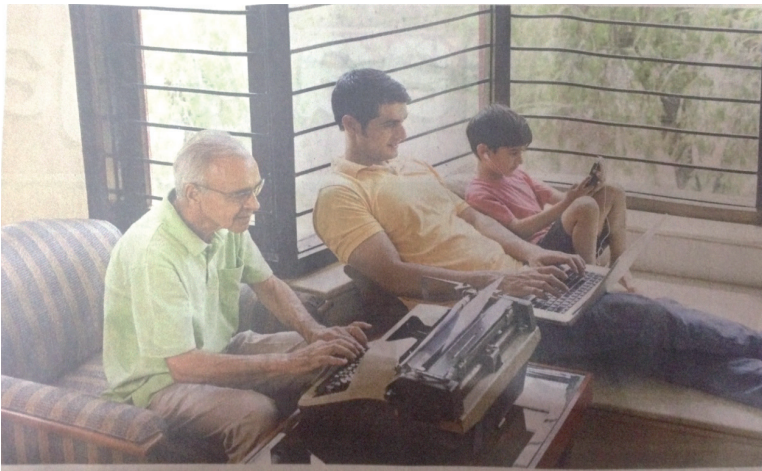
Media had been the prime revolutionary site that has effected change and has carried modernity on its wings (Appadurai, 1996). Flow of information exceeding all possibilities, market-media alliance changing content of communication, mobile phone completely changing the ways of communication are the changes that have gripped young India. The virtual space opened up for anyone who dares to experiment with technology that overcomes the hurdles of traversing physical space to communicate. Individual handset individuates content and target of communication. Such changes open up possibilities for new gender relations.¹⁷

Media has played the major role in making of the new middle class and the 'new women'. Interestingly, the almost complete absence of women from government controlled media gets special attention post liberalization by marketised media. Media created targeted viewers/audience and consumers of market products. Advertisements to sell market products through television serials brought in hefty revenues. Television serials around family issues without getting in to any cultural controversy became popular with

¹⁷ It was discovered by the author during field work (for research project on Custodial Killing for 'honour'), at Bhiwani, Haryana that girls are denied purchase of sim card for mobile phone unless they are accompanied by brother or father

women. So much so that women's pre-occupation with these serials even got captured in popular Hindi cinema.¹⁸ Yet this new women is not completely controlled by media. She, to some extent, is an agent if she is enjoying this consumption (Appadurai, 1996). At the same time, the growth of media has seen most creative advertisements and has unleashed individual imagination and expression.

All the papers in this section argue that media had been central in making women the prime viewer and consumer, without raising any of the rights based issues of women. Image created by media in many ways becomes the benchmark or general image as representative of the women of the new middle class especially in the absence of any other public image of women to counter it.



Oblivion to gender, this advertisement in *Times of India*, show generational change in technology use in the new middle class.

This advertisement on the front page of a national daily, is by a company that deals in online sale of old items. Advertisement, apart from other things shows technology enhancement with generations. Group of men here appear to be part of the new middle class but there is no woman in the picture using the technology. Even if women are part of the rising new middle class, in India use

¹⁸ 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum'.

of technology by them is not a public image, as women are mostly portrayed consumers of traditionally women related goods only.

Pamela Philipose in her paper, 'Media Frames Post-Liberalization India: Women, Men and Others' contextualizes the enquiry first outlining the enormous change of media in India with the advent of liberalization. Opening up of media to foreign players started consciously with upper cap. In the decade of the nineties newspaper circulation trebled; by end of 2011, 825 private satellite TV channels were permitted by ministry out of which 90 were foreign; the number of household owning TV sets grew rapidly- from 134 million in 2010 to 148 million in 2012 with rural owners not lagging behind; new printing and communications technology arrived; by August, 2000 \$1.5 billion foreign capital was invested in Indian telecommunication and 4 million personal computers were accessing the internet. Yet it was the mobile phone that brought the unprecedented change in the ways of communication in India.

Pamela argues that media are not ideological in themselves, for that they depend on the way they are used. Some of the ways that shaped media were to retain readers and viewers, accommodate advertisers, and face competition and innovative marketing strategies. All of this led to fading away of earlier distinction between consumer and reader/viewer. TV episodes attracting advertisements became money spinners.

By 2010 the advertising industry grew to a staggering Rs-247.5 billion. So it was important to create the right kind of audience for products being advertised. Two media platforms, Pamela tells us, were in particular used to create appropriate women reader/audience to gather advertising revenue-TV serials and women's magazines. Television serials began with older identities that were given new-look. They hardly did anything to raise awareness of their viewers as right bearing individuals. Feminism adapted by these magazines 'came to be understood as the ability of the 'new women' to make consumer choices'. Magazines were consciously creating segments of readership for the advertising market. Advertisement industry thus created the 'new women', who are 'not so much an independent citizen as an independent consumer.'

Men too got a new make –up of a metrosexual male, with extra

income, who could indulge in self grooming and who advertised himself as an object of sexual desire.

Pamela argues that this parallel proliferation of new middle class and media 'did unleash...self libratory- if not a socially libratory-energy'. In the last 25 years there had been unprecedented flow of information. This period has seen 'most creative women-oriented media content in India', helped in some way by the 'eloquent articulations' of women activists, most of whom themselves belong to middle class. Social media has dissolved the distinction between producers and consumers that has unleashed creative talent. She concludes by saying that certainly globalised media has impacted in some degree all Indian women, but not all women are impacted equally.

Media is an important medium that has the potential of influencing our choices in a subtle manner. Television serials play an important role in this direction. With the help of interviews with viewers and makers of the serials, Haripriya Narasimhan, in the paper, 'Struggling with 'Nayi Soch': Hindi TV Serials Today', tries to understand and analyse the making of new woman, values of the middle class and those depicted in the serials.

Focusing specially on Hindi television serials, the paper tries to understand the class question that these serials generate. The author submits that serials now have a 'middle class orientation'. Other classes are rather invisible. It may be difficult to neatly categorise them as urban/ rural, for they soon shift to urban locales that raise issue of modernity such as adoption, surrogacy, mobile phone use and chatting on the internet, education, new kind of professions that liberalisation may have made possible that involve women and their taking to work outside home.

By bringing the focus repeatedly to 'family', and 'tradition', the serials and serial-makers, conflate 'aspiration' and 'empowerment'. Modernity is defined in more spatial (urban-rural) and behavioural terms ('western' dress versus sari), rather than in ideological debates.

Viewers too feel that life has changed for women as daughters-in-law. Taking them as real life subjects, Haripriya tries to interpret serials. Women's real life and reel life are compared by the interviewees. Serial are not raising any serious debates on inequality and class.

Sanjukta Dasgupta in her paper, ‘*“Don’t be Santushr”*: Media, Women and the New Middle Class’ argues, that woman is at the centre of media driven consumption. Advertisement appears to reinforce the cultural norm; middle class is continuously expanding and also shaking away some of its attitudes of self denial. There is definite but slow change in the family structures, roles of its members and image of women.

Dasgupta describes globalization, liberal economic policies, the emergence of multinational companies, corporate ventures, retails brands, unprecedented purchasing power, subtly engineered desires, seduction and craving for material goods. Dasgupta asks has it reconstructed gender stereotypes. She argues that even with ‘liberating environment’ provided by internet, women’s bodies are most prevalent in pornography.

Dasgupta argues with Bathla (1998), that media is more or less silent on issues related to women as citizens and their participation in ‘public sphere’.

The paper also argues that targeted media has missed ‘history in making’ by the poor urban and suburban groups, who are on the verge of a quantum jump in aspirations and achievements.

While media has provided token visibility to women (primarily as stereotypical consumers), women’s engagement with work in the backdrop of globalisation is a far more complex trajectory to chart.

Section IV – New Middle Class Women: Work and Concerns

The sustained growth and development of middle class has led to more women seen at workplace (Sridharan, 2011). Some of the enabling factors that have led to women’s taking up jobs in urban areas are education and technology. More women are graduates in urban areas who are getting in to regular jobs. Ashwini Deshpande et al.¹⁹ using NSSO data of 2009-10, argues in case of regular workers “if women were paid like men, they would earn more than men on account of their characteristics”. Though, women at the lowest

¹⁹ <http://www.cdcdse.org/pdf/work243.pdf>

income levels face greater wage inequality, this gap decreases as income levels increase; thus creating “sticky floors” for women rather than “glass ceilings.”

Preet Rustagi argues in her paper ‘Employment, Education and Aspirations of Urban Middle Class Women in India’, that it is the graduates in the lower and middle levels of incomes in the new middle class that needs to be watched for this growth in women’s work participation in urban area. Over a period of seven years (2004-5 to 2011-12) there are 15.6 lakh more urban women graduates in this category.

The paper refers to ‘new’ middle classes as those who move up in to the middle class given the rise in income. Using various parameters, Preet has attempted to examine whether gender related norms have undergone some change in respect to education and paid employment in middle classes. She keeps the entry point as secure regular work that would require some basic educational qualifications.

Women’s education has improved but the corresponding job increase has not happened. The labour intensive growth which was expected to rise with liberalisation of economy has not been witnessed. It is largely the service sector that has provided women jobs.

Using data both for education and employment of women of five quintiles over the period of seven years (2004-5—2011-12), she argues that ‘the education of women and their aspirations for earnings are critical for middle class households both in trying to retain its middle class position and in seeking to be among the new middle classes’.

Govind Kelkar in her paper ‘Gendering the IT Sector: the Culture of Managing Home and Technology’, puts forward a key argument that our relationship to technology is primary to the relational process that create gender difference. Kelkar asks a very pertinent question, whether the women’s induction in IT has led to any loosening of patriarchal grip or are traditional structures of power intact. In the process she brings out the challenges for labour market, threats from social norms and employment policies. She highlights that IT industry has the potential of reducing gender gap.

In the IT industry, labour loses its collective identity and

individualizes the capacities of workers. The hierarchies at work get increasingly blurred. ‘The networking of capacities required by information technology increases women’s capability to take decisions on their own and constructs greater space to enhance their agency...’

Enhanced technology, though, cannot ensure gender just division of labour. Primacy of domestic responsibilities continues to be the stumbling blocks for women who seek wage employment. An important consequence of which is settling for boring and less lucrative jobs in order to balance home with work.

IT²⁰ firms in India are conscious of these hurdles faced by women. According to the study done by Govind Kelkar, 70 IT firms in India had, ‘implemented policies on sexual harassment, flexible working hours, transportation policies and flexible leave usage as the most common policies,’

She identifies two sticky areas in particular that resist a transformative change in gender regimes in Asia-i. Gender stereotype tag in the labour market where women are preferred for women’s jobs and men for traditionally- male jobs, without considering the capability of the individual; and ii. unfair division of domestic roles.

Similarly, technology in its altering of yet another vital aspect of women’s life-reproduction (especially its conflicts with their career) is analysed by Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta in her paper on ‘Reproductive and Genetic Technologies, and New Aspirations and Practices of Urban Indian Middle Class Women in a Neo-Liberal Market Economy’. Jyotsna’s paper explores urban Indian women’s engagement with reproductive and genetic technologies. She argues that this ‘biomedical modernity’ is infested with deep undercurrent of traditional beliefs and attitudes. She asks the question, what is

²⁰ Women constitute 32.9% of overall TCS workforce (FY’15). TCS has become the highest women employer. Diversity and Women Network (DAWN) was launched in TCS in FY 09-10- The objective was to sharpen focus and heighten sensitivity on the diversity mandate across various geographies—Cater to life cycle changes; Work-life balance; Day Care tie-ups and Workplace Parents Group; Facilitates conducive workplace environment; Reorientation Session; Senior Advisor Connect; Leadership Initiatives. www.tcs.com

the interrelationship between the neo-liberal economy, technology and culture? The paper opens up the interlink in ageing, aspirations of women and use of reproductive technologies, now available to Indian women at a price. Women's perception of her body and cultural demand on her is undergoing a change. Yet, how far these are informed and free choices is difficult to establish.

The paper shares in details the boom in reproductive technologies in globalising India. Women are at the centre of these new possibilities mostly because reproduction is at that of culture. Also because new middle class women have careers to follow and a few rich ones, have to style. Thus, such technologies like prenatal testing, assisted reproduction, egg freezing, umbilical cord blood banking and surrogacy are getting accepted for complex reasons. On the one hand it offers better possibilities for woman for whom the biological clock is ticking away, and on the other woman's body becomes increasingly a commodity of marketised economy.

Jyotsna draws on secondary literature and interviews conducted by her at a Delhi hospital to introduce us to these reproductive technologies, meanings these are acquiring in Indian context and relative choices mostly rich and new middle class women have in taking to 'bio-medical modernity'.

With more women in work place and middle class in general concerned with security of women, especially after the Nirbhay's gruesome sexual assault, sexual harassment at workplace and security in public places to some extent have become State's concern. The government recently has replaced the Supreme Court's guidelines on sexual harassment of women at work place with that of law.

In the paper, 'Negotiating with Legalities of Sexual Harassment: New Middle Class Women, New Meanings of Respectability', Vineet Pandey explores the possible impact of the new law against sexual harassment, {The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013} in the corporate sector.

Vineet bases his study on the interviews of 85 women workers of MNCs based in Gurgaon, Haryana and Noida, Uttar Pradesh, both falling in the national capital region that has been impacted

by globalisation. The study examines what the middle class women employees perceive and expect from the Act. It is assessed that the middle class women are not sure about the effectiveness of the implementation of this law, at the same time, they welcome the law as it gives recognition to such a problem at the workplace. The study discusses that the Act has triggered a positive perception amongst middle class women; they stand more aware and affirmed by the Act. The chapter also discusses the gray areas of the Act, such as the composition of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), the conciliation by the employer and the red rag provision of the Act.

Law against sexual harassment at work place and many other progressive laws to protect women's rights have been the result of constant pressure built up by women's movement over the successive governments. In addition, it had been the experience of women's movement that implementation of such laws need to be constantly monitored lest they remain just on paper. In other words, women have to be politically alert and maintain networks to enjoy the rights legally available to them.

Are members of this new middle class alive to these realities? Are they engaging politically?

Does the neoliberal paradigm have the analytical tools to engage with women's questions?

The following section tries to address these questions.

Section V – Neoliberal Paradigm: Gendering the Political?

Middle class's engagement in recent past with politics- anti corruption movement, street protests against rape of Nirbhya and its shaking away of complacency in recent general and Delhi state elections are some of the sites under scrutiny to understand the possible political participation of new middle class. At the same time it is equally important to understand whether women's political issues are getting curtailed in the neo liberal paradigm for want of analytical tools.

In the paper, 'Rumbling in the Middle: the Quest for *AAZADI* in Delhi', Albeena Shakil draws our attention to the unique character

of Delhi, being an urban village that influences its nature of politics and culture. In the background of the two middle class led protest movements that erupted in the national capital, anti corruption and anti rape the paper analyses the arising interest of middle classes in politics and for women's freedom. Albeena draws on her long standing engagement with women's movement as an activist to see the linkages with government policy of engaging with middle class and its discontent. The discontent she argues, 'brewing within the largely upwardly mobile middle classes of Delhi,' is located in the fact that they hardly have any say in the affairs of the city, especially in the city like Delhi that has 'serious disjunction between the rural kinship and clan based ideas that rule the roost and the more urbane sensibilities based on individual and citizenship rights.'

On the issue of women's rights, fissures within middle classes are evident. Where middle classes have consensus over women's right to move in public spaces, but 'they agree on very little else.'

Indu Agnihotri in her paper, 'Gender, Politics and the Middle Class: Some Questions from India' highlights the inherent contradictions between women's movement, issues of women's rights and the paradigm of progress, as also the ethos of a marketized economy. It is in background that this new middle class has emerged. She fears that by focusing on the discursive category of the new middle class alone, we are limiting the debates and are in danger of missing out on the unfolding social reality.

Indu traces the history of the women's movement and women's studies in India, which have succeeded in raising issues of rights of women from multiple locations and contexts. These concerns have survived the onslaught of different political agendas due to the linkages with ground realities. She laments that in the present focus on this new middle class, the link with well established analytical concepts to understand oppression in the context of contingent form of capitalism is broken. Without recognizing these, she asks, how can one raise issues of women's rights?

She writes that the focus on the middle class is as a descriptive category. Even within women's studies, the understanding of globalisation—'the latest avatar of imperialistic domination'—is

limited. This provides 'a benign face to it and offers a framework which is delinked to debates on political economy'. She argues that the question of gender and middle class 'remains intrinsically' linked to the relationship between globalisation and the challenges as also the possibilities of democratic politics and the role of the middle class.

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SECTION I

WOMEN AND HOME

Family Aspirations for a Decent Life: The Role of Young Women in the Newest New Middle Class¹

Alice W. Clark

Research Framework

The research for this paper is part of a larger project on daughters who are being encouraged by their families to become educated professionals. My project has been to collect interview data in several Indian cities from young women under 26, in college or postgraduate programs, who plan on lifetime careers and whose mothers never had one. Explaining the generational shift going on in some families regarding women's professional aspirations is the object of the project. Understanding that shift calls for (1) a focus on changing aspects of self-identity formation being experienced by young women during their education, and (2) a search for the reasons their families are now sponsoring these professional ambitions. This is a study of changing aspirations embraced by young women and their families. Any notion that this would be mainly an upper middle-class phenomenon is not borne out by the research, as will be shown.

Theoretically, Sen's ideas are of interest in this paper. I also consider concepts put forward by Bourdieu. Though Hart (2010) has interestingly proposed that these two thinkers' ideas can be harmonized, for this project I call that in question. Amartya Sen

¹ Some of the case studies used in this article have been reworked to appear in different chapters of the book by the author—*Valued Daughters: First Generation Career Women*, Sage, 2016.

(1999 and 2009; see also Agarwal 2007) is noted for stressing the possibility of creating conditions that allow persons to develop both their capabilities and their choices. His ideas seem to call for a critique of Bourdieu (1977, 2000 and 2010), a theorist of social barriers that lurk beneath the surface of personality, hobbling the fulfillment of ambitions associated with becoming educated. These barriers exist, in Bourdieu's framework, within the sphere of cultural capital, which privileged people possess in abundance, while people trying to rise from less privileged backgrounds by way of education stumble for lack of adequate cultural capital of their own. Their stumbling is often the result of a mostly hidden inner agent known as the habitus.

We shall explore this territory and follow the stories of several women who are making their way around it. In looking at the stories I collected, I was first reminded of "modernization theory", a construct that has been around for decades with the contents of the "modern" shifting across timeframes. One of its abiding interests has been the notion of female autonomy, which is hard to pin down (as lucidly discussed by Basu 1996), but which has largely been seen as an instrumentalist variable, leading almost exclusively to the accomplishment of goals outside itself. In its instrumentality, it fits oddly but aptly into postcolonial and feminist theories disclosing new forms of oppression and patriarchal hegemony that may circumscribe the opportunities for people like the young subjects of my research.

I am interested in elucidating the libratory potential of these stories, however, which also seems richly to exist. Therefore I first use ideas that have continued to flow from Sen and Nussbaum's development of a "capabilities approach" (Sen 1999 and 2009, Nussbaum 2001 and 2011, Nussbaum and Sen 1993). Using an application of that framework, I then put forward an "assertiveness capability" and suggest where it may lead.

The one-hour interviews I had with college women took place one on one, in a college classroom we had to ourselves. The women were introduced to me by their professors. I met professors in various fields first and asked them to introduce me to students who were committed to having whole-life careers while their mothers had not had one. Many teachers, before introducing anyone, talked about

the tendency for girls to study and then not continue to be career focused when they got married. They understood my wish to meet girls whose commitment to career was strong and they took this into consideration. Some introduced a group who wanted careers in the field they taught, and let me filter them; others introduced girls one by one. In many cases, the students I selected with the filters I was using turned out also to be students whom their professors favoured, though this qualification had not been used. The students who became some of my most important research subjects thus tended also to be those whose merits were admired and whose career success was hoped for by their professors.

For some interviewees a home visit followed, with the daughter present to help translate and respond to her parents' comments. I arrange the interview material here into blocks of text that do not reflect the uneven way the conversations actually developed. I pursued a list of questions about education, career plans, parents, family support, future marriage plans, desires for children, uses of money, and work-family balance; but I was not bound by my questionnaire, and didn't force a return to it if the conversation moved to other areas the subject wanted to share. In every case, the research subject was eager to participate.

An Old/New Middle-Class Story

I begin with the story of an affluent upper-middle-class girl, illustrating the way parts of the old middle class, in relation to gender roles and careers for women, are becoming new.

Shruti is the daughter of a High Court Judge who wants to be a lawyer herself. She is 21 and in the 4th year of the 5-year program which the Allahabad University Law College offers, leading to both BA and LLB Honors. I first interviewed her at the college. She studied in a convent school earlier, accounting for her excellent English. Her demeanor is elegant and genteel. The family is Hindu, of Bania caste, long considered one of the upper castes. Her father was recently elevated to be a judge in the High Court.

Her mother completed a B.Sc. and the first year of a M.Sc. program; but before finishing, she got married and quit. She had

moved to Allahabad for marriage and decided she would not work after that. There are two daughters, no sons. Shruti's younger sister is 18, in her first year of college, and wants to be a writer. The parents are supportive of their daughters doing whatever they want. "I was in Class 5 when I decided on law," Shruti says, "and my father was fine with it. My mother at first wanted me to have an easier career, such as teaching."

She says, "They don't consider a career to be necessary for a girl; but if she's forced to work, she should have qualifications." I ask, do they require you to be married? "They do want me to get married eventually. Getting married is a better choice, they say; staying alone is tough. You need someone to turn to; you need a family." She herself is not keen to get married, though, at least not anytime soon.

"I may find my own marriage partner; my parents have the final word, but caste is no bar. I would want a boy from a respectable family, well settled, with good qualifications and earning. He *must* allow me to work! He can be a businessman or a doctor, it doesn't matter, but one thing I'll make sure of—I will continue my work. I'm passionate about it! Men now agree that girls should work. My in-laws must agree."

"I want to go into litigation. Here we have the High Court, so either Allahabad or Delhi will be a good place for me. My career plan is to pursue being an advocate and practice at High Court or Supreme Court: it will be exciting! I don't want corporate work, or to be an employee. My father has always planned his own schedule. I want that much freedom. I'd be a professional rather than in some corporate firm. I've interned often over the last four years, and met many female lawyers in both Allahabad and Delhi. Litigation has been male-dominated in the past." One of the reasons she gives for her career choice, as a woman, is to bring more justice to women.

"It suits me to be aggressive. I admire my father and want to do as he did, and to make him proud.

"Some ladies say they wouldn't want a daughter-in-law like this, so getting the right mother-in-law may be a problem. I'd like a joint family; I would enjoy the company. I do enjoy housework, but will need a helping hand from my mother-in-law, and from my husband, too.

“I want two children, either sex. I’ll have one before 30, another in my early 30s. I plan to work four hours a day for at least 6 to 8 years; I’ll be efficient in my work. Parents need to be there with children; they take more care than anyone. My career will not allow me to move to another city. If my husband transfers, I would stay and ask him to come back soon. I think my husband will respect my issues and wishes.”

On another day, I went to her home. Her father said he was not to be quoted, due to his highly visible position, and after a couple of remarks he politely left the room. I visited with Shruti and her mother and grandmother, who is part of the household. Shruti’s mother spoke with me easily. She was 21 when she married; her husband was 26 and had already been practicing law for two years. The grandmother (father’s mother) shared that she too is a college graduate. There was resistance to her completing college in her day, but she insisted. Shruti says that now females know how to stand up for their rights, and even stand against their families.

Shruti’s mother contributes her thoughts on plans for Shruti’s marriage. “A boy for Shruti should be employed for at least two years; he should be either a doctor, a lawyer, or of another profession, as many years educated as she is, earning well. Shruti will be earning; and if the boy’s father is still earning, that income will also be there.” This interest in producing such amplitude of income fits with the economic status of this current family. The lifestyle displayed in this home adds weight to it.

The household has three cars for the family, one an official car for the judge, and one designated for Shruti to use. The mother is taken by a driver when she needs to go out. She belongs to clubs, ladies’ associations, a welfare association, and monthly meetings of judges and their spouses. The ladies talk about fashion, family, and gardening. She loves gardening and has a ‘mali’ (gardener) who carries out her designs. She is busy with children, home, reading, painting, embroidery, knitting, and the stock market. She goes out for shopping or dinner. She and her husband also take a walk in a city garden each morning or evening.

Shruti’s mother says that her daughter can be out after 8 p.m. if they know she is okay. For internships, though, she is gone for a

month at a time, and the family makes no difficulty for her about this. The mother says, “She is getting mature, and I am also getting mature with her. I’ve given her good values, and can’t spy on her.”

Shruti says, “I want to go through a phase where I’m not married, where I’m into my career and am not all that much monitored.” Her mother says, “When she’s career-wise independent, then things automatically change.” Shruti adds: “She’s trying to understand my generation and is becoming more broad-minded than her parents were.” Her mother says her own parents weren’t comfortable with her having friends home, especially male friends; “They seemed uncomfortable with my birthday party, Now India has more westernization.”

Shruti explains, “We use that word to mean less orthodox;” and her mother adds, “in terms of male-female relations.”

I took a tour of their spacious house. They have five servants, as well as numerous rooms. (Ray and Qayum 2009 offer a richly supported definition of the middle class as a servant-employing class.) Shruti and her sister share a bedroom with their grandmother. Shruti’s own separate room is the one she studies in. There is a well-kept garden. As I was leaving, I passed through the ante-room where Shruti’s father’s clients waited, after first passing through his study, where he was meeting two of them. Shruti drove me back to my guesthouse in her latest-model car.

Middle-Class Career Comfort

Shruti is both refined, and yet very clear and strong. She is not superficial. Her commitment to her future is powerful and well thought-out. She has all the background to know whereof she speaks. The immense resources of stored-up cultural capital she possesses in this family lead her to be able to make an ambitious yet manageable career and life plan; she is fully able to translate background resources and education into real capabilities. It is not surprising that a talented girl of such a successful professional upper middle-class family should be able to proceed with ease into the new trend of young women’s having lifetime career plans.

She has a spirited back and forth with her mother, who keeps

her responses eagerly agreeable. This relationship demonstrates great warmth of parental support, in which the daughter takes the lead and the parent follows. Her mother also does not seem to want to completely reproduce her own lifestyle in her daughter.

What strikes me as unusual is some of Shruti's language: "It suits me to be aggressive." This is pronounced in the same genteel manner as the rest of her self-presentation, but with a sense of moral force. This kind of elite self-presentation embodies and overcomes an apparent contradiction, with ease and authority.

Her hope to follow in her father's footsteps is well supported by his attitudes, even more than by those of her mother. He urged me to meet a lady judge whom he offered to introduce, so that I could see one in operation. I note this as his witness to me that what Shruti wants to do and be is fully possible, and that he fully supports it.

A Story of Striving

I move now into considering a new segment of the would-be middle class which is furthering the career ambitions of daughters. I begin with the story of Vasanti, the daughter of a milkman from a village in Maharashtra.

Vasanti is 23, and in the final year of her Master of Management Studies program at a public university in Mumbai. She intends on a career in marketing and retail management. She spent a year working as an assistant marketing officer in a big company in Mumbai after her Bachelors, and before beginning her Masters' program. Having studied in this field, she wanted to make doubly sure that this career path was her true choice. "Would I really like marketing? What are the line activities? I introspected and found that, Yes!" Her superiors were impressed with her, and promised to recommend her to any company she might choose after she finishes her Masters this year. "These are people who have seen me work with commitment and dedication," she tells me.

Vasanti lives with her mother and father, her two younger sisters and her grandmother in the same small two-room house in central Mumbai where she grew up. In the family's native Maharashtra village, her father had completed 10th standard, her mother 8th in

Marathi medium schools. "Our village has 45 houses; but 20 of them are shut." Those people, like Vasanti's parents, have migrated to Mumbai.

Vasanti's family is of a caste whose traditional occupation is selling milk. Her uncle still has a dairy in the village, and they visit him once a year. When her father was 16, he migrated to Mumbai to work with his older brother selling milk in the city. They collected milk every morning at a big dairy in Worli and delivered it to the customers' homes. When he came to the city "he saw educated people," she said, and wished he could have become more educated. He married when he was 25 and his bride was 18. The next year Vasanti was born, and two more girls followed. "They never regretted not having a son; they've always encouraged us to do everything a boy would do." In a telling statement though she says, "He wants to complete his dreams through me." Now the father is employed in a small firm working as a peon, earning Rs. 8,500 a month.

Vasanti is more than self-supporting already. She saved for all her postgraduate fees from the year's work as a marketing officer, and contributed money to her parents. And she still does. She earns currently by providing tuitions at her home to 17 children who live nearby. Two batches of kids come each evening, from 6 to 7: 30 and from 7: 30 to 9, sitting with her in the only complete room in the house. The younger sisters study on the balcony and the older people sit in the kitchen while lessons are going on. Vasanti earns Rs. 11,500 a month this way. She wants to continue her tutorial service even after she gets a professional job, expanding it with the help of a neighbor; she feels committed to the neighbourhood children. Their parents are not much educated, and the kids need this kind of help with their studies.

She is not under pressure to marry soon, nor to have an arranged marriage; she may select her own partner. It's possible she could be married to a boy of her caste, because some of them are also educated now. She says that she has broad-minded parents, but that they come from a narrow-minded village. She does not face restrictions on her movements, and is free to go out of town for exhibitions and school events, and to go out to parties with friends. In the future when she meets a possible marriage partner, she will insist on personal

compatibility and a four to five month acquaintance, freely moving around the town. The boy should be on his own, earning, from a good family, a non-drinker, and living in Mumbai. He should support her working. She has a particular requirement: it must be understood that 50% of her income will always go to her parents. This is clearly stated, in spite of her saying that she would gladly live in a joint family (with his parents). She expects to negotiate these matters directly with her husband-to-be, who will make them clear to his parents.

Vasanti is not the only working-class girl among my interviewees headed for a middle-class career, but she is one of the most remarkable. She is as thoroughly put together as Shruti, but without the background. How did she construct her own social and cultural capital out of the materials at hand? Her parents' unstinting encouragement and lack of restriction seem to form part of the answer. She has strong advocacy from committed professors, and is a top student. She has translated herself too into a global person, in her work experience with the company. One has to credit also, the forwardness of the city of Mumbai.

Like Shruti, Vasanti has ideals about her work and influence in the world. She feels committed to help educate poor children; and she insists that the company she works for must be an ethical one, with good business practices and good management. "You carry the image of your company, and it should bring pride to you," she declares.

Two Urban University Environments

In these two examples, I've presented vignettes from universities in two different cities in two different states. Both are public, government-sponsored universities, in contrasting regions of India. The unique character of the universities and of the surrounding cities is notable.

Allahabad University (AU) is one of India's oldest English-medium universities. Out of a small college, the University was founded in 1887 with the blessings of the imperial government. Many of its buildings are in the imperial style of that day, and its humanities departments make use of these old and un-remodeled structures.

There is an atmosphere of elegance and decay and yet of tradition and character as well. The ambition of many students is to take admission in this grand old place. The Law School is housed in somewhat newer facilities, yet it too has an air of tradition, character and high standards. The students I interviewed at Allahabad University were in either humanities or law, and each one attested to a sense that she was in luck to be studying at Allahabad University.

The city itself is strongly marked by being a huge military base with a large cantonment area, also very traditional and long-standing. There are other colleges in other parts of the city, most of them constituent colleges of Allahabad University. The cantonment is very close to the main university. This also adds to the atmosphere of settled tradition in this place. The airport is a military one, only partially fitted out with a domestic service area. The city has parks and a museum, the finest of which is the Nehru family's historic home. But, as a place to live and move about in, the city is very much lacking in facilities appealing to young people. In particular, girls do not sense that they have either freedom or safety to go about very much. Many women students live at home and others in an entire enclosed campus of women's hostels. In such an environment, it wasn't surprising to find students who were serious about studies, yet looked forward to a day when they might be able to live somewhere else.^j

In Mumbai, my work took place mainly on the SNDT Women's University's Juhu campus. This university was founded in Pune during the Independence struggle by the social reformer D.K. Karve, and then given strong financial support by the head of the wealthy Thakersey family, who named it after his mother. In 1936 its headquarters were moved to Mumbai. As a university dedicated exclusively to the education of women, it partakes of a memorial atmosphere of heroic struggle in this cause, with displays of large portraits of many great women and a few great men of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its buildings are modest and utilitarian. Its faculty includes both men and women but is predominantly made up of women. Its student population is very diverse in an all-India context.

The city of Mumbai all around the quiet grounds of this university

campus is a bustling place, with plenty of public transport on its busy thoroughfares, places to go out nearby, eateries, amenities and shops. Most girls commute to college from homes and lodgings both near and far away. Mumbai is an enormous mega-city, whose neighbourhoods have a powerful definite character of their own. In this environment one can find many students who see their future careers developing in this same city, either returning to their varied neighbourhoods, or taking up work in the city's widely spread commercial sectors. There are also young women from outside the area, living in lodgings while going to college here, who hope to find work back in the region they come from.

In spite of their differing geographic and social locations, there are ways to compare the two women whose stories have been offered so far. Coming from a wealthy middle-class family dedicated to the legal profession, it is clear that Allahabad can provide a career scope for Shruti if she settles there, and that she can establish herself as comfortably as she was brought up; the difference in her lifestyle will be mainly about the addition of women to the legal ranks where many fewer existed earlier. In Vasanti's story, the mega-city of Mumbai is critical to the immense lifestyle change she is set to make for herself and her lowly-placed yet stable family. The city offers to provide many options, few restrictions, and probably significant economic and professional opportunities for a talented and dedicated young woman such as herself.

In considering the marriage options of these two women, there may be a possible mate for each one who would support her choices and allow her career. The question will be about the in-laws. If Shruti marries within her caste, her in-laws may be conservative; if Vasanti marries within hers, her in-laws may be as needy as her own parents. These differing class issues might be expected to disrupt the future career trajectories of the two young women in one way or another, except for the character of the city in which each one sees her opportunities. Mumbai might make possible a truly professional life for Vasanti, one which would help her support everyone that she needs to, and thus buy their approval. Allahabad's highly reputed court system might make possible a life of both professionalism and ease for Shruti if she finds a family as progressive as her own.

A Family Welfare Project

I now dig deeper into examining the project of family welfare-building through daughters that is being undertaken by some families. These families have particular characteristics, not previously foreseen, that they share. I offer here stories of two young women from the “newest new middle class” whom I met in Allahabad, whose families I was also able to meet.

At the far edge of Allahabad, across the river, is a neighborhood with narrow lanes and small houses, rather like a village. There, in a very small house, Jaya lives with her parents, as she has since her birth 17 years ago, along with two younger sisters “and one sweet little brother.” She is in the second year of her BA program at Allahabad University, which she set her sights on attending since she was five. Jaya’s parents are proud of her—they have discovered that she has the capacity to go far. A few years ago, they did not have the high expectations for her that they do now; but when she was 15, she won the National Cadet Corps gold medal. Now they are geared up to see her through to achieving her ambition: she aims to become an IAS officer.

They are poor but proud, humble in their habitation, firm in their determination. They have the dignity of being OBC in category, village artisan in origin, and of village officialdom in actual occupational background. Jaya’s father has a small, unstable and temporary government post; his own father was a Block Development Officer. He is college-educated; his wife finished 10th standard. He had wanted to be an advocate, but had to cut short further education due to needs within the family. He now puts all of his money into his four children’s education. There is no possible way he could give Jaya a dowry, he insists; and Jaya’s mother vociferously says “No!” to the very idea of giving dowry. They are not apologetic; they look to Jaya to make good, and plan to keep supporting her in every way they can until she can support herself. Then, if she has the ability to help her three younger siblings along, they will accept this from her, but no more; she should have all her own money to support herself in the years ahead.

Jaya is a spritely young person, filled with energy and freely able

to pursue her interests in dance, reading English novels of her own choice, and enjoying her college subjects of psychology, philosophy and English, about each of which she has something to say to me. She meets me on the college steps and takes me by rickshaw to her home; she travels around freely and is trusted by her parents in doing so, although she is so young.

“I want her to do what I was never able to do!” Jaya told me her father said; a telling comment, echoing one reported by Vasanti. In both cases, the father’s humble job and the mother’s lack of education have not kept them from investing their hopes in their first child; this background seemed to be the perfect mixture for their doing so, even if—or maybe, especially if—that child was a girl. In addition, these girls surprised their parents, who had not expected that their daughter would make an amazing leap to another level. Education was important, but expectations were modest. The daughter reached a point of great opportunity, and then her parents were more than ready to let her move ahead.

A troubling story now adds more complexity to this inquiry. Vimla, aged 22 and a D.Phil. candidate, is also an eldest child who is surging forward beyond the background of her family. She teaches at the University of Allahabad, where she’s writing a D.Phil. dissertation that combines feminism, philosophy and education studies. Her family lives in an apartment at the outskirts of Allahabad, two parents with two daughters and a son (the youngest), all of them in college. The family is entirely supported by Vimla’s Junior Research Fellowship of Rs.19,200 per month, which will continue for the years it takes to finish her doctoral degree.

The family moved to Allahabad from a small town where Vimla went to college, to which they had first moved from the village where her father had been a farmer. The father has a college degree; the mother is illiterate. They are proud people, OBC in caste, with land in the village and relatives who send them some produce every year. Some of the relatives are college educated, others have very little education.

After first moving to the town near the village, the father sold supplies in a shop. Vimla then gained admission in the postgraduate program in Allahabad and moved there, living with a roommate for a

year. But her father did not want her to be “alone, a girl in the city”. So the following year, her whole family moved to Allahabad to be with her. The father has sacrificed his employment; he now devotes himself to taking his children to college and bringing them home. Vimla recently had to go to a northern city for a two-day seminar and her father went with her for protection. She does not go out anywhere unless he is with her.

She is the support and the linchpin of her family; they are proud of her intellectual accomplishments, and want her to study as much as she wants and to go as high as she can go. Her unschooled mother is particularly vocal in her admiration and support for her daughter. “I am happy she has a good career; she is famous in our society!” she says, with vigorous gestures.

But the contradictions Vimla faces in her situation strike her acutely. She is a well-read feminist scholar, and also a deeply respectful daughter. These are village people who have rejected their village’s narrowness and made an exit from a joint family in which instances of violence against women could be witnessed by the children. It was shocking to watch. “This is not the climate I want my children to grow up in,” Vimla tells me her father said when he moved them to the nearby town. She speaks with great respect of his action. “My father is a courageous man for my education. He didn’t have as much as he wanted of it, and he wanted it for me.” She tells me his dream is that she becomes “both a good lady, and an independent lady.”

She points out that this double goal of her father’s contains a contradiction. “How *can* I improve my personality when I’m told, ‘You are a girl, not a boy?’” she says (i.e., how *can* I become an independent lady?). Her father is extremely protective. He shares some of her decision-making; but the clothes she is wearing were of his choice, not hers. “I wanted short sleeves and no collar,” she says, pointing to her kameez; but he insisted it be made with long sleeves and a collar. She exclaims, “My sister wears jeans!” There is more responsibility placed on her, the eldest.

We talk about her future marriage, which she would like to decide for herself, but expects will be arranged by her family. She emphasizes that she has no chance in her situation, to meet anyone! The family will seek someone who is as educated as she, placed at

a similar professional level. “I want to marry a boy who’ll respect my opinions. I’ll say no forcefully if it’s not the right boy. I have no doubt about my decision being right. When my father arranges a meeting with someone, I will spend some months talking with him on all topics. I’ll ask him his opinion about me, and about girls. He must want a girl’s freedom and participation in decision-making.”

I ask her about how her future marital family should be managed. “With both of us in professions, when it comes to caring for our child, it should be both of us. When family members are available, it’s good. I want a joint family and good in-laws. If there’s a problem with childcare, I will leave my job and give first place to family and child. But there are relatives available, and my mother tells me I can call on her for childcare. I hope the boy will allow me to call my own mother. This is not a big problem in my family; childcare is shared.

“I want my mother-in-law to support my career, and my father-in-law to do so, too. While teaching, I can take care of my child after 5 p.m.—a teaching schedule makes this possible. I’ll take six months of leave for childbirth, and then return to work. If I’m transferred, I’ll ask my husband to move; if he is transferred, I will move. Men are more dominant in this.

“I will be a professor. My career plan is to get my P.G. diploma and then my D.Phil., and to work from now up to age 65. I love my teaching and my students. My passion is to be a teacher.”

Birth Order and Alternative Strategies

A young woman of modest background who is the eldest child of her parents may become the standard bearer for her entire natal family. The expectations placed upon her tend to grow as her accomplishments grow. She is to succeed and be a source of pride as well as income for her family. In families with no son, she plans to continue to support parents in old age; in families with younger siblings, she will help to see them educated. If there is a younger son, the daughter is expected to become self-supporting but not support her parents later on. She is not to expect a dowry; her earning capacity will suffice. These are challenging, even daunting expectations, and yet their burdensomeness is outweighed in the outlook of my

subjects by their own transformation into something much bigger within their family circle than what a woman used to be. Another girl in my study who is the only child of her parents says, “I am their son!” In such families, the overt practice of male dominance is being allowed to lessen, at least for now.

Each of the three “newest new middle-class” students I’ve reported on here, Vasanti, Jaya, and Vimla, is assertive about her demands—just as much so as Shruti, the Judge’s daughter. There were two points where this was vocally underscored in a very similar way. My questionnaire included: Will you continue to work after marriage? This question elicited a suddenly different expression and tone of voice than each girl had used before, as she answered, “Yes, of course!”—There could be no question about it. My questions about offering dowry or accepting a demand for dowry were similarly answered, in some form of “Of course not!” In other parts of individual interviews, a girl waxed spiritedly eloquent, taking flight in her narrative to tell me a longer and fuller tale. These expressions seemed to pour forth with considerable force from the girls featured in this paper.

The three student subjects of modest background each comes from a family in the SC or OBC categories. They are studying in government colleges, availing of special scholarships and reserved places as allowed by law. These privileges are being utilized in a matter-of-fact way, having been part of the law since these girls were infants, or even before that in the case of the youngest. The ambitions of these families for their daughters reach far beyond the accomplishments of the parents, and this too, is accepted by the girls and their parents as being unquestionably reasonable. The affect of the girls as they speak is confident and practical.

With regard to their personal habitus however (Bourdieu 1977, Saavala 2010), as revealed in bodily carriage and presentation, there is a marked difference between Vasanti and Jaya, on the one hand, two girls whose families allow them freedom of movement, and on the other, Vimla, who is strictly watched.

Vimla is the most accomplished of the three, the most aware and well-read regarding issues that face women. Yet she is the most restricted, perhaps due to what may be realistic caste-based concerns

of her father. Vimla's community is Yadav, the caste in power in her state of U.P., a caste which has a virulently conservative majority. The drama of this family is the split from the village branch of the family, the possibly strife-torn pulling away from them, and the insistence by her parents that their daughter should be allowed and encouraged to be an achiever; and likewise for their second daughter. In order to allow this, the father has to protect them closely, not just from random strangers, but likely also from members of his own community.

The strain is reflected in Vimla's bodily habitus. The way she carries herself is stern and correct. To protect privacy I do not use real names or keep photographs of my subjects; but in a photo I saw of Vimla among her classmates, her bearing was remarkable. She had a fierce dignity in her look and manner. In our personal interview, she was gentle and appealing. When we visited her family, she was formal, and did not translate for me; a colleague accompanied us. Yet she stated again, in the very presence of her proud and formidable father, that she supports this family now.

Assertiveness as a Capability

The notion I put forward here is that asserting who one is now, and what one wants to do and be, can be an act in itself. More than having an aspiration or even an ambition, it is a statement of the conscious self (see Taylor 1989, Bannerji 2001). The conscious self, when asserted and expressed in words, is a kind of moral force field. These women have this moral force in their bodies and in their self-presentation. Their circumstances may or may not allow them to fulfill their ambitions and aspirations, but nothing stops them being able to say, now, who they are, and what they plan to be and do.

Assertion is in itself a capability: a potential that has been actualized in thought and awareness. Claiming assertiveness as a capability adds more active dimensions to it than are expressed in the statement frequently heard in India, that women have become more assertive lately. Claiming it as a capability places it in the realm of the freedoms that Sen recommends be promoted by public policy, "to foster human capabilities and substantive freedoms" which work

together as goals and constituents of development (Sen 1999, p. 10). To see young women's new career-bent assertiveness in this light is not to predict with certainty their career success, but rather to note their growing, insistent influence in social, economic and family change.

Changes in family gender expectations and in female self-identity also articulate with one another, not separately; this was a core finding stemming from work in Bangalore (Clark and Sekher 2007). Questions are answered in different ways under various background circumstances, but this theme of ambition in a person who remains integrated within her own family, prevails. Family aspirations for a decent life can call upon daughters, just as keenly as upon sons, if not more so.

Under the stresses of the present, with economic dislocation and fracturing cultural conditions, these families need to address their situations through new family security strategies. Turning to their daughters to help lift them out of their anxious dilemma and into what they have come to prize as a decent life, these families, each of which has a daughter who is both clever and the eldest child, are placing gender at the very center of the issue. In part of the "newest new" middle class, gender is now located in a position of possibility and greatly hoped-for potential.

Gendered experiences of newly available kinds of cultural capital to invest in are avid and acute in this class segment. Young women are well aware of the boundary between their family background and their aspirations, and yet they attempt to scale that boundary when they identify locations and instances where they can collect and invest cultural capital for their own benefit and for that of their families. Bourdieu's theory seems to omit any potential for new cultural capital formation to occur, or to be created: but that is what this time of rapid social and economic change seems to facilitate in the hands of capable people. Locations and instances for today's young women to collect and invest new cultural capital include urban residence, exposure to a wider world, the aspirations of their households, the unstinting cooperation of their families, the friendship and mentorship of their professors, and the visible existence of professions that interest them.

In my finding, Bourdieu's view of a relatively less advantaged person's habitus inevitably restricting her social mobility seems too harsh, as well. I view this set of previously class-formed inner tendencies more as a stumbling block that may be overcome, albeit with a great deal depending on external factors that converge upon a person's life trajectory and affect her substantive freedoms.

Can Vimla, for example, become and remain a humanities professor? It will depend on the academic job market (though professors are desperately needed, funding issues are problematic), the distinction of her thesis, the understanding she has with her husband regarding family and financial matters, his relation with his parents, and his own career. These are only a few converging factors: others may include the political fortunes of her caste community. She is not alone, even now; she has the support of her father, however stern he appears, and his struggle to further her life and that of her sister may not be fruitless: there may be and probably are allies in a segment of their caste community. In addition, the support of her university department, and the enthusiastic cheers of her feminist peers and mentors, may not in this day and age be fruitless either.

Her assertiveness capability, however, is what stands out clearly in the present; and this capability can be expected to have real effects for those related to her, and for all those coming under her influence, whatever her future may hold.

What the young women studied in this paper had in common included several partially unforeseen characteristics. As well as sharing birth order and several family composition characteristics, which emerged as qualifiers without being asked for in advance, these women proved to be especially promising students who had found favour with their professors. Not only were their families eagerly hoping for their success, but so were their teachers. This was not a filter I had originally placed on the selection, but one that emerged during the research process.

In looking further afield for factors that affect new would-be career women, it cannot be overlooked that an infrastructure of *social capital* has been laid by for these women over decades, in the form of the expansion of educational opportunities and the mainstreaming of gender awareness and demand for redress. These changes have

especially affected certain university communities, and particular cities. Some urban environments have thus been made more favourable in allowing young educated women of talent, of whatever social background, to imagine and plan for whole-life careers. This infrastructure of already built-up social capital, as I have all too briefly described it here, fits with Sen's requirement for social policy to create conditions that allow persons to develop their capabilities and their choices. One can fervently hope that such social policies will continue, and will not be reversed.

Meanwhile, the moment is now, when these past and current investments in their welfare are being drawn upon with zeal, determination, and the devoted support of their families, by the youngest and newest women of the newest new middle class.

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New Meanings of Motherhood in Globalizing Middle Class Homes in India

Shelly Pandey and Manjeet Bhatia

Motherhood in India

Since ancient times women as mother are seen as a passive factor of reproduction. The son preference in the Indian society has glorified the meaning of being a woman only, if she is a mother of son/s. Before marriage the girl was to be prepared for her role as a wife and consequently as a mother (Dube, 2001). However, even after marriage none of the rituals or prayers is focused on the wife or bride but the focus remains largely on her prospective role as a mother.

The whole understanding of motherhood since the early times indicates that a woman has to be fertile and her fertility is proved by giving birth to a son, and there has been no indication of her role in the upbringing of the child after the child-birth, as all the important decisions pertaining to his life, like education, marriage, are to be taken by the father (Bhattacharji, 1990). While explaining the motherhood and the identity of the mother in the ancient times Bhattacharji (1990) further explains “the social reality had relegated the woman to the socially significant role of the procreatrix; she had lost her identity as a woman, as a social being, as an individual with free scope for intellection, volition and emotion. She was primarily, if not solely, a mother, preferably of male children (Bhattacharji, 1990; p. 54).

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However, the Hindu Code Bill at the middle of 20th century brought some changes in the images of motherhood in the Hindu families in India, albeit not in practice. Earlier the motherhood was only associated with glorification without empowerment but the Hindu Code Bill introduced property rights, guardianship rights for women along with changes in marriage and divorce rights (Sinha, 2007). All these changes somehow brought at least a different understanding about a mother, who was only seen as someone to continue the lineage of the family without having any need of her own. These new rights gave a new perspective to the marriage and motherhood where women's needs in the institution of marriage were acknowledged.

Even though after the Hindu Code Bill the identity of a mother still hovers around being a mother of a son, but the scope of the present paper does not deal with the motherhood in relation with the sex of the child. It rather deals with the changes in the construction of motherhood with the changes in the middle classness in India. While the paper does not negate Indian family's obsession with the male child, it focuses on how the image of mother is changing in the middle class homes.

To understand motherhood in the contemporary Indian middle class context, the present study has taken up two groups of mothers. One group consists of young mothers in the age group of 30-35, and the other group includes mothers in the age group of 50-60 who have working unmarried women. The reason to take these two groups for this study is to examine that with the changes in the Indian middle class families under globalization, how the concept of motherhood is embodied and performed by young mothers and how the new aspirations among the young women are facilitated by the older mothers, which would consequently have an impact on young women's lived experiences of being a mother in future as well.

Methodology

The research design of the present study is ethnographic. Ethnography is uniquely well placed to deal with the challenges of studying

social life under globalization because it does not rely on fixed and comparable units of analysis (Gille & O Riain, 2002). The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich, holistic insights into people's views and actions, as well as the nature (that is, sights, sounds) of the location they inhabit (Reeves et al , 2008).

The earlier studies on exploring gender relations in India (Niranjan, 2001; Basi, 2009; Patel, 2010) have also followed the ethnographic approach to explore the complexity of social relationships through intense participation in aspects of everyday life of the people being studied. The ethnographic accounts on gender relations weave together the conceptual and ethnographic narratives in elaborating the accounts of cultural perception and everyday life experiences, gender and agency, and women's spatial experiences.

Based on qualitative and ethnographic approach, the present study argues that how mothers of different age groups are negotiating with the demands, identities and desires of the new middle classness. To examine the same, the data has been collected from these two groups through semi structured interviews and informal conversations. 50 mothers from each group were interviewed, so the study is based upon a total of 100 respondents. Along with this, an intense participant observation was carried out over a period of one year during 2013-14. The interviews were conducted at their home settings which also allowed opportunities for the participant observation. The participant observation substantiated the data collected through the interviews that how motherhood is being performed within two groups. Apart from the primary data collection, the content analysis and visual ethnography of the television, print media and social media has also been conducted to understand how media is contributing into the new discourse of an image of mother in urban middle class context.

From the young mothers the data was collected to understand that how their experiences of motherhood is different from that of their mothers, how the identity, aspirations and desires of a mother in the present is different from the earlier generation. From the older generation mothers the data was collected to understand as to how they negotiate with the aspirations of having educated working daughters in the new middle class context.

Locating Middle Classness of the Respondents of the Study

To examine the motherhood in the new middle class context, first, it is important to locate the middle classness of the respondents of the study. The study claims these women to be belonging to the new middle class segment of the Indian society and this claim is based upon certain socio-cultural characteristics associated with the new middle class in India. As mentioned earlier, the study is divided into groups. The profile of the young mothers indicate that they all are educated (graduates having professional degree), working or have worked in white collar jobs. Majority of these women stay in the nuclear family set-ups in the urban location of Delhi NCR and all of these mothers had medically assisted child birth. All these facts about the respondents indicate towards the desired achievement of the new middle class in India as established by the literature (Baviskar and Raka, 2011; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2007; Fernandes, 2006).

The senior women largely belong to group of those women who could not complete their graduation and most of them were non-working mothers. These women got married in 1970's or 80's and during this period the education of a woman was primarily to facilitate a comfortable married life. A daughter's socialization often focused on preparing her to perform well the roles in her future marital home, as a good daughter-in-law and wife. Gradually, due to higher values attached to a girl's education in the marriage market, girls were more often encouraged to obtain higher education. Initially, a girl's educational qualifications were carefully managed to ensure that they were not higher than those of her potential grooms (Mies, 1980). These women belong to the old middle class families where the image of a woman is posited as frugal housewives and responsible and caring mothers (Benson, 1986). In India, especially in the pre-globalisation era, the home envisioned in the urban locations, reiterated the male breadwinner/dependent wife and children. The participation of women in the labour market was very limited due to lesser opportunities available (Ahemad, 1979). Though these women represent the old middle class families, but there has been a visible departure from the old middle classness

towards the new middle classness when their socio-cultural profiles are examined. Their children are educated for the global economy as they have professional degrees to cater the labour demands of the global economy in the present context. Unlike their own experiences their daughters are educated and aspire to work in the professional set-up. The middle classness of these women is located in the overall changes in their families consumptions pertaining to consumer goods, education, technology and children's white collar professions.

Data Analysis

Analysis of ethnographic data has been undertaken in a thematic manner as it focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas; and examining the data to identify and categories the key issues that emerged. Through a careful analysis of the data, tentative theoretical explanations were generated. The analysis followed the triangulation of data at many stages, as the data from the field note dairies of participant observations was substantially incorporated along with the interviews and the notes from the content analysis of media images, to have a rich interpretation of the data. The ethnographic data is approached through theoretical triangulation as well; where different concepts and theories have been adopted to analyze the responses and observations. Apart from the feminist ethnographic approach¹ and global ethnographic approach, a dynamic interplay between structures of gender inequality and the everyday practices of the respondents has been analyzed through theoretical concepts pertaining to gender in the context of middle class.

Motherhood and Middle Classness

The findings of the study indicate certain departure from the earlier construction of motherhood in India. An important aspect of this

¹ Feminist ethnography approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal and to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency (Stacy, 1998)

departure has been the shifting concentration towards the middle class womanhood based on the identity of an intelligent consumer, where the issues like slim image of self, healthy culinary practices for the family and the successful combination of professional tasks and households tasks are being practiced by women. Now the electronic media puts forth many role models for women, where marriage, children, work and new meanings of femininity are going simultaneously. The cliché created by the media such as 'yummy mummy' and 'anti-aging' are adding to the construction of motherhood.

Doing Class, Doing Motherhood: The Young Mothers

"I became a mother when I was around 30. This is becoming a trend in the urban middle class families that couples are having their first child around the age of 30. In our generation both husband and wife are professionally educated and find employment in this new job market. We need to get educated first, then get into jobs; then we get married and after some years we have children as we need stable income and savings before going for childbirth. All these bring delay in becoming parents. But with our jobs we also get benefits to be utilized during the childbirth, so it is part of whole experiences of globalizing India, where growth of one sector takes care of another" (a young mother from Delhi).

The analysis of the data from the young mothers indicates towards the embodiment of class along with the motherhood. The new middle classness can be located in motherhood in the analysis of the decision to become the mother by the middle class young women. The study found that the whole decision to become parents is well thought about decision in the context of urban middle class couples. This decision is generally delayed as compared to their previous generation and the reason of the same is also embedded in the characteristics of the new middle class only. The aspiration of the young middle class men and women in the white collar professions and the attainment of professional degrees before the employment, delay in the decision of marriage and consequently the decision of becoming parents.

The new experiences of motherhood in the context of new middle classness begin at the time of child birth and even before that. The young mothers pointed out that in the experience of having a baby bump there has been a shift from a sense of shame to one of celebration. The whole range of branded cloths to facilitate the comfortable dressing with a baby bump adds into the celebrations of having the same. On the other hand, Donner's study (2010) of middle class elaborates that how a sense of privilege is experienced by women with the medicalization of child birth which led to the shift from home based child birth to hospitals. However, the present study indicates that in the urban locations in India, there has been a remarkable growth of plush hospitals that has led to class differences within the medical treatments and facilities. The young mothers pointed out that the name of the hospital matters when the venue of the child birth is declared. Many of the women claimed to have child birth in best of the hospitals of Delhi NCR, but this privilege was experienced due to their own or their husbands' status as employees in MNCs, which entitles them to specific services.

This indicates how one characteristic or privilege of classness leads to another. The white collar profession, where the career aspirations of the middle class youth are located, takes care of other aspects of life where the class can be claimed. Hence these educated, professional young mothers begin their experiences of motherhood with the medicalization of child birth in a premier hospital of the city. This further explains that the consumer identity of the new middle class has been embedded in the experiences of motherhood as well. Here, the middle classes are consuming the better, expensive and modern medical facilities which add into their claim to the new middle classness.

Creating Biographies of Children

“I do not want to burden my child with so many activities but I want to give him a good exposure so that he does not lag behind in his peer group and that ends up in getting him into so many things. So it is something one cannot avoid in the present context. Being a mother, I am always arranging the same for my child as my husband does not get enough time to manage it” (a mother from Delhi).

Motherhood in middle class context has broadly been seen within the practices of parenthood while bringing up the children. Donner (2006) has analysed the negotiations of the young mothers with liberalization as they have to manage a foreign idea of early childhood education for their children that include variety of activities. She further says that these activities are associated with wider consumption patterns of the new middle class homes.

The present study analysed the social media profile of the young mothers along with their narratives, which revealed that the young mothers share the experiences of childhood by their children on social media, reflecting different forms of consumptions. Thematic birthday celebrations based on Indian and English cartoon characters, achievements and participation of children in different forms of early childhood activities indicate the creation of biographies of children by parents in general and mothers in particular.

The adaptation and obsession with the different kinds of extracurricular activities for the children is located within the insecurity of the global economy and employment. The old middle class in India had certain sectors of employment and professions, which included largely the government sector employment and professions like doctors, engineers, and teachers. A particular format of education used to prepare the children for these prospective employment sectors and professions which needed not a very high concentration on the extracurricular activities. However, post liberalization the global economy has been opened for the employment opportunities and the education system is also going in congruence with the unpredictable future of the child to prepare him/her for the global economy. With this view in mind, the exposure of the child with global lifestyle at home and at school is to prepare the child as one who can stride across national borders with confidence. In these entire child rearing practices, the new definition of a good mother is the one who coordinates these different forms of consumptions and who constructs the child as a global citizen to be able to fit in well with in the global market/economy.

Motherhood, Embodiment and Class

The analysis of the narratives of young mothers and the content analysis of the media images about the modern urban mothers and the images uploaded by the young mothers on the social media like Facebook/Twitter, indicate that the whole outlook of the contemporary motherhood has become very modern. The criticism by the media about the female actors who could not reduce their post-delivery weight and high regard placed on the slim women even after being a mother, has attached the idea of self-image and self-identity reflected through the slim bodies with the motherhood.

“When I became a mother, along with my baby, my other priority was my weight. I did workout and even joined gym for some time. Though I wanted to be relaxed and lazy at that time, but I did not want to be looked at as someone who does not care for her own body” (a young mother from Delhi).

I became mother at a very later stage, and the post-delivery weight was adding to my older looks. It became important for me to reduce it as I was looking like an old mother than a young mother (a mother from Gurgaon).

The narratives of the young women about their bodies indicate a departure from the earlier image of the Indian mother, where the identity was only through the child and especially male child. The strict parameters of being slim were never attached with the concept of motherhood, which also specify about the identity of the individual mother which is devoid of the child. How is the mother seen as an individual? This has become an important part of the celebration of motherhood. How much of it is market oriented, and how much a choice of an individual is difficult to ascertain.

The classness can be located in this new embodiment of motherhood through the concept of embodied capital by Bourdieu (1986). One of the forms of cultural capital is conceptualized by him is the embodied form which displays one's taste and class through the body, for example, Bourdieu argues that the higher class claims to spend more time on their bodies than the lower classes. When people display their good looks on their digital profiles, the body becomes

one of the ways to display one's status. This is an approach towards structuring of human relationships and identities centered around the socially shaped embodied subject (Crossley, 2001; Shilling, 2004).

This could be analysed as a display of one's taste of clothing, hair style, make-up or accessories. The study indicates that young mothers display a particular taste through their slim bodies. However, the main concern is to treat their bodies as a perceptible configuration, i.e. the body for others. Through maintained bodies, the status is claimed by distancing the body from necessity and rather, by projecting it as the matter of taste and consumption. The taste is in the form of particular shape, size and appearance of body and consumption in the form of health practices which reflect class based orientation towards the body (Shilling, 2004).

Climbing Class, Valuing Daughter: Senior Mothers

This section of the paper locates how the senior mothers who have unmarried daughters are experiencing motherhood as their daughters aspire to work in the service sector offered by the globalization in India. One of the characteristics of the work world in the globalizing India has been the MNC work culture that has been one of sites of the aspirations of the new middle class in India. On the other hand, one of the social changes in the contemporary urban middle classes has been in the career of the daughter. Earlier the career of the son used be an important aim of the middle class as the ultimate aim for the daughters used to be marriage. However, the present indicates that the one questions that the couple with marriageable children are grappling with is that "what is your daughter doing" and the implication of this question is related to the career in the job market.

The analysis of the data of the present study indicates that to make the career of the daughter, the older mothers are also redefining the meanings of the motherhood. Earlier having a daughter used to mean a helping hand for the mothers, even in the middle classes. However, in the contemporary times where to be fit for the job market of the global economy, one has to first be professionally educated, which

means longer years of education and then one gets eligible for the globalized work world. Even the globalized work world is much different from the earlier forms of job market which used to be restricted to the specific working hours. The new regime of MNC work culture has shift work and the work culture is beyond any specific working hours. Due to all these changes in the education and job markets, along with the aspirations of the middle classes to find places in these markets, the role and expectations from the daughters are also changing. The present study argues that these changes are facilitated by their mothers.

“My daughter works in a 11AM to 8PM shift, but she has to travel three hours daily to and from the workplace. After all this time spent at workplace and on road, I cannot expect her to work in home as well. She needs rest also, so when she comes back she just takes her dinner and goes to sleep. All the things needed for her in the rush hour of the morning when she is getting ready to go are arranged by me. Sometimes I really wonder how she will manage after marriage,” A mother whose daughter works in Gurgaon).

The sparse time spent at home and the need to take rest after the long day of work and travel, makes the women employees dependent on their parents, especially the mothers, to fulfill their other daily needs. As mentioned above, earlier the daughters were expected to help their mothers in cooking and other household work but with the MNC work culture which is sometimes shift based including the night shifts, the daughters become rather more dependent on their mothers for timely food and other help like proper sleeping atmosphere during day time. The following case study of a young girl who works in call centre highlights how the meaning of home has been changed for them given their work demands due to their mothers, as they claim that the home is the space of leisure for them.

Anushka's (a respondent from west Delhi) shift timings are from 23.30 hrs to 08.30 hrs. Her cab comes to pick her up at 21.30 hrs and she wakes up to get ready to work at 20.00 hrs. To get ready, washed and ironed cloths are kept for her. By the time she gets ready her dinner is cooked by her mother. Before leaving she eats her dinner and her mother hands over a water bottle to her. In the morning when she comes back, her breakfast is kept ready. While

having breakfast she spends some time with her parents and after that she goes to sleep. During afternoon her mother wakes her up for lunch. Sometimes she gives her food on her bed only as she feels too sleepy to come out of her room to have food. Her parents try to provide her sound sleep by speaking softly when she sleeps. The television is kept in the bedroom where she sleeps, thus, her parents do not watch television during her sleeping hours. She says “I have no idea what time our maid comes; which home appliance is not working properly or has its service due. Earlier I used to be aware of the same.” Ambalika’s mother added: “When she goes to work, I take care of all her needs from taking care of her clothes to her food. At times I serve her food on her bed while she is sleeping; otherwise she does not get up to eat”.

In this scenario, the interface between the Indian middle class and the rise of the globalized work world in India throws up a unique opportunity which enables young unmarried women to be not only financially independent, but also imparts them with the capacity to contribute to, and enhance their family’s income and consumption levels. The changes in the practices inside home represent the transformation of the family into a conduit for market driven activities, which has increased the labour market commitment of family members (Ciscel & Heath, 2001). Till women are single, their utility in the wage market is the most, their labour is welcomed by the market and their employment opportunities are welcomed by the families. But all these changes inside home are facilitated by an extra role played by the mothers as explained further.

Globalization has created a nexus of employment opportunities—women’s productivity and consumerism—in which the market controls the relations within the family as the changing market forces have replaced the domestic activities of the women in family. Although the market’s hegemony has affected the family as a whole but the individuals within the family seem to be receiving these effects differently. The entry of women in the new sectors of employment under globalization brings changes in gender roles for the young generation as there has been change in the power relation between the younger woman and men of the family, but the older women of the household play as buffer in this change.

“In our generation, men were not involved in the household as much as you see in the present generation. All the burden of work came on me as my daughter would have helped me if she was not working. On one hand there is absence of her help, and in addition to that, I have to work for her also and since most of the work is pertaining to the household chores which I used to do earlier as well, so my work has increased,” (one of the senior mothers).

The analysis further reveals that though the globalized work world has shifted the gender roles for the young, but at the broader level there has been no change in the gender roles in the household. The gender division of labour still continues in the household. The respondents could not claim that their fathers or brothers took up any work (woman’s work) which was done by them earlier, like cooking or helping mother in household work.

The increased demand for mother’s labour in the household of the respondents shows that on one hand the gender roles are changing for young women, but on other they are getting reinforced for the senior women of the household. This finding goes parallel to Patel’s study (Patel, 2004) in which she finds that at an age when elderly women should be retiring and enjoying the matriarchal status, they continue to be treated as unpaid servants of the household (Patel, 2004). If we look at the status of men of the household, they continue to enjoy the service of the senior women and along with that also enjoy the income of the younger women as they contribute directly or indirectly in the family’s income.

The different experiences of gender roles by mother and daughters have been analyzed through Sen’s concept of corporative conflict (Sen, 1990). According to Sen, in particular, the members of a household face two problems simultaneously, one—cooperation (involving activities for production) and the other of conflict (distribution of total availability among the members of household). Social arrangements regarding who does what, who gets to consume what, and who takes what decisions can be seen as a response to the combined problem of cooperation and conflict. The present study takes a look at how these gender relations of cooperative conflict undergo transformation along with employment opportunities open to the young women under globalization.

Earlier when women's participation in the labour market was limited, the gendered division of labour within the home formed the basis of the cooperative conflict between men and women. But since the participation of women in the labour market is increasing, they have also started getting the fruits of prosperity of the household. However, here also those women of the household whose labour is not located in the labour market, their work and labour is continued to be treated as purely a cultural phenomenon. In other words, the young women for whom employment opportunities have emerged are escaping the burden of work inside home and they are rather being served by the mothers. In this way, the burden of work inside the home has increased for the mothers. Consequently, the gender relations inside home are getting altered for the younger women; while their mothers are facing more workload inside home.

The present study also shows that for women, who contribute in the social reproduction of the labour of the modern service sector, the gender roles have not been changed for them as much as they have got changed for the women of younger generation, as their labour involves monetary returns. This shows that monetary returns from women's labour put her in a better position inside the home than those women whose labour is placed with the unpaid work at home.

The analysis of the data from the senior mothers also reveals that the ancient Indian motherhood, where mother was an image of self-sacrifice and ritual observance for the well-being of the father and the sons, has now included daughters also. The monetary returns of the daughters employment has certainly enhanced her value in the middle class households (Clark & Sekher, 2007; Tara & Illavarasan, 2009), but within this value for the daughter the image of the mother remains the same of being caring and the sacrificing one.

Conclusion

Both the generations of mothers are preparing their child for the global economy and work opportunities. But one difference that has come forward is the self identity, which is more visible in the younger generation. Along with this the continuity of the image motherhood, where the self is also reflected through the achievements of the child,

is also evident. The young mothers are creating the biographies of their child by keeping the child into some activity or achievements. On the other hand, in the present middle class context, the question such as what is your daughter doing? has become as important as the career of the son. The older mothers are providing them a milieu to negotiate the career opportunities available by taking up more burden on themselves. The gender division of labour inside homes expects daughters to manage domesticities along with their mothers. However, in the present scenario of the demands from the work render little time and energy for them to manage all these expectations and consequently the burden falls on the mothers who were earlier also managing the household.

Both the generations of mothers provide an understanding of the variety of gender relations in the new middle class context. There has been a global/local and change/continuity nexus in the kinds of femininities reflected through motherhood. The young mothers show that the motherhood does not overshadow all other identities of the Indian woman. They put forward their identity through a different embodiment of motherhood that includes maintained bodies along with the child care and arranged domesticities. On the other hand the older mother's continuity of being a self-sacrificing mother devoid of any identity beyond children is facilitating a change in the middle class families, where the career of the daughter is also getting a boost. And the motherhood has moved beyond being the mother of sons, because middle class's concern of education to the children of both sexes makes daughters also valuable for the labour market and the daughter's needs and concerns are also included in the making of new middle classness by their mothers.

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Doing Gender vs. Doing Modernity: The Dilemma of Indian Middle Classes

Sonalde Desai

Introduction

India's economic growth in early 21st century coupled with increasing incorporation in global consumer culture has generated great interest in the contemporary Indian middle class. This middle class is envisioned to have left behind the austerity of an earlier era to embrace a consumer centered marketplace of goods, services, ideas and ideologies (Fernandes, 2007; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase, 2009; Jaffrelot and van der Veer, 2008; Varma, 1998). At the same time, whether this effusive embrace of modernity extends to restructuring of gendered domains remains questionable and a number of studies suggest that modernity is often redefined in a way that precludes substantial gender transformation (Derne, 2003; Ganguly-Scrase, 2003; Liechty, 2003).

In some ways, this duality dovetails with the duality identified by M. N. Srinivas (1977). Writing in 1977, Srinivas noted the interplay between Sanskritisation and modernization in shaping the status of women in Indian society (Srinivas 1977). In this paper, I argue that this dilemma continues to shape women's lives in modern India. Past two decades have seen substantial changes in the lives of Indian families, including growth in incomes and increases in education. However, this upward mobility also forces new choices—in particular whether to continue to embrace traditional markers of social status, which involve clinging to and even enhancing gendered behaviours that portray an image of modesty and high culture, or to embrace

modernity with its disruption of traditional gender schema; the choice ultimately boils down to whether to prioritize doing gender or to prioritize doing modernity.

Doing Gender

Over the past two decades, feminist scholarship has become increasingly sophisticated and explored a variety of approaches understanding gender inequality. One of the more promising areas of work stems from the works of ethnomethodologists who tend to focus on the way gender is displayed or enacted through day to day actions of individuals. Goffman (Goffman, 1976) first articulated this perspective in his discussion of “gender display” where he argued that men and women engage in a highly stylized mode of interaction where presence or absence of symmetry can indicate deference or dominance. This concept was further elaborated in a provocative paper by West and Zimmerman, titled “Doing Gender,” where the authors argue that gender is a powerful ideological device which shapes choices and limits actions based on the actor’s sex and leads individuals to consistently act in a way that produces gendered behaviours in day-to-day interactions between individuals (West and Zimmerman 1987). In a subsequent article titled “Doing Difference,” West and Fenstermaker (West and Fenstermaker 1995), expand their arguments about enactment of gender to enactment of differences based on a variety of forms of inequality, particularly class and race.

In spite of the initial promise, this approach has drawn considerable criticism from long-term practitioners working in the area of race, class and gender. Collins acerbically points out (Collins et al. 1995), “recasting racism, patriarchy and class exploitation solely in social constructionist terms reduces class, race and gender to performances, interactions between people embedded in a never ending stream of equivalent relations, all containing race, class and gender in some form, but a chain of equivalences, devoid of power relations,”

So one might ask, does research on enactment of gender have any usefulness for researchers interested in inequalities based on power relations between dominant and subordinate groups in a society? This paper argues that, conspicuously visible gendered behaviors

serve to signal superior class status in a highly stratified society like India in a way that strengthens both gender and class inequalities. An interesting aspect of applying these concepts to India is that a lot of work on race-class-gender intersection in the United States has focused on double or triple oppression for women in subordinate groups; with India, the focus is on subordination of women in the dominant group and maintenance of caste and class hierarchies via this subordination. Moreover, these conspicuous gendered behaviours also help to sustain generational hierarchies creating two classes of citizens within the household.

Doing Modernity

While research on gender performance in service to caste mobility (Srinivas, 1977) or nationalist identity (Chatterjee, 1989) has received considerable attention, a focus on “performing” modernity is relatively new. Srinivas alluded to the disjunction between Sanskritisation and Westernisation where growing modernity associated with higher education may lessen the pull of Sanskritisation, replacing it with the pull of modernity. It was left to Appadurai to present a framework in which neither the East nor the West hold sway, but rather linked by electronic communication and mass migration, people in diverse geographic terrains live in a shared imagination creating a dispersed cosmopolitan impulse (Appadurai, 1996). Without privileging any geographic location, he suggests that global cosmopolitan culture is a work of imagination and “a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global in their practices of the modern” (Appadurai, 1996, p.4).

The past two decades of economic changes in India have created an unparalleled space for this cosmopolitan impulse. As political ideology has moved beyond the Nehruvian imagery of a non-aligned nation, steadfast in its self-imposed isolation to visions of a sleeping giant waking up to take its rightful place in the global marketplace, it has created space for embracing modernity in a variety of domains including the personal. Economic growth has led to rapidly expanding incomes among workers in the modern sector and has increased their consumption aspirations—both for material

and cultural goods produced in a global marketplace (Das 2002; Varma 1998).

Whether this embrace of a global modernity extends to gendered spaces is perhaps the crucial question we must explore. The fragility of the economic transformation may well play a role here. Although snapshots of Indian economy reveal growing incomes in the hands of modern service sector workers and trickle down growth of incomes for lower middle class occupations like drivers and shopkeepers serving them (Desai 2007), these are hardly new middle classes in a structural sense. Most of the individuals occupying these positions are not new entrants to the middle class status, rather these are people moving from older occupations to newer occupations that have gained prominence due to the liberalization of Indian economy. Thus, the extent to which they embrace modernity, particularly in gendered arenas, remains an open question (Ravinder Kaur, 2014).

In an intriguing analysis of Indian middle classes, Derne (2003) notes a variety of ways through which globalization has enhanced rather than diminished male privilege and left the boundaries between male and female spheres intact. This suggests that it is important to explore the contours of gendered behaviours empirically rather than assume *a priori* that the imperatives of modernity will sweep away the gendered basis of social stratification and doing modernity will triumph over doing gender.

Contending Cultures

As we begin to contrast the power of gendered basis of social stratification performed through highly controlled and ritualized gender displays against the lures of modernity, we can draw on interesting insights from the new sociology of culture. In a highly influential article, Ann Swidler (1986) laid out the schema for cultural disruption. Drawing on Skocpol, she offers an interesting analysis of conditions under which social transformations take place (Swidler 1986):

“To understand culture’s causal role in such high-ideology periods, we need to consider ideologies in a larger explanatory context. Coherent ideologies emerge when new ways of organizing action are being developed. Such ideologies often carried by social

movements, model new ways to organize action and to structure human communities. These ideological movements, however, are in active competition with other cultural frameworks- at the least in competition with common sense and usually with alternative traditions and ideologies as well. Explaining cultural outcomes therefore requires not only understanding the direct influence of an ideology on action. It also requires explaining why one ideology rather than another triumphs (or at least endures). And such explanation depends on analyzing the structural constraints and historical circumstances within which ideological movements struggle for dominance.” (Swidler ,1986, p. 280)

For the present purposes it implies that we need to clearly outline contending perspectives, their anticipated effects on behaviours, and then identify structural conditions for the triumph of one over the other. Above sections have outlined two contending scripts, namely, doing gender vs. doing modernity. These scripts might shape Indian women’s, particularly middle class women’s behaviours. We further suggest that whether one triumph over the other depends on the social contexts in which women and their families are embedded.

Gender in modern India has been highly politicized through caste and religion based social movements. While this is not a new phenomenon stretching back to the debates around sati (Mani, 1990) and struggle over women’s sexuality during partition (Das, 1996). In recent decades this politicization has taken a new turn around abolition of religion specific family laws and implementation of a uniform civil code (Sarkar and Butalia, 1995; Sunder Rajan, 2000). Households that are strongly embedded in religious and caste networks may find it harder to emphasize modernity and may instead choose to focus on greater gender performance that confirms with the ideology of a traditional and modest womanhood. In contrast, families that are somewhat removed from these networks may have greater flexibility in their choices.

Research Questions and Operationalization

The discussion above has identified several key questions that hinge on performance of gender vis-à-vis performance of modernity and whether it varies by the degree to which households are embedded

in religious and caste networks. However, a variety of studies have noted multidimensionality of gender (Desai and Andrist, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Narayan, 2006; Presser and Sen, 2000). Hence, it is important to clearly identify the dimensions of gender we expect to be relevant to the question at hand. In this paper, I choose to focus on intra-household relationships that reflect women's agency vis-à-vis other family members. These behaviors are also often signaling behaviors that signify households' adherence to a certain cultural script. Specifically, I focus on three aspects:

- **Need for Permission to Go Outside the Home:** Number of items for which women require permission from husband or other household members to go outside the home. These include: (1) local health center; (2) visiting friends and relatives in the village or town; (3) to go to a kirana shop; and (4) to go short distance by bus or train. When women (almost) never go to these places, we mark them as requiring permission.
- **Ability to Go Alone to these Places:** Regardless of whether they need permissions or not, whether they can go alone to the above-mentioned places. This variable, like the one above, is a simple count ranging from 0 to 4.
- **Primary Decision Making Power:** Number of decisions in which the respondent is a primary decision maker. These include: (1) purchasing an expensive item; (2) how many children to have; (3) what to do if the respondent falls sick; (4) whether to buy land or property; (5) how much money to spend for a social function; (6) what to do if a child is sick; and (7) whom should her children marry. This index ranges from 0 to 7 and includes both minor and major decisions.

These dimensions reflect a range of gendered behaviours. Needing permission to go to commonplace locations as kirana (grocery) shop reflects a social milieu in which women's agency is constrained through day-to-day interactions within the household. Inability (or unwillingness) to go alone is far more constraining, particularly when it comes to visiting places like health center and friends and relatives. In contrast, authority in decision-making reflects both

powers within the household as well as importance of any given decision in the household's economic context. This is a particularly crucial test of our argument. When households are financially able to undertake minor expenses involved in taking a child to a doctor or to make decisions regarding social gifts and other expenses, we would expect it to be far more likely that women will have greater decision making authority than where these decisions impose serious strain on household finances.

I have also argued that structural conditions may well shape these decisions and households which are closely embedded in caste and religious community may be more likely to constrain modernity. In order to examine this, I have constructed a variable that denotes household membership in caste or religious organization. While households may be closely embedded in these networks without actually being members of any association, but associational membership is a definite marker of their embeddedness.

India Human Development Survey

Much of the research in this area has come from qualitative studies whose contextual richness and depth is often not matched by breadth and ability to generalize across social groups and regions. This paper seeks to fill this niche by examining social class variation in a variety of gendered outcomes using data from India Human Development Survey (IHDS) of over 40,000 households spread across 33 states and union territories. The IHDS was conducted in 2004-5 and again in 2011-12 and involves a household level interview about income and employment of various household members and an interview of never married women ages 15-49 about intra-household gender relations as well as a variety of other dimensions of their lives.

For this analysis, I focus on 28,998 married women who are currently living with their husbands. These women are ages 15 to 49 and come from diverse segments of the Indian society. Descriptive statistics for our sample are presented in Table 1. State wise distribution of the sample is shown in Table 2.

The primary focus of this analysis is to see how intra-household behaviours vary across different income segments. In order to examine

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Gender Indicators	
No. of Places where Resp. Needs Permission to Visit	3.07
No. of Places where Respondent Can Go Alone	2.64
No. of Domains in which Respondent is Primary Decision Maker	1.14
Household Annual Income (Excluding Respondent's Wages)	
Lowest Quintile* (upto Rs. 30740 annual household income)	0.19
2nd Quintile. (Rs. 30741-Rs. 52956)	0.20
Middle Quintile (Rs. 52957-Rs. 86470)	0.20
4th Quintile (Rs. 86471-Rs. 156450)	0.20
Richest Quintile (Rs. 155451+)	0.20
Respondent is Employed Outside the Home	0.28
Respondent's Own Education	
No education	0.39
1-4 std	0.07
5-9 std	0.32
10-11 std	0.10
Higher secondary and some college	0.07
College graduate	0.05
Husband's Education	
No education	0.32
1-4 std	0.08
5-9 std	0.31
10-11 std	0.12
Higher secondary and some college	0.08
College graduate	0.09

* Households are divided into five equal segments, hence the term quintile. Bottom 20% of the households have annual income less than Rs. 30740; top 20% have income greater than Rs. 155451. These cut offs are chosen based on the distribution of the income in the sample

Member of Caste or Religious Association	0.15
Place of Residence	
Metro City	0.08
Other Urban	0.24
Developed Village	0.30
Less Developed Village	0.38
Caste/Religion	
Forward Caste	0.19
OBC	0.36
Dalit	0.23
Adivasi	0.08
Muslim	0.13
Christian, Sikh and Others	0.02
Age of the Respondent	34.14
Number of Children	2.44

Sample: 34851 Married women ages 15-49 living with husband.

this, I have divided the sample in five income groups. Additionally, the analysis also controls for caste/religion, place of residence, state of residence, age, and number of children and respondent's as well as her husband's education.

The results presented in this paper control for women's participation in wage work and her income is excluded from the calculation of the family income. However, in results not presented here, this analysis has been repeated for full household income, including the respondent's own wages and the results are extremely similar.

Results

Results from multivariate regression¹ for each of the dependent

¹ Regression is a statistical measure that attempts to determine the strength of the relationship between one dependent variable and a series

TABLE 2: Statewise Distribution of the Sample Proportion

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Jammu & Kashmir	0.01
Himachal Pradesh	0.01
Uttarakhand	0.02
Punjab	0.02
Haryana	0.02
Delhi	0.01
Uttar Pradesh	0.14
Bihar	0.07
Jharkhand	0.04
Rajasthan	0.05
Chhattisgarh	0.03
Madhya Pradesh	0.05
Northeast	0.01
Assam	0.03
West Bengal	0.09
Orissa	0.04
Gujarat	0.05
Maharashtra, Goa	0.10
Andhra Pradesh	0.08
Karnataka	0.05
Kerala	0.03
Tamil Nadu	0.07

variable are presented in Tables 3-5. For ease of interpretation we present predicted probabilities for each outcome where the values of all other variables are held at their means and only income levels are

of other changing variables (known as independent variables). It allows us to look at the relationship between household income and gendered behaviours while holding the impact of other factors such as education, age, place and state of residence constant.

allowed to vary. The variables included in these analyses are shown in Table 1. In addition a dummy variable² for state of residence is also included. In each table, we evaluate income differences in outcomes at two levels, probability of not making any decisions, needing permission to go to all 4 listed places and probability of not being able to go alone to any of the 4 listed places. These are the most gender in egalitarian outcomes; at the other end, we predict most egalitarian outcomes where women make decisions in all 7 areas, can go without permission to all 4 listed places and never need an escort. These are just two sides of the same coin but due to nonlinearity in the model, exact magnitude of the impact is different at different ends of the spectrum. In making these predictions, I hold the values of other variables like respondents' and husband's education, respondent's age and number of children, place of residence and state of residence constant.

Model 1 in Table 3 shows the predicted values in women's ability to move around their neighbourhoods and a short distance by train/bus without permission. As we compare different income groups, we see a consistent decline in women's control over their own movement. Whereas about 56% women from lowest income strata need permission to go to all of the four listed locations, this proportion rises to 60% for women from the highest income group. While this decline is consistent across income groups, it becomes statistically significant as we move from 3rd to 4th income quintile which suggests that women in top 40% of the income distribution are the most disadvantaged. We can see a similar pattern for the outcome where women never need permission but here the difference between different quintiles is not statistically significant, possibly because so few women enjoy this complete freedom.

2 In controlling for a set of mutually exhaustive categories it is common to create a set of variables, commonly referred to as dummy variables, which take value of 1 for each category of interest with one of the categories serving as a reference category. The 33 states and Union Territories are divided into 22 categories, combining some of the small states/UTs with neighbouring states. Uttar Pradesh is the reference category against which other states are compared. Thus, the analytical model contains 21 variables indicating the state household resides in.

TABLE 3: Predicted* Probabilities for Need Permission to Go to Four Listed Locations, Results from Ordinal Logistic Regressions

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2 – Income/Caste Assn. Membership Interactions</i>	
		<i>Not Member</i>	<i>Member of Caste Assn</i>
	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>
☒ Need Permission for All 4 Locations			
Lowest Quintile	0.556	0.552	0.580
Second Quintile	0.573	0.572	0.584
Third Quintile	0.587	0.581	0.622
Fourth Quintile	0.600	0.602	0.592
Richest Quintile	0.603	0.591	0.651
☒ Never Need Permission			
Lowest Quintile	0.079	0.080	0.072
Second Quintile	0.074	0.075	0.071
Third Quintile	0.070	0.072	0.061
Fourth Quintile	0.067	0.066	0.069
Richest Quintile	0.066	0.069	0.055

* Predicted values from Table 1. Holds value of wife's Employment, husband's and wife's education, urban residence, caste/religion, state of residence at mean values

☒ Gender Negative Outcomes

☒ Gender Positive Outcomes

In Model 2, we interact with those who have membership in social and religious organisation and predict the same freedom of movement for women from households with and without these social connections. Results suggest that women from households that are members of these traditional organizations are far more likely to need permission to go outside the home than other households. More importantly, this difference is larger for the upper income

households. Holding all other variables at their mean value, women from non-member households in the highest income bracket need to ask permission to go to any of the listed places with a probability of 0.59 while the probability for member households is 0.65 and it is a statistically a significant difference.

TABLE 4: Predicted Probabilities for ability to Go Alone to Four Listed Locations, Results from Ordinal Logistic Regressions

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2 – Incomel/ Caste Assn. Membership Interactions</i>	
	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Not Member Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Member of Caste Assn Predicted Prob.</i>
☒ Cannot Go Alone Anywhere			
Lowest Quintile	0.114	0.110	0.130
Second Quintile	0.113	0.110	0.131
Third Quintile	0.114	0.111	0.132
Fourth Quintile	0.115	0.112	0.133
Richest Quintile	0.121	0.117	0.139
☒ Can Go Alone to All of the 4 Listed Locations			
Lowest Quintile	0.419	0.427	0.380
Second Quintile	0.419	0.426	0.379
Third Quintile	0.418	0.424	0.377
Fourth Quintile	0.416	0.422	0.375
Richest Quintile	0.402	0.410	0.363

* Predicted values from Table 2. holds value of husband’s and wife’s education, urban residence, caste/religion, state of residence at mean values

☒ Gender Negative Outcomes

☒ Gender Positive Outcomes

Similar pattern is repeated for the other two dependent variables in Tables 4 and 5. The probability that women cannot go alone to any of the listed locations is 0.11 for the bottom income quintile and rises to 0.12 for the top quintile. The probability that they are free to go alone to all four locations drops from 0.42 in bottom quintile to 0.41 in the top income quintile. Women from households that are

TABLE 5: Predicted Probabilities for Respondent Being Primary Decision Maker, Results from Ordinal Logistic Regressions

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2 – Income/ Caste Assn. Membership Interactions</i>	
	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Not Member</i>	<i>Member of Caste Assn</i>
		<i>Predicted Prob.</i>	<i>Predicted Prob.</i>
☒ Not a Primary Decision Maker in Any Listed Areas			
Lowest Quintile	0.503	0.500	0.520
Second Quintile	0.552	0.549	0.569
Third Quintile	0.557	0.555	0.574
Fourth Quintile	0.594	0.591	0.610
Richest Quintile	0.609	0.605	0.624
☒ Primary Decision Maker in All 7 Listed Areas			
Lowest Quintile	0.038	0.039	0.036
Second Quintile	0.032	0.032	0.030
Third Quintile	0.031	0.031	0.029
Fourth Quintile	0.027	0.027	0.025
Richest Quintile	0.025	0.026	0.024

* Predicted values from Appendix Table 3. holds value of husband's and wife's education, urban residence, caste/religion, state of residence at mean values

☒ Gender Positive Outcomes

☒ Gender Negative Outcomes

connected to caste and religious associations are less likely to venture out alone, especially for the top income bracket where this difference is statistically significant.

Table 5 estimates the same models for the respondent being the primary decision maker for 7 different kinds of decisions. Results show that a majority of women are not likely to be primary decision maker in any domain and this lack of authority is greater for upper income women than for the lower income women. In the bottom quintile, predicted probability of women not being primary decision makers in a single domain is 0.50 but this rises to 0.61 in the top income quintile. This is really striking because several decisions involve household expenditures such as purchasing a major item, visiting a health center or social expenditure. One would expect that in upper income households these would be more commonplace decisions and women will have greater flexibility. The fact that they do not is a testimony to women's lack of power in upper income households.

Discussion

I started this paper with a discussion of choices women and their households make between using gender performance—often involving women's absence from public spaces and deference to ritualized behaviours—on the one hand, and performing modernity in which these ritualized displays are considered *passé* on the other. With rising income and incorporation into a cosmopolitan culture, these choices are more stark for upper income households than for lower income households.

Our results show that for each of three sets of behaviours we studied, gender performance is consistently privileged over the performance of a cosmopolitan modernity. Women from upper income households are characterized by their engagement in conspicuous performance of deference and segregation. This focus on gender display for higher income women is particularly stark when they belong to households which are closely connected to caste and religious communities.

The interesting aspect of the results presented above is not that Indian women engage in ritualized gendered behaviours. This has

been well documented for India by a variety of scholars and even more importantly, there are few societies that are free of gender displays. As literature around the world documents, modernity replaces one form of gender display with another. However, what is striking about these results is that this performance of gendered behaviours emphasizing deference and modesty is not ubiquitous, rather that it intensifies as we move up the economic ladder. This also is not a new finding in itself—the Sanskritization thesis was built around this phenomenon. However, the fact that it persists even during an era of rapid economic growth and increasing globalization is noteworthy. Appadurai (1996) identified the invasion of mass media as a key element for disrupting established patterns and creating a new public culture. However, although 60% of the surveyed households own a television and in 75% of the households women frequently watch television in their own or a neighbour's home, this incorporation in global mass media seems to do little to change their worldview, possibly because very few programs contain messages that would disrupt existing gender ideologies (Derne, 2003).

So far in my discussion, I have stayed focused on the gender display aspects of the domains I have studied. However, the implications of these displays for women's empowerment and wellbeing cannot be ignored. When women are not free to decide when to seek medical care for themselves and their children, must ask permission to go to a health clinic, and cannot go there unaccompanied, this retards their ability to get appropriate health care in a timely manner. Thus, regardless of whether these gender displays are *meant* to disempower women or not, they effectively do disempower women and this disempowerment is greater for middle class women than for lower income women. Moreover, in addition to strengthening gender hierarchies, these behaviours also strengthen generational hierarchies.

Poverty constrains many choices for women from lower income groups but they are somewhat protected from the overarching umbrella of gender inequality by a variety of factors. Women from lower income families are more likely to work, more likely to participate in local government and NGO activities and are more shielded from gender displays designed to enhance family status. In contrast, women from upper income households experience

considerably greater restrictions on their physical movements and authority within the household.

This is a somewhat paradoxical observation. Although financial resources should offer wider choices to women from upper income women, in effect their choices are far more restricted in a context that encourages gendered behaviours emphasizing deference to husband and older family members and modesty in interaction with the external world. Moreover, external conditions that might mitigate this hold—employment and lessening importance of caste and religious networks—remains out of reach. Data from National Sample Survey show declining female employment, particularly for educated women (Desai 2013) and the sway of caste and religious networks in modern civic life seems to continue unabated. This is unlikely to result in immediate changes in ritualized gendered behaviours even as India's incorporate in global economy continues apace.

It is important to note the definition of middle class in the above discussion. I have primarily focused on broad categories, comparing women in top 20% of household incomes with those in lower quintiles. Given the striking heterogeneity in the Indian middle class, this group contains a broad spectrum of occupational categories and is not limited to highly educated groups in privileged positions. It is possible that performance of modernity may well be emphasized in the top 1-5% of Indian households. But these elite households are well out of the bounds of what one might call "middle classes" and do not form the focus of this paper.

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SECTION II

GENDER AND SPACE

Public Space and Place: 'New' Middle Class Women and the Gendered Interplay in Urban India

Saraswati Raju and Tanusree Paul

Over the past few decades, space and place have become one of the most discussed and contested concepts in social science research and theory. The somewhat recent 'spatial turn', (re)invoked in response to the threatening global tendencies towards meta-narratives which sees the world as seamless whole with locational specificities being erased, seems to be responsible for this renewed interest. The proponents of spatial turn argue for the centrality and inescapability of positionality and context in construction of knowledge and social reality (Cosgrove, 2004).¹ That the context is provided by the geographical embeddedness of a given phenomenon is a simpler form of this argument. At a more substantial level, as pointed out by Warf and Arias (2009), spatial turn involves: a reworking of the very notion and significance of spatiality to offer a perspective in which space

¹ Sheppard (2002) has, in the context of globalisation and economic order, argued that space/time is a contingent outcome of societal and biophysical processes and (as with all dialectical processes) creates concrete spaces, places and positionality. To him, these places (and positionality) are not immutable or inevitable even as they appear to be so; they have to struggle constantly 'to hold things together' . . . and yet considerable persistence does exist, and the materiality of places and spaces has real and concrete effects on future trajectories. Sheppard is cautious not to use positionality as an alternative to the spatial metaphor, but in his formulation specificity of place plays a significant role in complicating the notion of positionality.

is seen every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs, a view in which geography is not relegated to an afterthought of social relations, but intimately involved in their construction. Geography matters not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen' (p. 1).

In knowing *how* and *why* of the happenings, gendered interplay with spaces necessitates a more nuanced contextual decoding because most of the activity spaces, often categorized into inside/outside, private/public, home/markets, spiritual/material, are neither simple sexually segregated geographical locations, nor are they mutually exclusive constructs. Such binaries are interchangeable and in constant flux and yet across cultures, these spheres are replete with meanings connoting hierarchical order of gendered power structures (Phadke, 2012).

The presumably gender-neutral public spaces are no exceptions as the following interrogation unravels.

Undoubtedly, the interplay of globalizing processes has resulted in reconfigurations of the traditional notions of spaces (and places).² Such processes have ushered in an era of spatial flows in contemporary times, juxtaposing the 'distant and the proximate, the virtual and the material, presence and absence, flow and stasis into a single ontological plane' (Jones, 2009, p.487). Consequently, there have been incessant attempts towards grappling with newer interpretations of spaces (and places) among the academia. One of the major contentions in this reference is time-space compression which refers to movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations (Massey, 1991). Partly, it is due to capital's logic which is responsible in shrinking barriers to production, marketing and profit-making. However, a rather different approach to time-space compression emphasizes more the role of speed in post-modernity through which global space is being 're-mastered' by a totally new geopolitical imagination of accelerating

² Why do we parenthesize 'place' would become clear with the subsequent discussion on the separation of 'space' and 'place'—constructs that have often been mistakenly used synonymously by many scholars.

flows of information and identities undermining modernist territorial formations (Agnew, 2001, p.141). The consequences lead to a time-space compression with a subsequent homogenization of social, economic and cultural aspects across place.

Although such a perspective has gained much currency amongst scholars, we agree with Agnew that such a presupposition is a function of wishful thinking and there is a pressing need for certain scepticism about hyperbolic claims such as the 'death of distance' or the 'end of geography'. As a matter of fact, it is the prospect of annihilation that makes people become more protective about the spaces and (places) in which they live and work since it imparts a sense of rootedness and security of identity amidst the flux. The feminist invocation in this debate brings in the interplay of power which is hierarchical and gendered. For them, the globalising spaces and places are anchored to corporate structures, financial deals, commodity flows and network—the masculinist constructs at the expense of the feminine home, households and community (Nagar et al. 2002), the latter associated with the quintessential binary of inside and the former with the outside. It is interesting, however, that these two worlds often collapse, intersect and overlap, when spatially contextualised.

It is at the juncture between globalising homogeneity and localised heterogeneity that this chapter attempts to trace how spatiality participates in the production of gender relations in general and with reference to India in particular in terms of overlap and permeability of the private and the public spaces; how, for example, the placing of the essentialised construct of women's domesticity intersects with their workspace—how the space and place become mutually constitutive?

The paper is organised under three sections. The initial discussion interrogating the vocabulary of space and place provides a backdrop against which the subsequent expositions are placed. The second section that follows provides a cursory overview of the entwining of space and gender in urban India while exploring how spatial limits and boundaries intersect with gender to produce specific geographies and alternatively how spatial axes acquire prominence in orienting bodily practices. That the relationship between gendered encounters

with space is subject to evolutionary changes is anticipated and yet what elements of surveillance, even as reconfigured constructs, continue to prevail and what actually changes pose challenge to the entire discourse. We, however, maintain that places (along with lived-in spaces), as they get reconfigured and rearticulated amongst conflict and tensions, often contain the resurgent encoding of pre-existing socio-cultural norms and instructions, more so in case of gendered behaviour. The last section concludes the discussion.

Given the thrust of the book, these issues are explored in relation with the emerging 'new' middle class.³ Although examples are drawn from various facets of lives, the focus is essentially on the world of (paid) work in the public domain, particularly on the 'new generation jobs'. This is because as Fernandes (2000) suggests, the newness of the middle class is constituted 'not through the newness of its social basis (that is new groups entering the middle class) but through the newness of the economic sector which is being constructed as the ideal standard for the middle class, one that is specifically linked to structural economic shifts linked to the liberalization of the Indian economy' (p. 89). Radhakrishnan's (2011) observations resonate the same idea when she describes how it is the 'global economy of work and consumption' rather than the 'class composition' that characterises this 'new' middle class; most of the members dubbed as belonging to the 'new' middle class have parents who were part of the 'old' middle class (p. 42).

Space, Place and Gender

Space and place have so commonsensically been used so as not to require definition (Domosh and Seager, 2001, p. xxi), and still both conceptually and theoretically, these are difficult concepts to expand univocally and simply and these continue to remain 'something

³ Middle class is an ambiguous category traced back to colonial administration (Sogani 2002) on the one hand to more contemporary emergence of market-led, newly available high-tech 'new generation jobs' accompanied by consumption culture of liberalising India (Fernandes 2000) on the other.

mysterious to social enquiry' (Dear and Flusty, 2002, p. 61). It seems 'a whole history remains to be written of spaces' (Foucault quoted in Gordon, 1980, p. 149). The vocabularies not only has a strong imprint of disciplinary orientation, space's (and place's) multi-dimensional nature ranging from economic, social and cultural on one hand to political and mental on the other, elude a neat formulation within as well as across the disciplines (Raju, 2011). In fact, there still remain as many positions on this as scholars.

Conventionally spaces have been defined in a Cartesian (geometrical) sense as an absolute, static, fixed and bounded block, a 'thing in itself'—an independent and 'individuate phenomena' (Dear and Flusty, op. cit). Defined thus, for long it has been conceptualized as a passive locus/container for social action, events and processes (Agnew, 2011)—'an empirical space' (Hubbard et al., 2002) within which events take place. It was during the early 1960s that the scholars started questioning this rather simplistic formulation of space. The critics argued that the framing of space in the abstract logic of geometry cannot adequately explicate the spatial structure of social life. Critiquing the construct of space as the 'unchanging backdrop against which life is played out'—(Lefebvre, 1991 quoted in Mitchell, 2000, p. 215), Lefebvre (1974) conceives of space beyond its geometrical connotations and offers several categories of space: absolute space: the lived space which is made up of fragments of nature, where rights and ceremonies are performed; abstract space: functions 'objectally' as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships ; representational space: space as directly lived through its associations, images and symbols; subsumes things produced, and encompasses their relationships in their coexistence a simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. Maintaining that spaces should be explored in terms of how people experience them, Relph (1976) identifies the following broad categories of spaces: through the modes of spatial experience that are instinctive, bodily, and immediate, what he calls pragmatic space, perceptual space, and existential space; and modes of spatial experience that are more cerebral, ideal, and intangible, i.e., planning space, cognitive space, and abstract space (cited in Seamon and Sowers, 2008). Tuan (1977) has furthered the understanding of space and talked about

mythical space. To him, it is the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities; pragmatic space, defined by a set of economic activities and is essentially an intellectual achievement; architectural space embodies the feelings, images and thoughts in tangible material whereas subjective space belongs to the mental realm and denotes the 'inner' aspect of experience; objective space emanates from subjective space (Tuan, 1977, p. 17). Aase (1994) talks about symbolic space, which marks a departure from the typical Eurocentric conceptualization of space, reckons data from symbols and others' construction of space. Soja (1996) puts forth the concept of third space beyond the simple binary opposition of centre and periphery, inside and outside. The third space is a world of political choice which 'ensures the survival of the oppressed, nurtures resistance and provides openings on the edge, in the chosen context of marginality, to build larger communities of survival and resistance' (Soja, 1996, p. 5). According to Harvey (1989), 'the organization of space can be read as a 'text'- it 'talks about' and 'works over' states of affairs which while being imaginary, are nevertheless real in their consequences' (p.213).

Foucault's work on space is perhaps most discussed. He sees spaces as overlapping heterotopias, i.e, spaces of multiplicity or spaces of difference in which conflicting performances can take place as opposed to homogeneous, empty, absolute and abstract space. Although he does not altogether deny the Cartesian notion of orderly space, as Mitchell (2000) points out, he in fact talks about 'analyzing the various geographies of control' that 'modernity has invented' (p. 215). For him places of resistance are 'counter-sites' to such control or dominant order. In the Foucaultian sense, Cartesian space is just that—space whereas heterotopias can be understood as lived-in *place*—sites invested with metaphoric meaning by various socially and spatially positioned players (Mitchell, op. cit).

Most scholars do conflate space and place even though in much of their conceptualizations they, tacitly or explicitly, envisage distinct separation of space (abstract) and place (physical). Although it is not our intention to get into the contested and still unresolved debate concerning what differentiates space and place; what comes

first—place or space or the other way round; are these two mutually constitutive and so, a rather simplified account is in order. To Relph (1976), space and place are dialectically structured in human environmental experience. This is because our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context (Seamon and Sower 2008, p. 44). Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) compared space to mobility and place to pause/stops. To him undifferentiated space becomes a place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. It is through the stability of 'place' that human beings experience and (create) a sense of space. Quite contradictly, for Cresswell (2004) place is space invested with meaning in the context of power. Massey (2005, cited in Raju, 2011, p. 8) also contends that spaces are a larger construct, which refers to the spatial organization of society in a myriad of ways such as network, connections and flows, and so on, and contains more than place or territory. In these conceptualizations, space appears to take precedence over place. For Raju (2011), however, place is prior to space (also see, Bachelard, 1969 and Heidegger, 1975). It is '... a sense of place- a specific landscape, a set of social activities and webs of meaning and rituals, all inseparably intertwined [which] may actually precede and create a sense of space' (Sheldrake 2001, p.7, 13; cited in Raju, 2011, p. 9). As pointed out by Ryan (1994), '... spaces and places become commonly defined for what they are . . . rooted in discourses and practises deeply structured in prevailing relations of power' (p. 40). The precedence of one over the other may be a matter of debate, it is consensually agreed upon that space and place are not two diametrically opposed constructs, but there exists considerable interlocking between the two. To encapsulate the brief: a) places are no longer projected as static and/or passive, instead they are conceived as socially produced and imbued with meaning and symbols, and b) their production embed an active interplay of gendered power as they are often seen as ideologically organized to help maintain established hierarchies, i.e. 'a place for everything and everything in place' is almost an ordained order in many cultures (Raju, 1982; Cresswell, 1996).

Significantly, however, it is the feminist engagement with space and place that has more pointedly brought into focus the intertwining

of gender with various axes in space/place makings. While criticizing Harvey for deploying a biased approach to the understanding of organization of space essentially through that of white, heterosexual male gaze, ignoring thus the embedded 'patriarchal structure of modernity', Massey (1994) maintains that space and place are distinctively gendered arguing that the differentiated 'inside' and 'outside' and 'women's confinement within the former space is a means whereby joint control on spatiality as well as their identity is being exercised by the society. It is the idiom through which 'conventional subordination' of women is being operationalized in the society (Massey, 1994, p.185; also see, Deutsche, 1991; Morris, 1992 cited in Ryan, 1994, p. 37). According to Hanson and Pratt (1995), '... axes of identity such as those of race, class, sexuality, age [and] gender never operate aspatially but are inextricably bound up with the particular spaces and places within which, and in relation to which people live' (cited in Bondi and Rose, 2003, p. 232). As per Bondi and Rose (2003), 'space and place, as materially grounded social constructions shape the ways gender identities and relations are played out, reinforced or modified' (p. 232).⁴ That gender and space are in constant flux is captured by Kilde (1999, p. 455) when she observes 'to contest gender is also to contest space or, more precisely, some of the meanings associated with space'.⁵

Withholding the complex and often confusing views on space/place or place/space the mutually constitutive interplay and the fluidity between the two and the invocation of gendered power dynamics in their articulation are, however, well-received in the

⁴ It is eminent that such a construct of space draws heavily from social theory rather than from traditional literature in physics and mathematics as has been the case with those who define spaces in absolute terms

⁵ According to Srivastava (2012) public and private represents the power alignment. Street as a public space is not neutral. Instead, it is associated with action, rationality, educated opinion, realm where important matters, amongst the rightful claims to public sphere—by men, happen whereas the private provides sanctuary from the 'hustle-bustle' of the public (a superior realm), a soft space—also, the colonial context—home as a repository of all that is 'good' about the culture.

various academic discourses. Based on a variety of contextually specific examples, largely from the world of work in India, the following section explores some of these issues.

Negotiations and Contestations at Workplace

The augmented access to employment opportunities, financial independence and progressive educational attainments witnessed in the contemporary times and the emergence of what is being termed as the 'new' middle class in India should presumably enable women to not only disrupt the overwhelming construct of the binaries between public and private spaces, but also make them question and challenge the patriarchal overtones alluded to in the making of public spaces. One can also challenge the persistence of a particular set of encoded behaviour as ironical because however contradictory it may seem, it has to be acknowledged that the earlier invisibility and the dichotomous split in 'productive' and 'reproductive' spheres and the gendered division of labour which had trivialised women's contribution to labour market in the past is now gradually disappearing (Chhachhi, 1999; Mukherjee, 2008).

Amartya Sen (1999) talks about 'reasoned agency' of those women who have work opportunities outside their homes (p. xii). That such agency and its interconnectedness with other forms of freedom have to further enhance in case of young and well-educated urban women, conflated with (new) middle class, is not an illegitimate claim. To what extent it happens, what pitfalls are still encountered, what social and cultural baggages are still carried on incessantly, are some of the questions that disturb us. We want to (re)visit these, drawing examples from the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sectors—the hallmark of 'new generation jobs' (EPW, 2001; Jose, 2009; Radhakrishnan, 2009).⁶

⁶ A number of studies note the cultural transformation of the urban people who work in the new sectors. According to Fuller and Narasimhan (2007), liberalisation had less radical consequences in the mixed economy of Indian the sense that it has not wiped out the traditional middle classes constituted by the bureaucrats, lawyers, bank officials, teachers etc. However,

In doing so we argue that despite occasional flickers of negotiated and contested outcomes, the knowledgeable ‘new’ middle class does not always function as the ‘agents’ of real social change when it comes to women; by and large working women’s presence in the public domain remains informed by social legitimacy and notions of ‘respectability’.⁷ What one sees is largely a situational rather than possessive change.

That the call centres provide graduates and undergraduate young people with decent employment with reasonable emoluments is well-established. What perhaps are not sufficiently talked about are the work settings—interlinking local with global, compressing time trans-national spaces, independent of traditionally framed/bound places (Harvey 1989). For example, Radhakrishnan (2011) observes how “[t]he interior office environments of most large IT firms in India are designed to look like their Silicon Valley counterparts, or more accurately, to look *placeless*, as if they could be ‘*anywhere*’” (emphasis added). She further cites an Indian IT professional calling this feeling of being ‘anywhere’ a ‘space wrap’.

Workspace ambiance and associated new forms of sociality, subjectivities, lifestyle and identities has been commented upon at length by many scholars (Mukherjee, 2008; D’Mello and Sahay, 2008; Upadhyya and Vasavi, 2008; Radhakrishnan, 2011). Referring to Bengali middle class families and their lifestyles, Donner (2005, p.125) observes how the perceived image of the ICT as a ‘clean and respectable’ industry had transformed women’s educational choices and career preferences creating new opportunities and spaces ‘upon which they [can] re-invent their identity’ (Patel, 2006, p.10). Although the working in the night shifts makes it difficult for women to balance work and personal lives, there is not only an increasing acceptability of women’s work in this sector on the parts of their respective families (Singh and Pande, 2005), the women have been

it has fostered the emergence of a comparable new rich of entrepreneurs and professionals in the private sector, who may be construed as the new middle class.

⁷ This section draws substantially from Raju’s 2013 paper published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (36): 16-18.

able to acquire sufficient symbolic as well as economic capital such that they symbolize the new social regime in India (Radhakrishnan, 2008).

However, to what extent this should be construed as indicative of women's empowerment is an ambivalent question since the 'physical space and the nightscapes traversed by female call centre employees are relatively fixed and confined because their movement is based on a strict home-to-work journey and the spaces they occupy are closely monitored' (Patel, 2006, p. 10).

Ironically, the emancipatory transitions in the public sphere that the IT industries epitomise are not accompanied by the prevailing status quo in the private sphere (Shanker, 2008). The constant struggle to negotiate the work-life jig-saw, puts the counter claim to the proposition that IT sector with its relatively less exploitative avenues of employment would enable them in strengthening their bargaining position at home for the organizational process in this sector is shaped by social context (Dutta and Hussain, 2010; Valk and Srinivasan, 2011).

Paul (2013) bases her study on a purposive sample of about 360 women working in the information technology (IT), information technology enabled services (ITeS) and organised retail in the city of Kolkata. The primary objective of her research was to look into the experiences of those employed in the 'new' job avenues of the labour market. This was to understand how the changes in economic environment affect the gender dynamics in a given setting. Another concern was to interrogate the extent to which the new economic order and the subsequent enhanced spatial access have been able to redefine women's interaction with spaces. The study observes how among the married professionals who were interviewed, most of the men had replied that while they had to accept their present jobs due to compulsion to support family, they would pursue their desired career in future which indicated their career goals and plans. In contrast, most of women interviewees appeared to lack definitive career aspirations. They were ready to work so long as their personal lives were not affected by their professional lives.

One can argue that this suggests men's entrapment within the gender-ascriptive role of being the bread winner in the family.

While such stereotypes indeed have compelled respondent men to immediately enter the workforce, it needs to be pointed out that their future aspirations have only been postponed and not curtailed. The pre-conditions that women have when they look for jobs as well as the reasons that prompt them to change their jobs reiterate their unequal positions vis-à-vis men with respect to career related decisions and choices. Although salary structure remains the most important criteria for job search, such prioritising has been reported by a much higher proportion of men compared to the women; for women professional, short/flexible working hours, proximity to residence and location of workplace in safe areas of the city were the most important criteria.

Almost half of Paul's respondents had reported that their identity as women hinders their career growth. Among them, about half were from the IT, a third of them were from organized retail and the rest were from ITeS. Their marital status, placement in joint versus nuclear families and having children had furthered their constraints; those at the IT sector perceived greater restrictions as compared to those in the ITeS and organized retail. Class location intervenes here. IT employs professionally educated and skilled women; they are subjected to much more stringent professional competition and hence are required to be far more robust in the pursuit of their career. Paul points out how lack of freedom of mobility was a chief barrier for more than half of the women in IT and ITeS sectors. Mobility, as referred to here, not only encompasses ability to freely access the public spaces, but also to strive for professional enhancements.⁸

⁸ Guillaume and Pochic (2009) in their study of higher level management officials note that geographical mobility is often presented as the norm to access top executive positions, and refusing the same could be risky. Career progression patterns also involve a strong correlation between age and career ladder steps. Very high potential professionals must be detected before the age of 35 and they need to reach the first levels of senior management positions before they are 40. This rhythm implies continuous involvement at work with no career breaks, and organizational awareness to avoid dead-end positions or organizational hazards that can slow down the career progression. Last but not the least, managerial careers are built around the learning of time availability, starting with 'on call' operational

The new generation jobs often require unrestrained mobility of not only capital but also labour. The employees are expected to move freely and be willing to relocate for professional growth. It is in this context that women's freedom of mobility appears to be socially controlled and nuanced. While more than half the sampled women employee had lived alone outside West Bengal and also abroad, either for education or for job, staying away from family after marriage for professional needs is fraught with familial resistances. Mobility restrictions anchor women to specific places where their families are located, seldom allowing them to shift base in response to better and prospective opportunities. Even the employers expect them to prioritise their families over career which eventually lead to questioning of their efficiency and commitment as devoted workers. Such preconceptions also shape the decisions of the top management in assigning challenging roles and assignments, thus indirectly obstructing their career growth. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the women are overwhelmingly present in the entry-level positions, but strikingly drop out from the workforce as they start to progress through the ladder. This suggests as to how the expanding workspaces that the IT and ITeS women could have potentially accessed, get curtailed by the interception of internalized spatial constraints.

The often presumed construct of these women as emblems of modernity—as individuals capable of making free choices and independent decisions—gets punctured because the 'choices' and the 'decisions' the women make with respect to their career appear to be circumscribed by socially approved norms of 'appropriate behaviour' which mandate adherence to ideals premised around their reproductive roles. That is, even as they take up challenging roles as

constraints and continuing with time consuming responsibilities. This time-consuming pattern reveals the importance of loyalty in corporate careers and the organizations' demands for total devotion. Overall, temporal norms associated either with career progression or working hours are very prejudicial for women. An intense working involvement is required between the ages of 25 and 35 when they are likely to have children and family constraints. This typical organizational career pattern, linear and progressive, ignores individual life cycles and implicitly assumes that managers are male.

skilled and 'empowered' professionals in the new generation sectors, women appear to continually negotiate with their socially ascribed reproductive roles. Tales of such improvised negotiations resonate through the criteria they have while looking for jobs, the reasons for quitting one job and accepting another, the reasons for breaks in their career, so on and so forth. Compared to these women, those working in the ITeS and organized retail are concentrated mostly in front-office, less skilled jobs with hardly any scope of growth. Despite long and sometimes erratic hours, perhaps their working does not entail as much stress and strain within their families as well as within the workplace.

Paul's study is confined to Kolkata, whereas Nadeem's (2009), observations on BPO services include not only customer support, but back office and financial services and an IT subsidiary of an investment bank. The outsourcing sites are based in Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai. The author thus provides a broader view of the social landscape that the new middle class is anchored to. According to Nadeem (2009), even here, the arrival of 'new' middle class:

[D]oes not [necessarily] herald an era of unprecedented personal or consumer freedom, a belated 'modernity', nor does it signify a crisis of the 'traditional' Indian family. Rather, it is an Indian morality play where the pleasure principle clashes with the demands of custom and obligation, where kama (pleasure) and dharma (duty) meet in uneasy suspension. That is to say, while the new global division of labour does produce tensions and even irreconcilable conflicts, it is far from effecting a generalized cultural transformation. (p.103)

Radhakrishnan (2009) eloquently articulates the continued framing of 'new' middle class working women in professional IT sectors, symptomatic of "the arrival of 'global' nation, rather than a parochial or traditional one" (p.197) within the idealised construct of (Hindu) women based on a powerful dichotomy between the 'inner' and the 'outer', 'material' and 'spiritual', 'home' and 'market'. The idioms, however, have now changed from spiritual placing to construction of middle-class domestic within the realm of family (and the location of women within it). According to her, the symbolically authoritative dominance of middle class allows the conception of

'family-first' to bear upon the national consciousness, opening 'up space for grappling with the embeddedness of gender' which shapes labour market outcomes. These IT women themselves enact highly competent 'professional' femininity, but one which remains 'markedly Indian' (Radhakrishnan, 2009, p. 200-201, 209).⁹ In a way, in author's formulation, the middle-class gendered sensibilities eventually get institutionalised to reflect the broader Indian culture. A somewhat identical observation is made by Patel and Parmentier (2005). Accordingly, women's participation in IT workforce is based on a continuation of traditional gender roles whereby 'technology and its development . . . adapt[s] to the existing social structure' (p. 29). Further, '[t]he persistence of . . . gender divides perpetuate the notion of gender segregation and do not enhance women's socio-economic and political status, nor provide equal participation in the information economy' (Kelkar, Shrestha and Veena, 2002).

The gendered segregation at workplace because of prevailing social norms and practices is yet again visible in the engineering field which, as a profession, has traditionally been characterised by male dominance. Of late, this trend has been changing as women from newly acquired middle class status enroll in the field of engineering. However, their employment rate has not only been slack, they are primarily being absorbed in teaching departments of technical educational institutes (Parikh and Sukhatme, 2004). There is a curious ambivalence at display here. On the one hand such women have been able to break away from the stereotype, but on the other they are stuck with the traditional typecast. Banking is another such arena where societal factors impact both the individual and organization that converge in perpetuating the existing stereotypes (Mirza and Jabeen, 2011).

Although we maintain that the overarching framework within

⁹ Radhakrishnan elaborately brings out the tension that is generated because of the long and erratic hours of job requirements in IT sector vis-à-vis women's responsibilities towards home and family. Although the divide between work and home blurs under such conditions, questions regarding priorities begin to rise. Her research suggests that women rarely privilege career aspirations over family life.

which even the new middle class women in public spaces are placed continues to remain highly constrained, the liberating sparks are not entirely absent. In a nuanced analysis of call-centre workers, Patel (2010) does point out how the concerns for the safety and morality of women working in the night shift work camouflage reiteration of recodified regimes of patriarchal surveillance, and yet the socio-economic and spatial mobility the night working grants is welcomed by many women. To them 'loosening of family bonds [is] especially bracing', particularly as it leads to a recasting of gender roles and control over one's sexuality. Gainful employment is not synonymous with 'empowerment', but in a social setting where women are often considered repositories of family honour, being able to work at night with men is no small matter' (Nadeem, 2009, p. 115).

However, a caveat is in order, the multiple locations of women along the caste/class axes in the Indian context makes the space/gender encounters more nuanced. In Paul's study of Kolkata, young women in organised retails were from socially marginal classes aspiring for status enhancement to newly emerging middle class. Both, Nadeem and Paul point out the differing societal perceptions between the IT and BPO industries; whereas the night shifts and the generally lower-end work in BPO and call centre puts workers in uncertain social rank, IT and back-end organised retail are not stigmatized. Employment in BPO can endanger one's marital prospects; that in IT it does not because of higher pay and the possibility of emigrating to the West. BPO workers occupy an inferior position in a privileged social universe. The 'positional suffering' that results is no less real in case of those who are not as privileged because it seems to occur only among a relatively well-off group in class terms (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 4, quoted in Nadeem, 2009, p. 117). However, it may be contended that with increase in the share of women in the BPO sector, those who may be from relatively better background continue to experience such positional suffering because of their occupational placing. How occupation and class intersects is an intriguing question in itself, and yet it is not that clear in the present context so as to arrive at any definitive statement.

The neo-liberal reforms can be said to prompt the emergence of new middle class in India, at least partially. If so, Ganguly-Scrase

and Scrase's (2009) observations regarding neo-liberal reforms and its intersection with women substantiate the complex relationship between (new) middle class sensibilities and space. Drawing upon intensive fieldwork in Kolkata and Siliguri of West Bengal, they observe how the middle class absolves itself from the ideological hegemony (of market and consumption) of neo-liberal agenda. Although many are indifferent to the benefits of reforms, there is no particular negativity towards them either.

Overall, it may seem that the ever-enlarging spaces for women workers in 'new generation jobs' are signifiers of 'India . . . leaving its parochial past behind in favour of something more progressive' and yet '[a]t the same time, this empowerment could go too far' threatening 'existing notions of a good woman and a good family' (Radhakrishnan, 2011, p. 79).

Why this should be so is an intriguing question. In advancing our arguments, Kagitcibasi's concept of the 'autonomous-relational' self (2005) comes handy. But prior to that let us forefront the assumed association between paid work, autonomy and agency of women in the Indian context, which often gets negated in the face of empirical evidences. It has been argued that the pathways interlinking increased access to resources translating into changes in the strategic choices that women are able to make, both at the household levels as well as at work, are fraught with questions such as the terms of reference with which women gain access to resources—are they empowering or exploitative; what are the trade-offs; how precisely does women's greater access to resources impact on gender relations and norms more broadly, and so on (Kabeer, 2005). Such questions epitomise the complexities of any process of empowerment associated with (paid) work and the need for a more comprehensive approach which recognises the multiple factors affecting the choices women make about their lives (Raju, 2013). For example, access to easy credit has been seen as empowering women through their entrepreneurial efforts, but the same has also been criticised for making women responsible towards loan payment thus adding to overall burden without much (assumed) control over the raised incomes (Goetz and Gupta, 1996).

The potentially liberating notion of women in 'new generation

jobs', does not work in its entirety in empowering processes. This is because such an assumption is located in the Euro-American cultural context with its ideological emphasis on individualism. For Kagitcibasi, autonomy and heteronomy are the two sides of the same coin. An individual can have interdependent as also independent self in a 'dialectic mutuality' or 'coexistence of opposites'. Thus, education and paid work status can impart a certain sense of individuate identity and yet such identity can still be circumscribed by self-efficacy and negation vis-à-vis the presence of relational self with the familial other.

Transgression in public spaces occurs also by way of negotiating confrontation with capital.¹⁰ Walby (1990) distinguishes between two forms of patriarchy- private and public. According to her, the former is based within the household and taking recourse to a more exclusionary strategy which leads to expropriation of women, while the latter is functional in the outside domain where state and public employment come into play, and entail public appropriation of women through a rather segregationist strategy. In somewhat similar vein, Spain (1993) associates patriarchy with the private and capitalism with the public space, thus suggesting that the private form of patriarchal domination is reinforced by practices more of socio-cultural nature while the public form of patriarchy is sustained by practices that perpetuate economic inequity based on gender. We contend, however, that such a strict separation of domains is somewhat erroneous as elements of private patriarchy—the constructs woven around familial primacy—intersect with how the patriarchal constructs play out in the public as well.

¹⁰ Marxists have typically argued that the development of capitalism had led to a worsening of women position with the separation of the home from paid work. The 'family economy' was overtaken by the 'family-household system' - a combination of a household structure based on the dependence of members on the paid labour of husbands or father and the unpaid labour of wife/mother in domestic tasks and the ideology of the family—the private sphere beyond the public realm of community and individuals.

Everyday Production of Gendered Spaces

We have argued for the framing of gendered behaviour in public places symptomatic of women's essentialised placing within the confines of 'respectable femininity' in nuanced, overtly or covertly, ways. A more direct manifestation of gendered division of public spaces is visible in working places for new generation jobs.

One of the feminist critiques of neo-liberal discourses has been the masculine nature of their focuses on corporate structures, financial deals, commodity flows and so on which are invariably associated with the outside/public domain (Nagar et al., 2002). A careful observation of such public spaces would indicate that they are implicitly imbued with certain 'gendered messages' (Massey, 1994). Paul observes that to think in terms of the spatial binaries of the public and the private, the roles which are critical to the functioning of the business can be considered as the primary driving force, therefore appropriated by men, while the enabling services although important are secondary and therefore earmarked for women. In the ITeS sector, women are largely employed in the voice-call processes dealing with clients and customers while men doing the more crucial 'back-end jobs'. This is also the case in the retail sector where most of the human resource managers are constituted by women while other back-end services are carried out by men. The front end retail staff dealing with floor operations, electronic goods and appliances, sports goods etc. are constituted by men; women remaining mainly in ladies' and kids' sections and customer services. In both the ITeS and organized retail sectors these front end tasks are perceived as more tedious, less lucrative which is reflected in the fact that most of the respondents in these jobs want to change to the back end jobs in their respective sectors (Paul, 2013).

The newly coming up Salt-lake—Rajarhat New Town area on the north-eastern fringes of the city of Kolkata is a case in point. This area is home to the swanky corporate-run information technology and financial organizations. Considerable ambiguity has been noted through participant observation and sequential photographing of various functions in this area from within and with others (Paul, 2013). Surprisingly, the pattern of occupancy of the new business

district located in the newly emerged IT hubs is no different from the core business district of the old city. These new spaces with state-of-art glass-fortified buildings hitherto unforeseen in Kolkata, where people not only work in 'first-world' conditions but also live in their time zone, and which is to symbolize the generation of new middle class in modern-day Kolkata is unequivocally masculine when it comes to physically claiming the public sphere. Here also, men are observed to be occupying the streets, side-walks and road-side stalls, for food, smoke or chat, while women remain conspicuously absent (Paul, 2011, 2013).

Enhanced activity space in physical terms is presumed to bring more 'spatial confidence' for women (Koskela, 1997, p. 305). However, in reality such spatial confidence appears to be mythical in terms of actual behaviour in physical space. Thus, despite working in professional high end sectors, women's negotiation with public space is rather indecisive. Even when they occupy the streets and seem to be moving freely, sexually intimidated and apprehensive, their bodily language enacts within certain limits.

Leisure spaces are another instance of ambiguity. While women are not completely denied a right to leisure, the nature of leisure itself and leisure spaces they can access is clearly defined by notions of safety and honour. Thus while small road-side tea shops, *paan* shops, parks etc. appear as masculine leisure spaces, the newly emerging consumption places such as cafeteria, restaurants etc. emerge as rather feminine leisure spaces because women feel safer and more respectable in an enclosed space as a result of their socialisation. These new consumption spaces, often termed as quasi-public spaces, have opened up multidimensional spaces of contested opportunities, both as sites of new identities and new gender roles and production and reproduction of prevailing structural relations. While Phadke et al. in their study on public spaces in Mumbai (2011, p. 41) argue for liberating experiences in gated locations for 'women's body language in malls demonstrates a sense of belonging that is not really visible in other kinds of public spaces'. Other public spaces, irrespective of their location in the old or new parts of the city, are overwhelmingly appropriated by the men. For example, despite having a greater access to public spaces in Salt-lake—Rajarhat New Town area because of

day/night shifts, respondent women in Kolkata continue to feel sexually intimidated and apprehensive in the public spaces (Paul, 2013) Women's access to public leisure is much more nuanced; although women are not completely denied access to public leisure, they need to be in the right place. Men, on the other hand can engage in leisure anywhere and at any time.

More than 50 percent of the women working in the night shifts feel 'uncomfortable' outside the usually accessed neighbourhoods. Besides about three-fourth of these women reportedly would not feel safe if they have to navigate the night-time city unchaperoned. These findings are in consonance with the findings of a recent survey, conducted by Assocham in 2012 of about 5,000 women working in large, medium and small-scale companies in National Capital Region, Mumbai, Kolkata, Pune and Hyderabad. Accordingly, as high as 92 per cent of the women surveyed feel unsafe especially during the night shifts in all major hubs of economic activities across the country especially in key segments such as BPO/ITeS, hospitality, civil aviation and nursing homes. As per the information provided by the Assocham Secretary General, women employees in BPO's and ITeS, travel and tourism and nursing homes are most vulnerable and prone to both physical and non-physical attacks especially after their duty hours are over.¹¹

The reason behind the persistence of feelings of fear and anxiety among women despite such an intensive engagement with public space envisaged by working through evening and night shifts is a baffling question indeed. Historically, all rules and legislations in India pertaining to women's employment, namely the Indian Factories Act 1911, the Bombay Maternity Benefit Act, Article 66

¹¹ Official statistics indicate that crime against women is on the rise in all the major Indian cities. The Times of India conducted a public poll on 25.9.12 asking whether the city of Kolkata is becoming more and more unsafe for women. 86.6 percent of the respondents answered in affirmative, mentioning that it is not only Kolkata, but the whole of urban India that is becoming unsafe for women. (Source: http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/majority-of-working-women-in-india-feel-unsafe-after-dark_817526.html 19.12.12).

(c) of the Indian Factories Act (1948) institutionalised women's restricted access to work and mobility in masculine public spaces through legal prohibitions. Although in 2005, by amending article 66(c), women were 'allowed' to work in night shifts to respond to the need of the new ICT economy; in reality this actually reflected that 'women remain tethered to a patriarchal framework that dictates what a woman can and cannot do' (Patel, 2010, p. 50).

Several safety mechanisms to 'protect' women working during 'odd' hours are in place.¹² While these attempts mark sincere intentions on the part of the employers to oversee the security of their women employees and facilitate their work participation; nevertheless, it cannot be dispensed with that these efforts also reify patriarchal regimes of surveillance and morality-mobility encodings. Through these strategies, 'notions of women and respectability are constructed as a way to control and confine women, with respectability used as a mechanism operating between identity and space and producing gendered subjectivity, spatial knowledge and ultimately gendered space' (Boyer, 1998, p. 267-68 cited in Basi, 2009, p. 151).

Ranade (2007) and Phadke (2007) in their study on claiming the public spaces of the city of Mumbai note, that women can access public space legitimately only when they can manufacture a sense of purpose for being there. They are seldom found wandering in public spaces without any purpose as men do; women occupy public spaces as a transit between one private space and another. Women are socialized to certain notions of safety and risks, 'proper' and 'improper' and the safety through respectability is what they thrive to attain through their negotiation of public space. As Tenhunen (2006) observed, '[t]he way to move about with honours to go out when necessary, that is, for a good reason and in good company' (p.115). Mathur (2007) observes that, among other things, women's

¹² The security measures adopted by various BPO companies include GPRS tracking devices in vehicles or security guards escorting women to their homes, strict and thorough background checks of the drivers and Security guards who accompany women employees at night, strict monitoring of the women's pathways till their arrival at home, self-defence etc.

ability to take decisions on their own spatial mobility i.e. where, when, how and with whom they can go out is representative of their bodily integrity which implies their intrinsic right to have control and autonomy over their bodies. Perceptions woven around the norms of being the 'ideal' women in the public space get reflected through the opinions of the politicians, so-called ascetics, bureaucrats as well as some sections of the civil society whose contentions is that a woman who does not stay within her limits in terms of dress, code of conduct or spatial location, appropriate time etc. and crosses the proverbial '*Laxmanrekha*', ought to be reprimanded. Thus the women's transcends of traditional identities and transgression of the spatio-temporal boundaries is ruptured by regressively gender-encoded access to the public spaces.

In Sum

The free play of the globalizing processes over the last two decades has ushered in conspicuous economic as well as cultural changes. Consequently new economic spaces are coming up in the form of information technology hubs constituting variety of IT, ITeS and outsourcing jobs amongst others such as organised retail trade etc. It has been argued that the associated opportunities, both in terms of work and leisure, have been significantly appropriated by the women. However, the seemingly increased access and visibility of urban educated women in the public or masculine world of paid work and leisure needs to be problematised. The overarching ideological constructs regarding 'good women' continue to govern the overall behavioural pattern of professional women workers transcending the binaries of public and private—these two fuse and merge into each other. Moreover, the ways the workspaces are organized, they actually embed asymmetrical gender relations, implicitly or tacitly. That is, women's place in the traditional gendered hierarchy transcends these workspaces to produce duality of existence for them. This can be appreciated if we recall how places are seen as imbued with meanings; meanings that may relate to person's sense of boundedness, belonging, situatedness and emotional anchoring. Places have also been seen as a containing several constructs of social

relations. Arguing thus, we negate Castells (1996)'s proposition which suggests the notion of 'placeless space' or 'disembedding' induced by globalising processes whereby 'space is separated from place and social practices are' delinked 'from local contexts . . .' (Giddens, 1990, quoted in D'Mello and Sahay, 2008, p.78).

In sum, socially and ideologically, although the women in IT culture partake in the production of 'new middle class', the overarching material and symbolic fix of 'idealised' Indian women continue to haunt such positioning. To this extent, professional women in general tend to not only enact, but also reinforce and negotiate the notion of respectable femininity. The fusion of global with Indianness is thus legitimised.

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Gated Spaces, Commodity Cultures and the Politics of Gender

Sanjay Srivastava

I. Commodity Cultures as Quotidian Cultures

This ethnographically derived discussion focuses on new urban spaces such as gated residential communities, and the re-fashioning of religious and wedding rituals in order to explore contemporary relationships between gender and consumption. It examines the ways in which the historically disquieting figure of the ‘consuming woman’ is positioned within new arrangements of residence, leisure, custom and consumption. In addition to restoring to gender its actual meaning as a relationship—through an exploration of masculinity—the paper also seeks to open up the question of sexuality, since women’s involvement in the ‘world of goods’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) also, in principle at least, positions them in contexts beyond the asexual mother and the dutiful sister. This discussion asks: what is the conjoined politics of gender and ‘freedom’ (including sexuality) in the seemingly new worlds created by women’s involvement with trans-national patterns of consumerism?

The discussion is organized around the idea of ‘moral consumption’ and ‘retractable modernity’. These terms are used to suggest the ways in which consumerism is the ground for both an anxiety about gender as well the ‘solution’ to questions of women’s (and men’s) identity in a time of rapid social and economic transformations. Hence, unlike scholarship that suggests that the relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ cultural contexts is expressed by the subjects of change as denunciations of the decline of bonds of community and family life in the wake of rampant consumerism (e.g. van Wessel 2004), this

paper proposes that consumerism and its antitheses (however these are imagined) are easily reconciled in everyday life *through* recourse to consumerist discourses themselves.

II. Spatial Modernity: DLF City

The field-work context upon which this paper is based concerns the 3500 acre privately developed DLF City in the district of Gurgaon in Haryana. The Delhi Land and Finance Corporation ('DLF', established 1946) made its first application to the Haryana government to acquire agricultural land for urban development in 1979.¹ Beginning in the mid-1980s, DLF City was constructed by the DLF Corporation and is regarded in both scholarly (King 2004, Dupont 2005, Brosius 2010) as well as popular writing (Jain 2001) as a significant site for the making of contemporary cultures of transnational urbanism in India. Its malls, gated residential enclaves and offices (occupied among others by call centres, BPOs and prominent multi-national corporations) speak of an urban transformation that is also the making of a new ideas of the modern—'middle-class'—Indian self. However, notwithstanding its current image as a significant force in the making of a '21st Century' India (DLF's corporate slogan is 'Building India' and both corporate and official promotions refer to Gurgaon as 'Millennium City'), there is a longer—and instructive—history of spatial modernity and urban improvements that involves this private entity and the state. I outline this history in order to point to connections between aspects of modern Indian political economy and the key focus of this paper, viz., the social relations of gender.

The Delhi Land Finance company was established in 1946 by Chaudhury Raghvendra Singh, a civil servant and landowner. Till the mid-1950s, DLF had a significant presence in the private real estate market in Delhi. The key aspect of its business strategy was the company's ability to both surmount as well as manipulate the

¹ Letter number CE (P)/79/6293 from DLF United Limited to The Director, Town and Country Planning, Haryana, dated 3 September 1979. Copy is in possession of the author.

extraordinary layers of land and 'planning' regulations instituted by the colonial state (see, for example, Hosagrahar 2007, Legg 2007). The background to this lay in the control the state exercised over vast tracts of *Nazul* lands, viz., 'the Delhi Crown lands denoting property which has descended to Government either as successor of former Government or by escheat, in absence of heirs to legal owners' (Gazetteer of Rural Delhi, 1987). The colonial government had in 1874, 'handed over the administration of *Nazul* estates to the Delhi Municipal Council as well as all income accruing there from' (*Hume Report* 1936: 3). Hence, private interests in the real estate business such as DLF had two ways of acquiring land for their commercial activities: buying from large land-holders (*Zamindars*) whose properties escaped the *Nazul* regulations, or acquiring lands falling under the *Nazul* areas through negotiation with the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT). The Trust was established in 1937 in the wake 'of a report by Mr. A.P. Hume, ICS on congestion in Delhi city' (*Annual Administration Report of the Delhi Province for 1937-38*: 26-27). Its key objective was 'slum clearance' (see Legg 2007).

Given the monopoly of the state over urban land, negotiations with it in order to further private enterprise formed a crucial aspect of the urbanism nurtured by DLF; *its* urban spaces and citizenry were created through treating the state as a facilitator of individual choice. DLF's 'colonies' were carved out through combating the professed 'socialist' and anti-consumerist proclamations of the state. It is this relatively long history of the consumer-citizen, nurtured among the processes of private urban development that forms the background to contemporary contexts of urban citizenship that I discuss in this paper. This parallel history—one that sits alongside that of the centralizing state with its emphasis on curbing consumption in order to invest in productive industrial capacity—allows an understanding of present as both an accumulation of the past *as well as* a break from it. This history is also crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the state and the market in the making of 'civil society' and its discourses of gendered citizenship. The manner in which this relationship contributes to the making of different kinds of public-ness has been the focus of analysis in different fields including 'educational reform' (Kamat 2002; see also 2004), 'bourgeois

environmentalism' (Baviskar 2002, see also Baviskar, Philip and Sinha 2006), and middle class 'environmental activism' (Mawdsley 2004).

The urbanism conjured by DLF was founded on a keen grasp of spatial-bureaucratic *realpolitik*, and the company became adept at finding its way around the maze of official rules and regulations that stood in the way of its commercial ambitions. However, notwithstanding its initial success, DLF's real estate business in Delhi came to an abrupt end in 1957. For following a highly critical report of an inquiry into the functioning of the DIT published in 1951, the government promulgated The Delhi (Control of Building Operations) Ordinance of 1955, leading to the establishment of the Delhi Development Provisional Authority. The Provisional Authority was, in turn, succeeded by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1957.² The Ordinance of 1955 elaborated a magisterial vision of urban control, positioning DDA as a land monopolist and proscribing private real estate activity.

With DLF unable to ply its lucrative trade in Delhi—by the late 1950s it had developed some twenty-two private 'colonies' in Delhi—it turned its attention to various other businesses but without much success. In the late 1970s the company was taken over by the founder's son-in-law, Kushal Pal Singh (b. 1929) and the new head turned his attention beyond Delhi's borders into the state of Haryana. This appears to have been prompted by two factors: his father-in-law had landholding in Gurgaon (estimates range between twenty-five to forty acres), and DLF's Delhi-strategy of 'tapping into old family connections' and appeals to community ties to acquire land could be replicated in Haryana.

² The inquiry was constituted under the chairmanship of the leading industrialist G.D. Birla and the report came to be known as the Birla Report. In blunt terms, it concluded that 'the story of the Trust is the story of failure' (Birla Report 1951: 7); that its record of slum-clearance had been 'meagre' (DIT Enquiry Report 1951: 3), the Town Expansion Schemes had merely resulted in the 'freezing' rather than 'development' of considerable land areas (*ibid.*); it had commissioned neither a 'civic survey' nor a 'Master Plan', and, its strategy of selling land to the highest bidder had only exacerbated the 'housing problem' (1951: 4).

From the late 1970s, and primarily under KP Singh's initiative, DLF launched upon an aggressive policy of land acquisition in Gurgaon district, then a largely agricultural area occupied by a mixture of Jat, Ahir, and Gujar castes. Singh's own Jat background appears to have been instrumental in his practice of consanguineal capitalism as he smoothed the way for his company's subsequent rise to real estate behemoth.

Confronted with a context of small land-holdings (typically four to five acres) and multiple ownership patterns, Singh relied heavily on local knowledge to achieve his aims. Hagiographic accounts relate how obtaining clear title involved securing agreements with dozens of owners, a task achieved through invocations of bucolic trust and patrimonial obligation between caste and community brethren. Grass-root corporatism was matched on the other hand, by persistent lobbying of the state to change laws that militated against residential development on agricultural land (see, for example KP Singh's autobiography, Singh 2011). This was achieved through measures such as the re-classification of agricultural into 'nonagricultural' land. The blending of corporatist ambition with state patronage, communal bonds, and peasant cultural economy paid rich dividends, and by the mid-1980s, DLF had acquired some 3,500 acres of land in Gurgaon—much of it on credit, with promises to pay later—and was ready to transform the rural hinterland into, as its publicity later proclaimed, the 'Millennium City'. The city came into being through close collaboration between state entrepreneurialism and local and global capital. It was accompanied with changing perceptions on the part of middle-class citizens regarding the 'beneficial' aspects of corporate engagements with everyday life. This forms an important backdrop to the discussion below on gender relations in the new middle-class.

As of December 2006, DLF projects (residential, commercial, and retail) were spread across twenty-nine cities across India, with 'over 220 million square feet of existing development and 574 million square feet of planned projects'.³ Through an extraordinary

³ http://www.dlf.in/corporates/dlf_city/overview.asp, accessed 20 July 2007.

slew of numbers denoting colossal spatial transformations and the discourse of 'transformation' itself, DLF has created the image of a nationalist-corporate alternative to the slothful and unreliable spaces of the bureaucratic state; this 'new' India fires the engines of economic creativity through etching its sharply defined motional intent upon previously inert landscapes. Population estimates for Gurgaon vary according to the source. According to a recent report, the areas falling under the recently (2008) constituted Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (that includes DLF City and several other privately developed residential enclaves as well as older areas of the district) contained around 1.2 million persons. However, Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) dispute this estimate, claiming the true figure to be closer to 2 million. The RWAs suggested that the 'true' figure had been suppressed so that the Corporation did not have to make provisions for the actual number of residents.⁴

In addition to new residential spaces such as gated communities, DLF City also contains a variety of leisure, shopping and commercial spaces. These includes a '18-hole Arnold Palmer' golf course, a number of members-only clubs, shopping malls, multiplex cinema halls, a Bollywood theme park, multi-cuisine restaurants and global fast-food outlets, and the offices of leading multinationals and call-centre companies. Fields of green have, within the space of some two decades, turned into spaces of global commerce and habitation fueled by changes in the economy since the mid-1980s. One of the most significant of these has been the rapid expansion of the retail banking sector which has made it relatively easy to obtain home loans, thus further fuelling the real-estate boom that makes Gurgaon and DLF City what they are (Khanna 2007).

III. New Rituals of Space: Gender in Place

I have provided a detailed background to the making of 'new' Gurgaon—in the form of DLF City—in order to outline the material (or, spatial) and political economic aspects of the making

⁴ Sanjeev K. Ahuja '11.53 lakh population: The Numbers Lie, Say Residents', *Hindustan Times*, 10 August 2010, p. 4.

of new forms of sociality. In the present discussion, this relates to the new contexts of consumer cultures, the relationship between citizens, the state and the market, and the politics of gender. That is to say, I wish to explore the relationship between economic and cultural entrepreneurialism (see, for example, Gooptu 2014) that characterizes spaces such as 'New Gurgaon' and the new politics of gender and sexuality. I begin this discussion on 'locating gender' in the spaces of new middle-class cultures through ethnographic vignette relating to women's participation in religious activities within a gated community in DLF City that I will refer to as Essex Gardens.

All gated enclaves have their Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs). Historically, RWAs have dealt with issues of common concern such as 'security' (through appointing private guards at key entry points), maintenance of local infrastructure (such as parks and gardens), resolution of localized disputes, and the organization of social and cultural events for their members. Compared to the 'open area' RWAs (i.e. those associated with localities with independent houses), those of the gated communities have far greater leeway in producing imaginaries of desirable public-ness. In almost all cases, RWA office-holders are elected to their positions (of President, Secretary, etc.), with elderly *males* constituting a substantial number. There is a tendency to favour retired officers of the armed forces as RWA functionaries, perhaps seeking to attach the aura of military discipline to that of the modern housing locality.

The RWAs are, then, male dominated—with 'special cells' for 'women's' activities—and women very rarely take a leading role. The exceptions are some older English-speaking women who are able to interact with men on reasonably equal terms. I was told by a senior official of a Delhi-based NGO that oversees interactions between the government and RWAs, that women representatives found it difficult to travel with their male counterparts without attracting 'adverse comments'.

The RWA at Essex Gardens gated enclave (name changed) organizes a number of community activities within condominium walls and *Holi* celebrations constitute an important event on its annual calendar. In the popular imagination, public celebrations of *Holi* frequently figure as contexts of unruly behaviour both towards

women as well as 'respectable' citizens in general (Cohen 1995). The RWA-organised *Holi* at Essex Gardens is an elaborate affair. At the recent *Holi* celebrations, for example, a stage had been set up on the main lawns of the complex. It was surrounded by a large-scale music system. Young men and women, as well as middle-aged couples, danced to Bollywood music being played by a 'Disc Jockey' hired for the occasion. There was also a 'Bacardi Bar' that handed out free alcoholic drinks, as the Residents Welfare Association had secured 'sponsorship' from the company, allowing it to display a number of its banners around the complex. A few weeks before *Holi*, the RWA had also organized a cricket tournament that had been sponsored by a local car dealership (as a large banner mounted for the duration of the tournament informed passers-by). Indeed, the Association has established close and fruitful links with a number of corporate houses. The Essex Gardens water-harvesting scheme, for example, has been sponsored by the Coca-Cola Company.

Janmasthanami, the festival that marks the birth of Krishna, is another popular event at Essex Gardens. Celebrated 'on the eighth day of the waning half of the lunar month of *bhadrapad*' (Hawley and Goswami 1981: 62) that falls during August-September, the festival is based upon elaborate local roots that draw upon networks of kin, neighbourhood and religious ties. So, in the city of Vrindavan (strongly associated with Krishna's childhood), Janmasthanami celebrations involve a variety of priests, performing artists (who enact 'nativity' plays) and lay worshippers, each of whom draws upon and contributes localized resources. Janmasthanami celebrations at Vrindavan (not dissimilar to those in other parts of India) are also organized around acts of commensality—feast and fasts—that further institutionalize community bonds through participation in non-monetised ritual activity (Hawley and Goswami 1981). For the past three years, the festival at Essex Gardens has been organized and overseen by the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), founded in New York in 1966 by Srila Prabhupada. ISKCON members who live within Essex Gardens took an active part in convincing the RWA to allow the group to take over conduct of the festival from residents. At a recently organized Janmasthanami event, the celebrations began with a *bhajan* (prayer) by a group

of ISKCON devotees who sat on a large stage that faced several rows of chairs. To the right of the stage, a projector connected to a laptop beamed colourful swirling images on a large cinema screen. As the lead bhajan-singer repeatedly requested residents to join the gathering, the crowd built up to around a hundred and a group of women, including one from a Essex Gardens household that is member of ISKCON, began to dance in an empty space in front of the stage. It was an improvised dance that followed ISKCON 'street dance' pattern in many western cities. The dancers exhorted others to join, and a few (all women) did so.

A powerful sound system ensured that the singing reached all parts of the complex. Soon after, two male ISKCON devotees joined the dance, but to the right of the stage, away from the women. They were joined by a few other male residents of the complex. Whereas the women danced in gestures of bliss and devotion in front of the *jharokha* (tableau depicting Krishna as child), the men—perhaps appropriately, given the association between masculinity and technology—danced in front of the laptop. Two specially attired girls also came forward to dance to verses recited from the *Gita*, and an ISKCON devotee offered a discourse on the text. By now, the cinema screen was displaying 'star-wars' like graphics of flying machines, flaming arrows, a twirling globe and a variety of psychedelic animation. The ceremony was building up to a crescendo. The dancing women improvised, doing Indian dances such as *Garba* and *Gidda* popularized by Bollywood, as well as free form. The ceremony concluded with an *arti* (lamp) ceremony, and the cutting of a 'Krishna birthday cake' which was then offered as part of *prasad* (sanctified food). The screen now showed scenes from American cities where American *bhakt*s (devotees) danced sang and spoke about their lives as 'Krishna *bhakt*s'. The ceremony lasted some three hours, with the laptop uniting the Essex Gardens space with an American one. The 'West' was here, via a confident cosmopolitanism that could include it in the broader tableau of Indian culture, a situation unmarked by anxiety and angst regarding 'cultural imperialism'. We ate our cake and dispersed.

Within localities such as Essex Gardens, the suffusion of local space with an easy familiarity with transnational cultures of

commodities also happens in other, more obvious, ways. One of the most common ways in which group interaction takes place is around stalls that are set up by consumer goods companies, each carrying prominent signage regarding their wares and the company name. Every other week, a mobile van or a portable tent promoting a variety of goods can be found within the Essex Gardens premises. On one occasion, Honda Motors advertised its newly launched 'Jazz' model by inviting residents to inspect the car, which had been parked next to an information booth. A young woman exhorted adults to 'come down and see for yourself', while children took part in dancing competitions and were awarded for composing ditties about the vehicle. Some months earlier, an electronic goods company had put up a stall at the same spot. Consumerism—its discourse of choice and the newly imagined relationship with the corporate sector—is also the ground for the play of the gender politics that I wish to explore in this discussion. This is the context of moral consumption and retractable modernity.

IV. Locating Moral Consumption and Retractable Modernity

The making of moral consumption (and an associated moral middle class) is, as I have argued elsewhere, a context 'where the active participation in consumerism is accompanied by an anxiety about it and its relationship to 'Indianness' (Srivastava 2011). Moral consumption, in my usage, refers to the context where consumerist activity is accompanied by explicit and implicit discourses on both taking part in it *and* the possibility of exercising control over it through withdrawing from it at will. This is different from accounts that suggest that Indians view consumerism as a threat to established life-ways (van Wessel 2004).

The proscription of 'indulgent' consumption is a significant aspect of long-standing cultural discourses of the sacrificing and nurturing mother (Donner 2011). However, it is possible to recast this perspective through exploring the ways in which such proscriptions are frequently encompassed *within* acts of consumerism.

In a separate discussion that explores emerging relationships

between women, public spaces and consumerism,, I have suggested that women visitors to the Disneyfied (and hyper-consumerist) Akshardham temple complex in Delhi move seamlessly between playing consumers and devoutly religious persons (Srivastava 2011). As in the case of the female residents of Essex Gardens, women visitors to the Akshardham complex seemingly rub against the strictures that militate against women's access to public spaces and self-directed consumption (SWSJU 2010; Phadke 207; Ranade 2007; Donner 2012). The 'consuming woman' appears to have access to new urban spaces such as gated communities and religious theme-parks that are contexts of a significant change in the relationship between gender and 'purposeful activity' through the consolidation of a new imagination of 'loitering' (see Phadke, Khan and Ranade 2011). The former relates to the popular perception that there are specific conditions under which men and women may access public spaces. Hence, while it is generally understood that men's access to public spaces need not be tied to a 'purpose' (i.e. carrying out specific tasks), the idea of women loitering in such spaces is treated as both incomprehensible and condemnable (see also Ranade 2007). At Essex Gardens and Akshardham complex, women loiter.

In this discussion, however, rather than view the issue of women, consumerism and public spaces as one relating to a lessening of patriarchal strictures in the wake of the 'opening up' of the economy, I would like to position it as an entry into the complex cultural politics of consumption. The consuming woman—the one who is 'indulgent' towards herself rather than her husband and sons—is a figure of recent import in Indian public discourse (see, for example, Uberoi 2008, Srivastava 2007, Oza 2006). There is, no doubt, that she also approximates to an emerging category of real-life women (Uberoi 2008). However, what is also not in doubt is that the older strictures upon women have not simply been cast aside through the tide of consumerist activity in the wake of economic liberalization. De Neve suggests that newly affluent industrialists of the knitwear garment manufacturing town on Tirrupur in Tamil Nadu, even as they have plunged headlong into the processes of consumerism, 'seek to locate themselves at the heart of what is locally constructed as an integrated and moral Tamil society' (De Neve 2011, p. 75).

In a similar manner, the consuming woman must hew a path between 'indulgent' consumption and being a 'good' woman. It is a path located between personal desire, masculinist anxiety and approbation. That is to say, that while 'The "civic" is increasingly tied to discourses of consumption and a free market' (Lukose 2010, p. 155), women's accounts 'reveal a more ambiguous space of freedom in which it is possible to have some choice but little agency' (Lukose 2010, p. 130). I seek to utilise 'moral consumption' and 'retractable modernity' to analyse this context.

The relay between 'choice' and 'agency'—and the politics of gender within contexts of new middle-class-ness—can be further explored through an examination of the newer models of family life that now circulate in tandem with discourses of consumerism. The gated community as a physical space is—as outlined above—part of broader processes of political, economic and social change. These are also reflected in certain other contexts, allowing us to examine contemporary thinking on ideas of the self. Patricia's Uberoi's (2008) discussion of Indian 'bridal magazines' provides a useful entry into this topic. The magazines Uberoi takes up for discussion were mostly launched in the mid-1990s and address an imagined high-income consumer, not unlike occupants of an up-market gated community. The following quote from an editorial in the inaugural (1997) issue of the *Bride and Home* magazine captures the social terrain that that bridal magazines encounter, and also allows us, via Uberoi's discussion, to think about the discourses of domesticity in a new context of consumer culture.

Arranging a wedding in India [the editorial says] has traditionally been a family affair, and so it should remain; but it is to offer choice that *Bride and Home* steps in and gives young couples a freedom to partake in the most important decision of their lives: marriage. (Quoted in Uberoi 2008, p. 239).

Bridal magazines such as *Bride and Home*, Uberoi says, address young women through the notion of 'choice' in a social context 'where descent, succession and inheritance are in the male line; post-marital residence is 'patrivirilocal'... and authority resides with the senior males of the family or lineage' (Uberoi 2008, p. 245). And

yet, within all this is the idea that the 'modern' form of marriage and domesticity—such modernity defined through an association with the goods and services (including those of 'marriage planners')—is a key moment in the making of modern Indian identity. How then to address the tension between older (and very real) structures of power and the apparent promise of consumerism-led liberation? Here, Uberoi suggests that, the domestic sphere becomes a site of 'adjustment' to changes on a broader scale: it is a place 'of the consolidation of this new, cosmopolitan culture of Indian kinship and marriage, that is self consciously both 'modern' and 'ethnic'" (2008, p.245). Applying this insight to the present discussion, we might say that contemporary domestic-nationalism conjures a family type based around a 'couple' whose modernity is based around its 'freedom' to make choices about the goods it might consume rather than, say, 'spousal choice' (Uberoi 2008, p.241). That is, the emerging politics of domesticity—that which relates to the gated community as well as ideas of intimacy and marriage conjured by *Bride and Home*—consists of reformulations and *reinstitution* of older structures of power in a new era of consumerist modernity.

Taken together, moral consumption and retractable modernity relate to the idea of both being an active consumer, as well as having the ability to withdraw from the realm of consumption to 'return' to realms represented as its putative antithesis such as religion, ritual and 'proper' domesticity. It is also the context of a civilization discourse on the relationship between 'tradition' and 'modernity' and, thereby, an explicit entry in to the politics of gender. Moral consumption is the site of the making of middle-classness in terms of the relationship that men and women are expected to have to contemporary processes of social and economic change.

What is the model of public-ness provided by gated communities, religious theme parks, and the re-making of life-cycle rituals such as those written about in bridal magazines? What forms of freedom of movement and participation in community life do they articulate? These questions might be more fully addressed through considering the *different* kinds of activities that the women of gated communities take part in. The cosmopolitanism of the new 'arts' of the body—gym cultures, dancing in public alongside men, exercises of running

and walking, for example—are *combined* with ‘older’ practices of religiosity, household duties, and participations in ‘women orientated’ customary rituals that are also part of gated community life. As I have argued elsewhere (Srivastava 2007, chapter eight), this presents us with a situation where ‘public women’ are offered the ‘freedom’ of public spaces (and the activities associated with them) and who, concurrently, demonstrate the ability to return to the ‘home’. That is to say, unlike men, women’s access to public spaces is tied to their commitment to the private sphere: they must both be ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’. This might be termed the politics of domestic nationalism, a context that concerns post-Nehruvian developments relating to new forms of residence, leisure, consumerism and gender relations. It is this context that I seek to summarise through the term ‘retractable modernity’: displays of the capacity for moving in and out of the realms of the ‘modern’ and the self-proclaimed ability to return to ‘tradition’.

During field-work, one of the most frequent comments by female residents of Essex Gardens related to their active involvement in the public life of the community. And, almost all women cited ‘safety’ as a significant context for their new found ‘freedom’. Feminist scholarship has usefully suggested that the discourse of ‘safety’ that is companion to the issue of women’s access to public spaces is mired both in patriarchal and masculinist notions of ‘protecting’ women (and hence men’s honour), as well as classed notions of urban threats to ‘respectable’ women (Phadke 2007; SWSJU 2010). The contract of ‘safety’ seeks to guard women’s ‘reputation’ and hence brings with it, among other restrictions, a ‘desexualised’ version of public visibility (Phadke 2007). The choice is clear-cut: women should be safe in public spaces, but this also entails ‘proper’ conduct on their part.

In order to generate a sense of community that caters to *all* senses of neighbourly life, the Essex Gardens RWA organizes a vast array of public events and activities and religious discourses by ‘renowned’ *gurus* are frequently accompanied by ‘free demonstrations’ of the latest consumer goods. The controlled nature of gated communities does not, however, translate into ‘sterile and predictable patterns of inhabitation’ (Phadke 2007, p.1515). The haphazard encounters

that the street offers—where temples are festooned with advertising bill-boards—are even more intensely reproduced within the gated community. What makes possible the ersatz pell-mell of the street is the directed circulation of the discourse of consumerist choice and intent that is *uninterrupted* by the ‘distractions’ of the street such as the need for constant vigilance against putative others. It is within this crucible—where the street is not the street, but for precisely that reason, enthusiastically embraced—that ‘public’ woman can be both the guardian of tradition *and* take part in the sexualized presentations of the self; at night, elaborately dressed women perform the rituals of *Karva-Chauth* (to ensure their husbands’ well-being), and the morning after they pace the condominium grounds on their exercise rounds dressed in skin-hugging and sexually expressive clothing. And, unlike the constraint placed on women at public celebrations of the spring festival of *Holi*, at the VP Bacardi-sponsored *Holi mela* (fair), men *and* women danced together to Bollywood songs on an open-air stage.

The broader context of the above is a particular kind of gender politics that relates to the perceived ability to move between the worlds of ‘tradition’ and modernity (see Srivastava 2007) by exercising choice. Through the notion of choice, consumerist modernity and its spaces offer women the possibility of both maintaining their ‘reputation’, and taking part in ‘disreputable’ activities denied by the open-street. It is in this sense that contemporary middle-class notions of urban citizenship—with its specific configuration of a hybrid modernity—reformulates the ‘fraternal social contract’ (Pateman, 2002) within its own terms to include the consuming woman within its remit. Hence, the female consumer-citizen takes on a significant role in the RWA discourses of the making of the ‘global’ city and its inhabitants. The sense of community that is produced through public performances of *Karva Chauth*, Bacardi sponsored *Holi* revelry and ISKCON organised *Janmasthami*, and Coca-Cola’s sponsorship of ground-water harvesting schemes circulates among these localities in a far more intense manner than might be the case in the retrospectively barricaded suburbs of Delhi. The latter kind of locality is imperfectly barricaded and its territory, traversed by a mixed traffic of vehicles and people, defies strict policing, either of

people or ideas. Notwithstanding this difference, however, what the two spaces share is the idea of a middle-class under threat from a variety of sources, including slum dwellers (in Delhi) and villagers (in Gurgaon). Gates are mechanisms for both producing and assuaging anxieties.

The making of a moral middle-class, one that has control over the processes of consumption, and hence modernity, is in fact, located in the processes of consumption itself. For, it is only through consumption that one can demonstrate *mastery* over it. So, one consumes a wide variety of products of contemporary capitalism—consumer goods, leisure services, etc.—in combination with more abstract commodities such as ‘spiritual’ goods such as religious rites and wedding rituals and nationalist celebrations. What differentiates the moral middle-class from others is its *capacity* to take part in this *diverse* form of consumption, whereas a more an de-racinated (‘westernized’) middle-class is imagined as only being able to consume the products of capitalism. Here, the refashioning of urban space tells us something about perceptions of different kinds of middle-classness and their perceived relationship to consumption practices. It is also a narrative of the perceived relationship between space and identity. I have explored this idea elsewhere in a discussion around ‘women’s’ magazines such as *Grhalakshmi* and *Grhashobha* (Srivastava, 2007). There, I have suggested that the side-by-side positioning of extraordinarily explicit articles on sex and sexuality with those on religious ‘values’, rituals, and texts should be understood in the context of the process of moral consumption. That is to say, as the activities of a class that sees itself as ‘truly’ Indian because it is not defined by foreign modernity, but is rather, able to define its own version; *this* middle-class can take part in the processes of modernity, but also ‘pull back’ and return to ‘tradition’. And, the process of consumption is simultaneously that of establishing its ‘morality’: for it is only through the engagement with a wide variety of things—commodities, spaces, whatever—that the ability to *withdraw* to the realms of tradition can be demonstrated. Hence, it is in this sense that gated communities and a growing body of discourse—such as that represented by *Bride and Home* magazine—that speaks to the new lifestyles represented by them, represent spaces for the making of a

moral middle-class identity. These class identities are, simultaneously, gender identities within the new cultures of consumerism: they outline 'proper' modes of gendered engagement with the world of goods' unlike van Wessel's informants (van Wessel 2004), there are no anxieties about consumption itself, but only a concern with the 'best' way of consuming.

Finally, moral consumption while it applies to both men and women is particularly able to account for *women* as new consumers. Moral consumption provides a solution to the 'problem' of women as consumers, as imagined through masculine discourses. For, historically, at least in the Indian case (but also for Europe, see Rojek 1993; Lancaster 2000), there has been a fraught relationship between women and consumerism: in masculine accounts of Indian culture, women are expected to be non-consumers, devoted to the welfare of the home and the nation, rather than indulging in self-pleasure (e.g. Chatterjee 1993; Sunder Rajan 1993; Roy, 1998, esp. chapter six, and Sarkar 2001).

In the contexts outlined above, however, women wander in spaces aligned to consumerism, become familiar with a wide variety of commodities (beyond, say, those used in the kitchen) and fashion themselves as uninhibited consumers. .

Within established discourses regarding 'feminine conduct', this is a context of masculine anxiety. For, consumerism speaks of autonomy of different kinds, including the sexualized self. However, the anxiety is assuaged through the idea of choice, which is an integral aspect of consumerism itself: the women are secure in the knowledge of their capacity to both take part in consumerism *and* withdraw to the realm of the family etiquette and 'true' Indianness. So, we might say that in this context, the class politics of 'distinctions' (Bourdieu 1992) takes a detour through the post-colonial politics of 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Chatterjee 1993). Consumerism here is the grounds for the making of a moral middle-class—and a politics of gender—within which women are not determined by modernity, but are able to take part in it and return home when required. Contemporary consumerism provides the grounds for the making of moral consumption: for one must take vigorous part in consumerism in order to display one's ability to withdraw from it.

One must display modernity to remain traditional. The relationship between moral consumption, moral middle-classness, new urban spaces such as gated communities and the refashioning of rituals speak, in these ways, to the long history of anxiety about the public woman through the question: how can the public woman belong both to the world as well as the home?

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‘In the Middle’: Mediating the Mall, Home and the World Outside.

Krishna Menon and Rachana Jobri

The middle class in India like most other things about India cannot be homogenized. It is best described in the plural and is a truly heterogeneous and diverse. The middle class in Europe is intimately linked with the experience of modernity and all that came with it. Capitalism and free market, new property relations and a new family structure, liberal philosophical outlook with its celebration of the individual, ideas of individual rationality and enterprise and a secular citizenship aided by a blossoming of artistic and literary growth assisted by a print revolution were some of the ingredients that went into the making of the middle class.

Karl Marx had a nuanced response to the emergent middle class. He celebrated the middle class—freed as it was from the particularistic tyranny of feudal Europe on the one hand, but on the other hand he despaired at the realization that the middle class with its firm roots within the bourgeois economy, society and politics would never be a beacon for revolutionary change and transformation.

In our context, the middle class has a very different trajectory—mediated as it is by colonialism. A considerable amount of scholarship exists on the complex and different nature of Indian modernity. Modernity with all its dubious bounties burst upon the Indian shores mediated by colonialism and not as a consequence of an organic process of change and transformation in the society. This ‘passive revolution’¹ has created a capitalism that has been described

¹ Kaviraj, *EPW*, vol. XXIII, no. 45-46-47, November 19, 1988; Partha Chatterjee, *EPW*, Nov 22, 2014–37, September 14, 2013.

as having all the vices of the old but none of the virtues of the young.² While seeking rapacious bounties of capitalist exploitation of nature and human beings, the Indian middle class unlike its European counterpart was not tied firmly to the emancipatory and egalitarian discourse of the Enlightenment.

At the risk of simplifying the complex history of capitalist transformation in Europe, one could argue that the West experienced an organic revolution when all old structures, practices, institutions and beliefs were weeded out (in varying degrees though) and replaced by a new and universalizing logic of modernity. The discourse of modernity was the universal light that shone through the political, social, economic, intellectual, sexual and other aspects of life. The middle class came to represent this universal light of rationality and egalitarianism.

As against this, the middle class in India was compromised at birth being granted by the needs of colonialism into a largely feudal and hierarchical milieu. This has meant that the middle class in India is not the product of a progressive historical and social process of change, and hence does not bear in uniform or strong measures the progressive orientation and zeal that its western counterparts did.

This analysis should not be taken to mean that the western story is without its exceptions or complications. However, it is truer in the case of the West that the middle class and its world view had acquired a universalizing presence. That is most definitely not true of India. With large scale economic changes in the nature of global capitalism and the movement of labour, immigrant populations with their distinct cultural and social structures have challenged the universal framework of the western world.

The Indian middle class with its origins firmly located within the colonial system has never been (is now struggling perhaps) the unchallenged arbiter of Indian society, economy or polity. It has consistently had to come to terms with the abiding presence and looming shadows of pre-modern discourse and structures. This has meant that the middle class (with ties in the new economic/cultural/social system) is not the naturally dominant class in Indian society.

² Randhir Singh, *EPW*, 6, February 08, 1992

In the early years following Independence, the Nehruvian state forged ahead its agenda of creating a modern India. One of the vital ingredients of this was to be a modern middle class. The Indian state went about addressing this shortfall by assigning to itself the rather puzzling task of creating the middle class. The economist Pranab Bardhan (Bardhan, 1984) has often referred to the Indian state employing the midwife's knife, referring to the fact that the state through its various economic policies and regulations assisted in the birth of a middle class.

This early middle class that was painfully put together by the development strategy of the Indian state was needed to be the bulwark against feudal and pre-modern markets and lives. The middle class was to be the mascot for everything that new India was to represent—modern, progressive, liberal-democratic in its orientation and free from primordial identities such as caste and religion; a class which would produce all the modern things of life—ideas, goods and services, newspapers, cinema etc. This class it was hoped would take India from its feudal origins to its modern avatar.

Being state created, this middle class however was sluggish and not fully free of its rural, agrarian, feudal and hierarchical past completely. This has indeed become the central feature of the middle class in India. Zoya Hasan (Hasan, 2000) has argued rightly that the middle class in India wants nothing more than modernity but abhors its identity eroding consequences. Thus this middle class would like nothing better for instance to be able to continue with the traditional privileges of caste, class and gender while being assured of a place in the community of global middle classes around the world.

By the 1970s a strong middle class was set in place thanks to the Indian states' active assistance and involvement. This middle class was characterized by a restlessness and impatience with the state and its meddlesome ways. The old model of state craft, economy and patronage politics had outlived its utility and the middle class was keen on recasting it.

The old style Nehruvian state was withering away, and so was the old avatar of the Congress Party. In its place was a new state with a new dispensation presiding over neo-liberal economic changes. The old style frugal middle class that had as its primary objective

the generation and creation of capital through savings was replaced by a middle class that came to be characterized by its ability and propensity to consume and spend. Capital accumulation gave way to consumption. (Partha Chatterjee, 1999)

Through a series of economic policies the Indian state dismantled the earlier structures of license-quota-permit-raj that were legitimized as socialist instruments. The sloth and corruption built into any state structure plagued these as well, and further discredited the state initiative in the eyes of the middle class. The early nineties saw the rapid disinvestment and a withdrawal by the state from the market mechanisms. A policy of liberalizing the market, privatizing the state sector and globalizing the Indian economy was initiated aggressively. This changed script required a new cast of actors and a new set of props and costumes.

Far reaching socio-cultural, technological, linguistic, sartorial and many other kinds of transformation have characterized this process. Urban India including small town India and indeed rural India have undergone a series of transformations pushing it closer to the globalized consumption economy. The emerging middle classes are plural and diverse in nature and numbered at a staggering 250 million. The middle classes in India as argued by Satish Deshpande (Satish Deshpande, 2004) are internally differentiated and extend over the wide range of the upper managerial sectors to the rural classes. Sections of the middle classes have responded differently to the ongoing economic changes- some welcoming and embracing it in its entirety, and others, who had a vested interest in the older systems, more guardedly and sometimes even critically.

While there are some sections of the middle class with the benefit of technological and English language skills that benefits more from this process, there are vast sections of the vast middle class that look askance. At the same time there is always the thrilling prospect of joining from the margins, more like cheerleaders if not the main players on the field. Like cheerleaders these sections facilitate the spectacle of consumptions and are important conduits for the delivery of the new life style. Call centre employees, pizza delivery boys and indeed young women at the innumerable stores in the glitzy urban malls are good examples of this group. The promise and

lure of a new consumption life style exists, although they may yet not be a part of it. The promise however, is enough.

As Leela Fernandes has argued, (Leela Fernandes 2006) the new class requires a new aesthetics expressed through the possession of new commodities. The old car, the old phone, the old house, the old diet, old entertainment and indeed the old way of shopping have all to be replaced by a new global sensibility. This has resulted in the growth of a retail and service sector that has been steadily absorbing workers from the manufacturing sector.

The 'state created' old middle class was a product of an India that valued as its symbols- the big dams, factories and steel plants. The new middle classes in sharp contrast are characterized by their open contempt and disdain for the state and its projects. (Leela Fernandes, 2006) The new symbols are the symbols associated with global consumption patterns and all that assists in this consumption.

This unabashed worship at the altar of consumption has had a far reaching impact on the construction of sexualities as well. Sex is slowly but surely getting unhinged from its procreative padlock of Nehruvian India. This was characterized by a surreptitious and furtive attitude towards sex and the pleasures of the body. Neo-liberal Indians on the contrary, constructed by the market as it celebrates consumption and bodily pleasures, are no longer guilty- most certainly not about sex. The market is itself sexualized and sex is commodified.

India in the 1990s is characterized by the boom in private automobiles, assisted by the privacy of mobile phones, the exploding audio-visual media, the internet with its endless possibilities for direct communication, pubs, discotheques and the ideology of the market cater to the expanding and youthful migrant population freed from its traditional roots new ways of constructing and conducting themselves. The possibility of unmediated and unsupervised sex is certainly one of the new possibilities. The malls in urban India symbolize the celebration of this economy of desire and consumption.

Rupal Oza has argued that (Rupal Oza, 2012) the near universal enthusiasm amongst the middle classes for an unshackled economy in the 1990s is however not matched by a similar enthusiasm for the unshackling of sexual, social and cultural mores. Globalization

takes over the economic sovereignty of the nations, which she argues is compensated for by an attempt to control and regulate the sexual and social aspects of life resulting in greater surveillance and control of women especially.

National sovereignty as understood in Nehruvian India extended to the economic sphere. This was very significant for an India emerging out of colonialism. However post 1990s, this sovereignty is sought to be exercised through a rigid control and construction of sexual and gender identities. This is a complex process; the recent judgment on the issue of homosexuality is one such instance. The aggressive market assisted reinforcement of feminine beauty is yet another. The explosion in the beauty and cosmetic industry is a case in point. The innumerable spas and gyms and the expansion of cosmetic surgery, and permanent hair removal centres etc point in the same direction. The packaging of this new middle class has to be in conformity with a carefully calibrated global standard, calibrated in such a way that traditional patriarchal, heteronormative and caste privileges are not challenged or recast in any way.

This, perhaps it might be argued is a typical consequence of what Partha Chatterjee describes as ‘our modernity’—a modernity that is almost bipolar, rather tenuous and ambiguous about its own nature. While the dazzling lights of neo-liberalism have been allowed access into the economy, the access into the social, sexual and cultural spheres is highly contested.

Cities and the New Middle Classes

In many ways the ideals of a globalized modernity find maximum expression in the metropolitan cities of India. Although the pull of these transformations can be found in smaller town as visual images beam into domestic spaces far from these metropolitans, the possibilities of sharing these new worlds seem greater in larger cities. In India, as elsewhere in the global south, cities increasingly conform to a ‘world class aesthetics’ (Ghertner, 2011) and are marked by the preponderance of the visual (John Urry, 1995). Elizabeth Grosz (1999) defines the city as a network that links social and spatial relations. The continually shifting landscape of a city organizes both the aesthetics and the economics of space and place. Cities, bodies

and subjectivities are intertwined in a complex set of relationships. Although hierarchies exist, it may be argued that the heterogeneity prevalent in most cities of the global south is 'replete with districts where different capacities, inclinations, purchasing power...are intertwined in dense proximity' (Abdou Maliq Simone, 2011) (Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, 2011) The women who work at shopping malls find themselves deeply involved in this urban heterogeneity.

Shopping Malls

The history of shopping malls in Delhi begins in 1999 with the opening of Ansal Plaza in south Delhi. By 2000, a series of changes in the land use policy of Delhi by the government allowed for the emergence of mega structures. Today Delhi is dotted by around 100 such malls spanning all parts of the sprawling city. Select City Walk, where much of the research for this paper has happened, has been described by Bharti Chaturvedi (2010), as a place buzzing with people, not necessarily the extremely rich and credit card carrying consumers often associated with such swanky places. The mall is as much a space for people with little spending capacity, benefiting from the comfort of air conditioning and relative safety whether for parents of young children or dating couples. At the same time the restricted entry means there is monitoring of who can find a space within this space (Voyce, 2007). It is probably true that these 'new fortresses' render invisible all but the middle class shoppers. For these middle classes, however, malls give a sense of belonging to the cosmopolitan world, and perhaps an opportunity to imagine an escape from the local. The spatial representations of the mall are of safety and security. Malls are represented as spaces associated with particular lifestyles, which in turn assume a normative quality. In the context of an unequal hierarchical and squalid urban Indian context malls produces a sanitized and glamorous public space that is supposedly non-hierarchical. The mall is a temple dedicated to the gratification of the body and its senses. Malls and glitzy shops are the conduits of a new global way of being that celebrates pleasure and its fulfillment. While Voyce writing about consumers sees the mall culture as falling in line with the depiction of the middle class as lacking civil awareness and responsibility and the mall as a space

of purification and safety, there is little reference in his and much other writings about those who work in these malls. An interesting departure is evident in Nandini Gooptu (2009) examination of the mall workers in Kolkata.

Mall as a Gendered Space

In many ways our paper is located within and extends questions pertaining to feminist writing on the gendered nature of space. Here “*space*’ refers to a complex construction and production of an environment—both real and imagined; influenced by socio-political processes, cultural norms and institutional arrangements which provoke different ways of being, belonging and inhabiting” (Shilpa Phadke, 2012, p. 53). The gendered nature of physical spaces is evident from the pervasive, though problematic, notion of public and private space. The gendering of space defines who can appear in a public space, the appropriate ordering of time that determines when these appearances are deemed legitimate and the manner in which these appearances may be performed. Despite the problematic conceptualization of the binary of public and private space, it may be that one of the characteristic features of contemporary urban India is in the increased fluidity that marks the boundaries between private and public space.

Fernandez and Heller (2006, p.500) classify the Indian middle class into three strata, advanced professionals, small business owners and others with dominant aspiration to the first category, and finally the salaried workers with limited education but little authority over other workers. Amongst those who are employed in malls are a large number of young women who are located at the lower borders of the middle class.

The women who we seek to understand in this paper are rarely discussed in research on malls. We focus on the young nubile women who work in stores becoming the purveyors of this new discourse of pleasure and desire so inextricably linked with consumption. Our focus has been on women who are employed by stores that sell food, cosmetics and clothes, becoming the embodiment of unfettered desire, the ideal conduit for the creation, communication and

the consummation of this desire. This paper envisages the lives of these women as they travel every day, crossing borders of class and neighborhood from their residences to the space of erotic bodies and hyper reality. Based on ongoing interviews we attempt to capture the lives of these very recent entrants into the middle classes to reflect on the ongoing debates on the new middle class and gender in the context of these new spaces.

We seek to understand how the mall in urban India reconfigures traditional hierarchies and class distinctions. It is an interesting site because it showcases a specific way in which the local and the global come together, creating a new set of closeness and distance as it were. Physically their work in the malls brings these young women much closer to the global life styles of the rich, but their inability to afford that lifestyle and the alien nature of the lifestyle that it sells, creates a huge distance between them and the space that they occupy. This is virtually like crossing borders on a daily basis from what is little better than a shanty into the glitzy and opulent world of the mall, only to trudge back into the dingy and uncomfortable homes in their 'unauthorized colonies'.

In deciding to explore the lives of young women who work on the shop floors of the malls of Delhi, we had deliberately chosen a new site that embodies neo-liberalism and a class group that must negotiate this world with the world of home that falls outside the class character of the shopping malls. Were sites of work such as those of the malls creating the possibility of a new middle class woman? How does she come to understand this location both vis-a-vis the familial world she comes from and the physical world outside the space of the mall. We wondered how women negotiated the experience of living in such proximity to the objects of desire that seemed to mark success in the contemporary urban imagination when they themselves had to return to spaces that could be defined largely in terms of an absence of these. In asking this question we seek to understand the emergence of a specifically urban Indian neo-liberalism that provides for a possibility of new identities for middle class women.

This paper is part of a larger ongoing study on the lives of young women workers in the malls of Delhi. The primary focus of the study

is on the possibilities of new subjectivities that emerge in the new spaces of work particularly with reference to the experienced body. The women we have studied are mostly in their 20s. They have largely completed school. Some of them are continuing their education through correspondence but not all. The group we interviewed has some married women. We met a few pregnant women and a few had children. They also include women whose families are in Delhi and some who have migrated to Delhi. The women we spoke to were selected primarily on the basis of their availability and the stores they worked in.

The Mall Experience

Deepali, whose father was a carpenter and mother was a 'housewife', was working at a lingerie store and was completing BA through correspondence. Deepali earns about 10000 a month. The small excerpt from her interview reveals Deepali's relationship to the mall and the customers who visit it.

'We often compare...our salary is 10-11000. A customer comes and spends the same amount at one go. Our salary is not as much as they spend on shopping. They do not even look at the price sometimes spending 4000 on a little thing, and on the other hand we wait for days for the sale to start. Businessmen have no concept of a budget. Even foreigners are more careful, 'too expensive' they say and leave...There are some people in between these as well. They buy only within a specific range but sometimes they really like something then they pick it up. One has to convince them a little'.

Deepali's classification of customers is indicative of the keen observation of others that Abdul Maliq Simone speaks of. This classification points to her clear understanding of her location in the hierarchy of the mall and also the unequal nature of the world she inhabits. Yet, malls are recognized as providing economic and cultural opportunities to a range of people. Asked if malls were good for India, she says,

'Yes, I think it is. Because there were many people here who did not have jobs but now they do...like guards and staff like us. This is how

India will progress, people will seek education, they will become well mannered, and caste will lose its importance'.

In presenting this progress narrative of an India of malls, Deepali produces herself as a member of India's new middle class. This sensibility is a marker of new urban spaces. As we see in Deepali's classification of shoppers, these fragmented spaces contain possible worlds for a broad spectrum of people. In this paper, however, we wish to discuss a different relationship to space. For the women workers of these malls, daily life involves occupying multiple divergent spaces. Although the women themselves would not classify their worlds as such, we could describe their worlds as constituted by three distinct spaces. The Mall and home from the worlds of work and domesticity respectively. As noted earlier there are sharp differences between these worlds. However, the most significant contrast was surprisingly not between the mall and home, but the mall and the world outside. In the following sections we will try and describe the three worlds of these women and the dynamics of travelling between them.

The World of the Malls

The women we spoke to share an understanding of the mall as a distinct space marked out by difference from the world outside. The mall is described as a safe space where you can be as you wish.

'In the mall, you can wear whatever you want, no one notices you, no one comments'

Although unreasonably expensive, it is clean and comfortable and represents the world of progressive India. Apart from the material comforts of air conditions and the clean toilets, life on malls was exciting. The word 'new' came up often. It was fun to meet new clients. There was always something happening. The malls were clearly experienced as an entry into the new world. A striking quality that bears directly upon the question of the middle classes of the workers was the repeated references to their work and life on the mall as a source of new learning. Being in the malls taught you how to belong to this world, seeming almost like a form of education into the contemporary.

A Microcosm of the Neo-liberal Ethos

Perhaps the special characteristic of the mall lies in its capacity to combine safety with excitement. Malls provide the young women the ways to become someone else. It would be facile to suggest that the transitions into the world of the malls comes easily, and we will discuss later that they do not. There are other middle class spaces of work too, but the mall offers the possibility of specific pleasures that may not be available elsewhere. Here it seems that the mall becomes a site for the education of young women into the new world of desire. By working on the shop floors, women learn about the latest fashions. Their everyday interactions with customers help them to understand the manner in which individuality is expressed and cultivated through the utilization of the products they sell.

Much of the work they do is concerned with the enhancement of femininity. Customers bring varied approximations of the contemporary ideals of this femininity to the shop floors and their interactions with the workers often take the form of imparting new 'knowledge' to them. The skills involved dressing up and applying make ups, where *'we can actually show our skill as applying makeup comes naturally to her and to women generally'*. *'Customers are well dressed, watching them teaches us how to dress'*. Working on the mall requires a daily engagement with new customers. A significant aspect of the work involves the ability to satisfy the particular demands of each customer. Given this uniqueness of customer choice, the work is never replicated and each day poses new challenges and new opportunities for work.

Part of the pleasure of working on the mall comes from the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the contemporary. To work on the shop floors of a mall is to be in the midst of the rapidly changing world of fashion. As part of the shop floor, women enjoy trying out the new garments, cosmetics and other products launched regularly at their work place. The phrase 'times keep changing' came up often. In these rapidly changing times of fashion, the shop workers derived a special powering being in touch with popular trends and abreast with the knowledge of the new. Our participants seemed to enjoy following the latest fashions. As they pointed out, the clothes on the mall were extremely expensive and rarely affordable. However, they

now knew about the latest designs which they would incorporate into clothes they had stitched by local tailors in their neighborhood markets. In addition, the work provokes an imagination of better prospects, becoming a manager, setting up a factory back home etc. Throughout the year 'we keep getting trainings and all, it's a constant process'. In a world dedicated to the new, where awareness of latest fashions constitutes knowledge, the work creates a refined personality. Meeting new people, learning about brands, learning to speak English, listening to Western music and learning to drink coffee are some of the new cultivation that work on the mall teaches.

To work on the mall requires acquiring a new habitus. Abdou Maliq Simone observation of the dense proximity of urban spaces seems to be relevant here. Class backgrounds amongst other characteristics, though visible are highly under coded in comparison with the world outside. This absence of certain criteria that mark out class distinctions creates a pattern of greater attention to the other and of greater risk taking in the relational sphere.

Paying attention to small details helps to create authority in areas that are often considered outside those that are their usual business. It is not certain how the details are assimilated into a new identity. However, it would seem as Abdul Maliq Simone observes that these provide 'a materialization of different possibilities, different routes in and out towards the rest of the city.'

Anxious Encounters, Regulated Bodies

Listening to one slice of their narrative, life inside the mall is one of absolute pleasure. Yet, there seems to be a virtual splitting of experiences for the self that seem to register the excitement and pleasure is quite de-linked from the equally traumatic processes through which they negotiate their entry into their workspace.

You know the first time I was very nervous....there was no training. I was told to join and the existing staff told me about everything about products. I picked up by watching others. When customers came I used to be very scared. How will I attend to them, what will I say, I used to move away to one side. At times customers also told me off. (mujhe bahut sunaya). I did not know the different types of shoes e.g. golf shoes, tennis shoes. I had no knowledge about all these. Customers would come and

say, “show me some tennis shoes”. I would go blank. I knew nothing. Then I used to search for a staff to help me. Once a customer got really angry, ‘when you do not know why are you attending to me? Within a year I learnt everything through trial and error’.

Despite their own description of malls as spaces of freedom, it is clear that they cannot actually dress, behave or speak as they wish. Rather dress codes and the presentation of the body are clearly spelled out in malls. Western dress is compulsory, mostly trousers and shirts and make up is mandatory in most stores. They are also expected to speak English, an accomplishment they enjoy but which also evokes apprehension. There are many other rules. In one store where loud music was playing, a woman told us, ‘we are not allowed to lower the volume’. Many shops do not have chairs for workers who literally stand up and serve for the entire duration of their shift.

Malls also involve frequent experiences of humiliation from customers. Children can be particularly classist. *They can pull at anything, tear it, and spit at it. We can't say anything. See in the morning only I had arranged everything, a child came, biggish built, he sat on it and when I tried to point out he ruined it even more.....*

Workers also learn to accept the differences between themselves and the shoppers.

‘To tell you the truth, one gets used to it. Initially it feels weird but now I think, of course this is how much things will cost in a mall. Customers spend so much money. Sometimes I think why don't they save their money. But then everyone spends according to their requirements. The more their capacity, the more they spend’.

At Home: A Different Habitus

Expectedly the second space that emerged in the narratives was the space of the home. On the basis of the limited interviews we have carried out, it seems as if most women come to work with the permission of their families. From our interviews it seemed that families largely accepted, perhaps gained from the income of these women. The time spent at home was a time of relative freedom particularly from the regime of the body that characterized their work space. At home, most women did not wear western clothes (although

they did not report criticism from family members about their dress). At home they said they preferred to dress in 'simple' clothes. Strikingly, almost all women referred to freedom from makeup which one woman described as *'hard to take off'* as characterizing the hours they spent at home.

Home does not provide them all the comforts of the mall. Although home is believed to be cleaner, there is a conflicted relationship with the material comforts of the mall and the psychological comfort of home. The body becomes very used to some of these comforts such as air-conditioning,

'In the summer months, they keep the malls very cold. Sometimes we have to request them to switch it off then you get so used to it that you feel really hot at home with just the cooler. Winters are better. At least you don't get into the habit... aadat tho kharaabh nahin hoti'

Or as another woman shared

'At home we have coolers etc; I get a cold over here. Then in some days it becomes a routine the body gets used to it. Then you get so used to it that you have to go home and take a bath with cold water. I feel really hot at home, it gets a bit uncomfortable. Here we spend 10- 12 hours in AC. Thank god there are no power cuts at home.'

Several women expressed relief that malls were air-conditioned and, unlike home there were no power cuts.

Despite these discomforts, home also allows a freedom of expression that is disallowed in the apparent perfection of the mall.

'At home if I get angry I can sometimes express it. Here if you feel angry with the customer you cannot even express it. You really have to keep yourself under control. You can't say anything to the staff either. I come here to work, at home I relax.'

Scholars writing on the middle classes in India have suggested that feudal spaces coexist and remain unchallenged despite liberalization. However, the understanding of families seemed very varied amongst the women we spoke to. Amongst unmarried women there were concerns about whether they would be allowed to work once married. Women also wondered if family life would be sustainable if they continued to work. Yet we encountered a heartwarming husband and wife who worked together at the mall.

In the morning we both wake up early, we cook together, finish the housework and then we come to the mall. At night also we quickly freshen up, and then we cook dinner together. We are the only ones here (in the city). If we don't take care of each other, who will? My husband is very supportive, what stress can I possibly have?

The World Outside

The contrast between home and the mall is less traumatic than that between both these worlds and the space in between. These are the streets, local shopping markets, bus stands that the participant must pass through to make the daily journey from her home to the mall. These are defined as the problematic space that impedes the free movement of women pushing them into an earlier space of feudal patriarchy. Clearly the women saw the public space as divided into two distinct worlds

Monica who worked in a garment store spoke about the mall and the outside world.

'Over here you can be on your own terms, you can dress the way you like, and no one talks badly. koi gaali-galoach nahin karta. Outside people are rowdy, halla-bulla kartien hai and they spit on the streets thook the hain sadak par, inside the mall you cannot behave like this. Everyone changes. No one does anything wrong in the mall, everyone becomes prim and proper the moment they get into a mall. They have to show that we too roam around in malls. You know outside being a lady you really have to take care of your own safety. In malls there is nothing to be scared of. We feel unburdened. We are totally relaxed. We can be or do whatever, the world outside should be like this too. Malls have changed India'.

There are huge differences between the mall and the outside, differences of cleanliness, atmosphere. Being out is very difficult; you have to watch out all the time'

Not only is the mall a safe space, it represents the ideal world.

Deepali who worked at a lingerie store also emphasized safety and freedom... *'If I wear the very same dress 'outside', where the autos are, they stare at you, make comments. It's a little odd and uncomfortable.*

In the mall life feels completely different. Earlier I would never listen to English music, but now I like it... I put on earphones and I hear it at home too. There is a lot of difference between people here and those on the outside. In fact when the very same people come into the mall, they also change. If they want to toss something away, they will throw it into the wastebin. I wouldn't do the same job in a shop in CP. It is safe here.'

Deepali and Monika's descriptions when read together with the rules, regulations and anxieties associated with work at the mall remind of Foucault's docile bodies. The safety of the mall comes from its panoptican like structure which despite obvious sharp hierarchies creates a sense of equality. Whatever dissent is experienced is located elsewhere. At the same time, it is precisely this consenting relationship with the mall that makes a clear critique of other feudal public spaces possible. While women feel tired navigating these spaces and fighting fear, they are compelled both for economic and psychological reasons to return to the mall.

Our research is an ongoing work in progress. We need to know more women and know them better. However, even a preliminary dwelling upon their worlds reveals its fragmented and contested character. This contest creates new anxieties and challenges. The young women in our study represent this anxiety and this challenge very forcefully. They traverse and navigate many spaces and many worlds... our modernity that straddles the feudal, hierarchical world as well as the supposed neutral space of the mall. The unsafe and machismo ridden public arena and the 'safe' space of the mall and of course the traditional roles in the household versus the new 'empowered' roles in the market. On the debates regarding women and neo-liberal cultures, we cannot see a simple answer. The experience of earning and living daily amongst the objects of desire is an education into middle classness, creating aspirations and fantasies that are sometimes captured by Bollywood characters. Yet there seem to be tyrannies in the world outside that neither these women nor the malls that they work in, have any control over. The dangers of that world must be managed by them and their families. Families too permit them to work, sometimes also enjoying it. Yet these are contingent freedoms. Do these women represent new femininities?

We would argue that they do. Are they empowered? Possibly with limitations. Do they form a part of a new and distinctively Indian middle class? Ours would be an affirmative response.

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SECTION III

THE CHANGING MEDIA
AND ITS IMPACT

Media Frames Post-liberalization India: Women, Men and Others

Pamela Philipose

Incidental studies on the impact of mass media indicate, however, that women's exposure to the media is often very inadequate, and unsatisfactory. It appears that the mass media has not been an effective instrument to inform and prepare women to play their new roles in society.

–‘Towards Equality’, Status of Women Committee Report, 1974

The major thrust of the plan relating to mass media will be to raise the level of peoples' consciousness and enrich their cultural and social life and make them better informed citizens... There will also be target-group oriented programmes i.e. for youths, women, children and weaker sections.

– Government of India's Seventh Five Year Plan Document

Historians of India have commented on how Indian women, as a subject, disappeared from public discourse in the years following independence. Even the participants in the parliamentary debates on the Hindu Code Bill in the first decade of post-independent India were largely male leaders, and when the Hindu Succession Bill made the front pages of newspapers of May 9, 1954, it was the role of its male pilots that was highlighted. The reasons for this erasure of women's agency were many but an important factor that needs to be noted was the manner the new Indian state adopted in its approach to this section of its citizens: women were not recognized as a category separate from “the people” in state policy, and it was presumed that they would inevitably benefit from the general social measures being put into place. The media—which comprised newspapers and the

state-controlled All India Radio in those days—largely reflected this common sense. As feminist media theorist Margaret Gallaher had observed in a different context, the image of women in the media was largely their “non-image” (Gallaher, 1981).

This lack of presence was in sharp contrast to women’s participation in the national movement, a period that saw the forging of a wider social compact between the educated middle classes in the country and the predominantly larger category that came under the rubric of “the toiling masses”, a much used term from those days. However, the relative equality within that compact did not appear to survive long in the India that had just gained independence. After Independence, environmental historians, Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, pointed out that it was the more influential and prosperous sections that took all the right steps to secure their own specific interests (Gadgil, M. & Guha, R., 1995). But what were the women within these “wealthier and more powerful sections” doing? Could it be that the very absence of women from the public space was an important signifier of middle class status during that period, a sign of having arrived, as it were?

A discursive shift occurred with the Report of the ‘Committee on the Status of Women in India’, *Towards Equality* (1974), appointed by the Government of India. It recognized that “large masses of women in this country have remained unaffected by the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution”. In what was perhaps the first public critique of the functioning of the Indian media through the lens of gender, the Committee observed that “mass media has not been an effective instrument to inform and prepare women to play their new roles in society”. Following the ‘Towards Equality’ Report, the role of the media in bringing about “gender empowerment” became a major trope in policy discourse and that remained the case until the late 1980s. In 1984, the Report of the Working Group on Software for Indian TV headed by P.C. Joshi, re-emphasised women’s equality and saw television as post-independent India’s gift to society and the ‘man-woman relationship’. It urged the government to formulate guidelines to ensure the “positive portrayal” of women on television. The Seventh Five Year Plan document, which had doubled the country’s media communications investment—with

49 per cent of this outlay earmarked for Doordarshan alone—called for “target-group oriented programmes, i.e. for youths, women, children and weaker sections”. In 1988, the National Perspective Plan for Women (NPP) reiterated this approach by demanding that the Government of India initiate a “conscious strategic change” to achieve transformation of attitudes towards women and girls in the national media.

As the 1990s unfolded, however, it became increasingly clear that such “conscious strategic change” was becoming an increasingly remote possibility. Until this juncture, the idea of the Nehruvian consensus that privileged democracy, secularism, welfarism, socialism and non-alignment within a “framework of rules, institutions and conventions” (Kothari, 1961) had survived, helped in no small measure by the media, from mainstream newspapers that “spoke” for the nation, to the films produced by the Government of India’s Films Division and even the privately financed film industry. Under pressure from a vast array of forces, that consensus finally ruptured as the 1980s came to an end. The history of that period is well known: a sharp rise in oil prices with the first Gulf War, a plummeting of remittances into the country from the Middle East, capital flight and a balance of payment problems led to an unprecedented fiscal crisis. The Indian government chose to resolve it by seeking loans from multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This of course meant accepting certain conditionalities, which included the opening up of domestic markets to global capital, the devaluation of the rupee, sharp cuts in state spending, privatisation and economic restructuring. Globalisation, now part of the Indian reality, is acknowledged as one of the most defining forces of the 21st century. It is a set of both social and economic processes that intensified global connectedness through the mobility and flows of capital, culture, commodities, information and technologies.

These developments taken together created the setting for the emergence of the “new middle class”. It is possible to define this “newness” in several ways. Leela Fernandes has argued that the rise of this class represents the political construction of a social group that operated as a proponent of economic liberalization. The ‘newness’ of this class, she went on to argue, referred to a process of production

of a distinctive social and political identity that represented and laid claim to liberalization's benefits (Fernandes, 2006).

Among the sweeping transformations brought about by the twin forces of globalization and economic liberalization in India, was the mushrooming of media establishments and products, first in the urban centres of the country and gradually in its peripheries. The Government of India pro-actively created a regulatory environment that was conducive for the media and entertainment sectors. For instance, while no foreign investment was allowed into the television sector earlier, the cap on such investment was placed at 49 per cent for foreign entities that sought to uplink news and current affairs channels and 100 per cent for non-news and current affairs channels (Karnik, 2011). The process of opening up to foreign players took a little longer for newspapers. It was only in 2002, that foreign direct investment of up to 26 per cent was allowed in news and current affairs publications.

Let us briefly consider this growth. Newspaper circulations nearly trebled in the decade of the nineties—from 21.9 million in 1990 to 58.3 million in 1999. According to the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), the total number of registered newspapers in India stood at 86,754 as on 31st March 2012, with 4,853 new newspapers registered in 2011-12 alone. A similar burgeoning marked the electronic media. In the late 1980s, most homes with TVs had access only to the state broadcaster, Doordarshan. By the quarter ending December 2011, according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the country was hosting 825 private satellite TV channels permitted by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. Out of these 825 channels, 90 were of foreign origin and some 400-odd were purveyors of news. Simultaneously the number of television set owning households grew rapidly as well—from 134 million in 2010 to 148 million in 2012, with 69 million urban owners and 79 million located in rural areas. When it came to the radio, while the dissemination of news and current affairs remained a monopoly of the government's All India Radio (AIR) with its 403 stations reaching nearly 99 per cent of the total population, private FM radio stations numbered around 242 in 2013 according to TRAI.

As the media sector grew, new printing and communications

technologies also arrived which, in turn, swept away the old black and white newspapers printed off rotary presses on poor quality newsprint, and replaced them with newspapers and publications in colour. Television too changed its stripes. What is generally regarded as a turning point in this evolution was the arrival of satellite television with CNN's 24X7 coverage of the first Gulf War. Before long, media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's Hong Kong-based Satellite TV Asian Region (Star TV network), which was a part of his News Corporation, brought five new channels into the country. So rapid was their spread that by early 1992, Star TV telecasts were being beamed to an estimated half a million Indian households. The Economist had presciently commented that Murdoch's move of buying into Star TV was "buying into the idea of a middle class Asia". How profitable this venture was can be seen in the fact that by 2009, the valuation of the television industry stood at Rs 266 billion (Narayan, 2014).

Meanwhile, by the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, the impact of the convergence of telecommunications, satellite communication and information technology, in the form of the internet and the worldwide web, was rapidly being felt. This was the birth of new media. If economic liberalization had reshaped old media, it controlled the contours of new media from their inception, expediting a phenomenal growth. As the Internet began to be increasingly available, both transnational and national media content became available at a touch of a button.

The 1990s saw Indian telecommunications grow rapidly. The New Telecom Policy in 1999 set out to improve teledensity and encourage the growth of telecom in rural India and envisaged Internet access to all district headquarters by the year 2000. The Information Technology Act of 2000 was also enacted to ensure an information technology base that could support electronic business transactions. To help the sector expand in unprecedented terms, the private sector was encouraged to invest in it. A large percentage of foreign direct investment in 1999-2000 was directed to the Indian telecommunications sector. In 1999-2000, the total amount of foreign direct investment in India was \$2.1 billion. However, in August 2000 alone, \$1.5 billion of foreign capital was invested in

Indian telecommunications projects, and by then there were more than 4 million personal computers in India that were accessing the Internet.

But arguably nothing perhaps reflected the life changing presence of telecommunications in India today, than mobile telephony. In 2012, according to TRAI, urban India had a mobile telephone subscriber base of 587.90 million, while that for rural India stood at 334.58 million. Mobile phones, in turn, emerged as an important point of internet access for rural India. This has made India the home to the third largest number of internet users in the world. They are now estimated to be over 200 million, with about a third of them based in rural India.

Changes in content inevitably accompanied such changes in form. John B. Thompson has argued that symbolic forms or symbolic systems like the media are not “ideological in themselves” and that whether or not they are ideological is “dependent on the ways they are used and understood in specific social contexts” (Thompson, 1990). This may be useful to keep in mind in order to understand the ways the media were used to create in consumers an ownership of the values of marketization and globalization.

The demand to retain emerging readers and viewers, the pressure to accommodate advertisers, the need to fend off competition from other players and the pro-active involvement of public relations and advertising interests, together began to shape editorial content, whichever the medium. Innovative marketing strategies that undermined the normative framework evolved in an earlier era now came to mark the functioning of media groups. Conventions that respected distinctions between the editorial and marketing functions or that between audiences and consumers began to get increasingly overlooked.

The years from the nineties onwards saw print journalism jettison detailed analysis and involved investigations in favour of shorter stories, with “readability”, “colour” and “infotainment” becoming the new mantras. News was in fact recast as entertainment with a particular focus on lifestyle, the entertainment industry, crime, scandal and personality-driven politics. The argument justifying this that was often proffered was that attention spans in a television-

saturated society had become narrower and people had no time to read and absorb complexities in print.

The times came wrapped in the promise of globalised prosperity, connectivity and personal success for the middle class which was, arguably, the best placed to benefit from these developments. The monies involved were not insignificant. As market strategist Rama Bijapurkar reminds us, if the first decade of liberalization added 200 billion dollar to India's GDP, the next decade brought in three times more—1.2 trillion dollars—and another trillion is expected to flow in before this decade is out (Bijapurkar, 2013). Almost all of this capital came in terms of consumer and electronic goods and services and this is where women with disposable income came to play a significant role.

What is important to note here was that the first 15 years of the post-liberalisation period was all about the penetration of markets with the media, advertising in particular, coming to play a central role to assist this process. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha termed the new elite that emerged from this process as “omnivores” who were drawn increasingly into the larger universe of consumption that was in turn driven by the media (Gadgil, M. & Guha, R., 1995).

What emerged was the “advertising model” that sought to make strategic commercial use of specific media products—whether they were colour supplements of newspapers or sponsored television shows. The nineties, for instance, saw Murdoch's Star responsible for introducing the first music television channel in India (Channel [V]); the first 24X7 news network (Star News); the first successful adaptation of an international game show (Kaun Banega Crorepati?) and the first reality TV series (Lakme Fashion Show). Each of these proved to be money spinners appealing to a large swathe of the middle class across lines of gender. To get an idea of the profits that could be made from advertising, a closer look at Kaun Banega Crorepati, a quiz show that sold the get-rich-quick dream to millions, may be useful. While the network invested Rs 75 crore for 130 episodes of the programme, it stood to gain Rs 1.15 lakh per minute of advertising time, which earned it around Rs 1.5 crore per episode, considerable in those times.

For such efforts to really work, specific target audiences had to

be created and offered to potential advertisers. As Pradeep Guha, a one-time executive director of Bennett Coleman & Company that published the Times of India, put it with admirable clarity, “Undoubtedly then, the advertiser is my target audience...But that does not mean we do not respect our readers. It’s just that we market our product to those readers which our advertisers want. And these readers are then packaged and sold to our advertisers. And that’s where the profits lies, ...” Fernandes observes that practices of this kind actually end up collapsing the boundaries between the ‘symbolic’ and ‘economic’ dimensions in the making of this new middle class” (Fernandes, 2006, p. 64).

By 2010, the advertising industry had grown into behemoth valued at Rs 247.5 billion by PricewaterhouseCoopers. Within this, television advertising constituted its largest segment accounting for 41 per cent of the total advertising pie. There was, therefore, a great deal at stake in terms of creating the right audiences for the products being advertised.

A great deal of well-paid creative talent went into the making of these advertisements as the intriguing journey of a Pepsi Cola’s tagline for an advertising campaign of 1998, ‘Yeh Dil Maange More’ suggests. Picked by an Indian army officer, Captain Vikram Batra, as a war cry during India’s Kargil war with Pakistan, it assumed hyper-nationalistic overtones following the subsequent death of Captain Batra during that war. The phrase continued to emerge in the years that followed in the popular media, even appearing as a title of a popular film. Later, in the 16th General Election of 2014, it was even deployed by Narendra Modi in his prime ministerial bid during the Lok Sabha election campaign of 2014.

Women were in the pole position, coming to be seen by the media and advertisers as one of the major sites on which new middle class identity could be built. Consumption, as women’s studies academician Maila Stivens observes is “a pivotal concept to use in thinking about the place of gender in the new affluence” (Sen & Stivens, 1998). Two media platforms in particular were used to create suitable female audiences and readerships for the purpose of aggregating advertising revenue: Television serials and women’s

magazines. Both drew liberally from older identities while giving them a new spin to reflect the emerging modernity.

Women consumers were segmented by them into distinct homogenous categories: those with disposable income who now aspired to possess the goods and services offered by globalization and economic liberalization, and those just outside this category who aspired to be part of the former segment. Two other segments—super rich women and those below the poverty line—figured in the paradigm too, but rather less directly. The focus was really on the first two, but at the same time it was recognized that the separations between these categories were essentially fluid.

The market research agency Pathfinders: India carried out two detailed SNAP (Study of the Nation's Attitudes and Psychographics) polls. They covered 10,000 urban Indian housewives in 36 towns across classes and zones. The numbers of the "contemporary housewife", defined as individuals generally better educated, with a higher proportion of working women, more active lifestyle and more media savvy, showed an increase from 19.2% in 1987 to 22.1% in 1993. This "purchase-prone attitudinal cluster" (particularly in relation to high value durables and personal products) registered a jump from 49.3% in 1987 to 53.6% in 1993.

Television serials shown on Doordarshan in the late 1980s and even those generated by private channels like Tara in the early 1990s (Zee TV) were generally centred on the idea of admirable female protagonists. But as the 1990s progressed, they quickly got replaced by a string of family-centred soaps driven by a distinctly conservative creative impulse. Although the plots of these serials were replete with personal rivalries and the double-dealing manoeuvres of an assortment of relatives, the institution of the family/joint family was invariably glorified and its values deemed to be "Indian values". Women constituted the largest audiences for these family soaps which, whether they were in Hindi, Malayalam or Assamese, entailed plots that pitted women against women. The formulaic 'monster mother-in-law' was an outright winner. The Star TV serial, *Kyun ki Saas Bhi Khabhi Bahu Thi*, ran for eight long years—from 2000 to 2008—and allowed the actor who played its heroine to become a prominent politician. South Indian soaps like *Aanandam* (Tamil)

and Kumkumapoovu (Malayalam) had strikingly similar plot lines and they too ruled the small screen for long spells.

There could be many reasons for this rise of the neo-conservative television storyboard. The unprecedented box office success of Bollywood films like *Hum Aap Ke Hain Kaun*, the Sooraj Bartaya box office hit of the 1990s, that celebrated the ethos and conviviality of the upper middle class Hindu joint family where women are celebrated as upholders of tradition, has been considered by some media theorists as a triggering factor. Media academic Sunetra Narayan also points to the fact that many of the popular television soaps were in fact churned out by the same production company, Balaji Telefilms, with its head—Ekta Kapoor—associated with 20 serials in four languages (Narayan, 2014).

However, the unprecedented popularity of this formula also suggests that it conformed to what the advertisers promoting household, cosmetics and consumer goods, were actually looking for. Common to most of these serials were opulent sets, elaborate costumes and the celebration of the market economy in ways both direct and tangential. They did very little to raise the self-awareness of their viewers as rights bearing persons. The storms in a teacup they projected posed no real threat to the status quo and their reconstituted “family values” were invariably internalized by viewers who, subsumed within the larger framework of culture, power and commerce, adapted their behaviour and lives to the new paradigms being set.

Women’s magazines constituted the other key platform. Although magazines for women with their formulaic content of cookery, fashion and the like had been around for at least a century and mirrored the gendered mores of their times, they were now tweaked to conform to the post-liberalization era. While they appeared to speak for the modern, independent woman, they in fact subverted concepts like feminism and shaped them for their own purposes. Feminism now came to be understood as the ability of the “new woman” to make consumer choices; International Women’s Day became an occasion to project “women’s products” that promised to “liberate” them from the drudgery of the kitchen and housekeeping.

Media researcher Maitrayee Chaudhuri, after studying the

content of the English women's magazines between 1993 and 2000, noted that much of the material that passed for independent features were actually promoting, even sponsoring, various products available in the market. She concluded that "articles on the lifestyles of the rich and famous, interviews with models and fashion icons, and cover stories on consumption patterns of the new generation Indian fill an increasing section of the English print media until we no longer know where the advertisement ends and the news begins" (Chaudhury, 2000).

Interestingly in 1989, *Femina*, India's largest selling women's magazine, after studying market trends, concluded that it was time to shift focus from family and home to personal care. While the move was driven by media strategies to capitalize on the new personal care products flooding the market, it was justified by the publishers of the magazine on the basis that it was time to cater to a "genre of super womanhood in India, so that nothing would stop ordinary women from achieving and acquiring extraordinary success" (Chaudhury, 2000). Regional publications came up with variations on the same theme. The popular Bengali women's magazine, *Sananda*—begun in 1986 and edited by film personality Aparna Sen—also catered to the "new woman", driven by the same compulsions of wishing to exploit the burgeoning markets in cosmetics, home products and travel.

By the early 2000s, while publications like *Women's Era* continued to cater to the "home maker" on the one hand, bookstalls were awash with other glossy and expensive magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* and *Verve*, which purveyed the three-in-one formula of glamour, fashion and sex. This was evidence yet again of the conscious creation of segmented readerships designed for the advertising market, with the latter publications fixing their gaze on the global luxury goods segment—Luis Vuitton accessories, Armani garments and the like.

Sharada J. Schaffter after studying 2500 advertisements from 1994 to 2001, could identify distinct categories of such content. Three broad categories presented themselves to her: women as homemakers or mothers; women as sexual objects; women as a lower order of human beings, looking up to men (Schaffer, 2006). A fourth category that increasingly made its appearance as the first decade of the 21st century rolled on was that of the successful woman

professional who could effortlessly straddle of the twin universes of home and office with enviable poise.

Interesting trends emerged. The crowning of Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai as Miss Universe and Miss World respectively in 1994 were powerful signals to the world of the arrival a liberalizing India, with its new willingness to do business. The years that followed those much-hyped crownings led to a positive spike in the sales of beauty products with the Indian cosmetic industry recording historical levels of growth.

If youth was valorized in order to launch a thousand creams that promised a “wrinkle free” appearance with their advertising targeting even women in the 20s, fairness of skin tone became imperative. Advertisements of fairness cream products consciously identified darker complexions with negative prospects, whether it was for marriage or employment, while a fair complexion was associated with glamour and runaway success. A skin tone was thus turned into an aspiration by the market, generating enormous profits for the companies that promoted these products. The manner, for instance, in which the multinational, Hindustan Unilever, could create through a carefully crafted strategy of advertising and marketing a Rs 10 billion-plus brand out of the fairness cream, ‘Fair and Lovely’, is particularly illustrative of the pecuniary potential of creating advertising stereotypes that resonated in the mind of the consumer. By 2003, according to the HUL website, its product—Fair and Lovely—had emerged as the most trusted brand for young women in India. What is not stated is that, disturbingly, even schoolgirls are known to be consumers of this cream, so widespread was the aspiration to be fair skinned.

What about the other cosmetic giant, L’Oreal, focusing on hair and skin products? The Indian market may account for only 1- 2 per cent of its Rs 16 billion global turnover, but the country’s share is expected to quadruple in less than a decade. What will help L’Oreal achieve this target is its very innovative strategy of reaching out to Indian consumers through small beauty parlours scattered across the cities and towns of India, some 40,000 of them. These entities have been persuaded to learn to use and stock the expensive L’Oreal range (Bijapurkar, 2013). In this way, these widely spread out units are

doing their bit to promote the desire for personal grooming in far corners of the country and especially among its urbanizing middle class.

The new woman projected in such advertising and marketing strategies is someone who knows her mind, wants to look beautiful and youthful, and is upwardly mobile; someone who has disposable income—perhaps with a little help from what Bijapurkar terms as the “biggest liberator Goddess EMI” (Bijapurkar, 2013); someone who can negotiate her stances and choices within the context of the family; someone who is, above all, not so much an independent citizen as an independent consumer. She was also influenced by international products and trends. For her film, *Tashan*, Kareena Kapoor joined western fashion icons like Kate Moss and Victoria Beckham in sporting Size Zero, and it became an instant rage.

What is also interesting to note too is that while these women were portrayed as being sexually liberated in these advertisements, their very sexuality ended being objectified; while they were projected as independent women reaching for the world, the sleek gadgets they were urged to acquire often led them right back into the home and kitchen. The reordering of familiar tropes in the name of progress and modernity, therefore, did little to counter the millennia-old reality of social inequality between men and women and it sometimes even went into strengthening it.

A case in point was the transmogrification of a relatively unknown and unacknowledged ritual, *Karva Chauth* into a frenzied celebration of wifely devotion through the drip-feed messaging of the market and the irresistible allure of mainstream cinema portrayals. Referring to the Southeast Asia of the nineties, Maila Stivens, had commented that “the development of elaborate new feminities” were central to the development of burgeoning economies and they were founded on the central icons of Consumer; Wife; Mother; Beautiful Young Woman. Post-liberalization India provided further evidence of the trend (Sen & Stivens, 1998).

As the first decade of the 21st century came to an end, the ‘saas-bahu’ (mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law) theme slowly gave way to others, some of which bore a more progressive veneer. Television soaps in Hindi, like the long-running *Balika Vadhu* which critiqued

child marriages, or *Na Aana Is Desh Meri Laddo*, that sought to expose the son preference in Indian society were examples of this. This sometimes saw the emergence of new female characters like the svelte, elderly protagonist of the Malayalam television serial, *Paarijatham*. The “new women” now projected both in television serials and in the advertisements that accompanied them, knew their mind and nursed great personal aspirations; these were women who could negotiate their stances and choices within the context of the family; people, above all, who were not so much independent citizens as independent consumers with their ‘womanhood’ constantly being celebrated and catered to, by the market. One market analyst commenting in the evolution of ‘women as consumers’ in the post-liberalization era, observed: “Self denial defined women of the past, self indulgence defines her today” (Bijapurkar, 2013).

Masculinity—by virtue of its social predominance iterated through existing norms, values, and cultural practices—has always secured its own dominance. But while the entertainment media—television serial producers in particular—focused on the nuances of female representation, there was a distinct lack of interest in male portrayals. In the era that threw up an astonishing range of women, most of whom were at perpetual war with each other, it was the ‘good man’ who kept the family together, stood up for traditional values and resolved personal disputes. Such portrayals, strongly endorsing patriarchy—even the ‘bad’ man who drinks or who rapes has ultimately to be controlled by the hegemony of the ‘good’ man—were relatively static, especially when compared to the myriad ways in which masculinity was being projected in advertising.

The early nineties saw the consumer market throw up the ‘ideal new man’ of the post-liberalization era. Among the first to capitalize on the projection were cigarette companies which, before the passing of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act of 2003 put an end to cigarette advertising as a genre, were conspicuously successful in creating masculine icons invested with sex appeal. The Indian Tobacco Company Ltd, the biggest manufacturer of its kind in the country, actually doubled its advertising budget between 1995 and 1999 to emerge as the second largest advertiser in India and it is striking how it surrendered the iconisation of the macho, hard living

cigarette smoker that was the staple of its advertising in an earlier era, and replaced him with the gentler, more caring man of the nineties, as framed in the Made-for-each-other series that ITC ran to promote its Wills brand. Here was someone who could share a good joke with his female partner on a relatively equal plane, even while there was no mistaking who occupied the superior social space. The ‘ideal new man’ who emerged from the advertisements of clothing giants was similarly projected to have an easy assurance, even as he took on the world with his power dressing. Raymond promoted its Park Avenue line with the words, ‘Prowl with the cats in New York’.

As the first decade of the 21st century unfolded, the classic hegemonic male progressively gave way to the metrosexual male, whose high level of disposable income could now get himself the attention of companies focused on the FMCG sector. In 2005, when Shah Rukh Khan stepped into a bathtub full of rose petals to promote a soap that had until that moment been largely endorsed only by women, it reflected the zeitgeist of the times. It signaled the arrival of men with disposable income who did not regard it effeminate to lavish expensive attention on their appearance. Men using whiteness creams were no longer the subject of derision. They wore international brands like Diesel or Zenga, had a range of hair gels, and was proud to sport a waxed chests if their shirts had to be discarded for some reason.

Several factors went to shape the metro sexual male. Some have argued that it was the direct consequence of the booming services and hospitality sectors of the period, which needed presentable, well-groomed men. It was also the case that with the Delhi High Court’s 2009 reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that outlawed homosexuality, looking or being “gay” no longer carried the heavy opprobrium of an earlier period. Similarly, with a greater presence of women with disposal incomes and sexual confidence, men too could be portrayed as objects of sexual desire. The deodorant and aftershave segments of the market went into overdrive in creating such a stereotype—the ‘mantastic’ man, who cannot but attract sexually aroused women like a human magnet.

Was there anything potentially liberatory about this parallel proliferation of the new middle class and the media? It could be

argued that what these forces did unleash was a self liberatory—if not a socially liberatory—energy. It cannot be denied that the last 25 years have witnessed unprecedented information flows, much less marked by the asymmetries of an earlier period, and this in turn have allowed for a greater expression of personal agency and voice. It is perhaps no accident that some of the most creative women-oriented media content India has ever seen emerged in this period, helped in part by the eloquent articulations of women activists, most of them from the middle class themselves. Over the years, even as the women's movement had critiqued the manner in which the media and pornography had commodified the female body and the violence directed at it, it had demanded a new grammar of cultural production that transcended the patriarchal and monolithic creations of mainstream cinema and mainstream media.

Many transformations did indeed take place and several innovations attempted. The 'reality television' format that was now possible thanks to new communications technology, could bring the public into television studios. In 2002, the Tamil programme, *Kathai Alla, Nijam* (truth, not fiction), award-winning film actress Lakshmi, its anchor, took over 100 calls a day on personal problems like marriage breakdowns, domestic violence, bigamy, sexual abuse and so on. Aamir Khan's *Satyamev Jayate* (2013, 2014) episodes were a more contemporary variation of this format, and provided a new twist to old themes like skewed sex ratios, child abuse, rape, by taking them out of the "women's issues" box. Having a male actor icon as anchor who quite unashamedly wore his tears on his sleeve reflected the new acceptability of the metro sexual male.

Even within the entertainment serial format, there were attempts to break the mould. The 2003 serial, *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* (there's no one like Jassi), had an interesting middle class protagonist—the plain speaking, salwar kameez wearing Jassi, who was bold, intelligent, animated—constituted such a refreshing change from the bejeweled beauties who inhabited the mainstream serial space that the Postal Department even issued a stamp to celebrate her!

Then there were films like Aparna Sen's *Mr and Mrs Iyer* (2002) or Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which would have been unthinkable a decade earlier. The sensitivity with which Rituparno

Ghosh portrayed women as sexual beings rather than sexual objects in *Bariwali* (2000) and *Chokher Bali* (2003), or the subtlety Amol Palekar brought to his film, *Anahat in Marathi* (2003), while reflecting a woman's right to express her sexuality, indicated a synergy of ideas and techniques that was arguably only possible in globalised times.

The earlier heteronormative universe of the media had not only privileged the male-female binary, it betrayed the homophobia of larger society. Significantly, the Supreme Court of India recognized transgender as the third sex in *National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India and Others* (2014) and the verdict marked the great distance post-liberalization India had travelled in terms of acknowledging gender rights, although gay sex was still deemed by the courts as an illegal act. In this judgment, the courts specifically set down that "gender identification becomes very essential component which is required for enjoying civil rights by this community. It is only with this recognition that many rights attached to the sexual recognition as 'third gender' would be available to this community more meaningfully". Transitions of this kind were assisted greatly by media articulation. The emergence of a film like Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), made in the first decade of post-liberalized India, changed the terms of reference completely and expanded notions of what should be seen as acceptable. Sohini Ghosh saw the public's response to *Fire* as "Independent India's first public debate on homosexuality" (Ghosh, 2013).

Finally, thanks to the social media's capacity to dissolve the distinction between producers and consumers of content, the country's young creative talent could project their cultural energy in compellingly evocative ways without necessarily going through long established structures. The Ravinder Randhawa-Swara Bhaskar's song, 'Maa ni meri' is an example (Look Mother! Look how I fought. I was one, they were six. But afraid I was not...Mother, I will not become you...). It emerged out of the protest mobilizations over the Delhi gang rape of December 16, 2012, and celebrated the spirit of a girl who would not remain silent, someone "who would rather drown than swim obediently in the tide of patriarchal norms". Placed on YouTube, the song became an overnight success.

Yet the limits of this efflorescence and its social impacts also need to be acknowledged. While it can be said with certainty that the globalised media had impacted to some degree all Indian women, not all Indian women have been equally impacted by them. While some of the changes deepened individual rights and agency, others only went to reinforce existing hierarchies and disparities and create neo-conservative attitudes. The market, the mainstream media and the forces of 'hidden persuasion' may have been tempted to conflate the experiences of middle-class urban women with that of all the women in India, the reality is that the latter did not constitute a homogeneous category. They are marked by regional, ethnic, religious, caste and language divides and characterized by differences in income levels, age and sexual orientation. Most importantly, they did not participate equally in the media space/discourse and were sometimes even proscribed from doing so by patriarchal and feudal forces that have survived the forces of market liberalization and globalization and have possibly even thrived because of them.

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Struggling with “*Nayi soch*”: Hindi Television Serials Today

Haripriya Narasimhan

Introduction

Star Plus, a prominent television channel offering GEC (general entertainment content) programmes, introduced a new ‘anthem’ called *Tu hi tu* in 2011.¹ The video shows a young woman, who wakes up in the morning looking fresh, smiles at her sleeping husband, wraps her *dupatta* around his hand and starts her day. Then she packs an omelette for her daughter. Her class background is indicated by the huge bungalow where she lives with her in-laws. She cares for her father-in-law by keeping an eye on his sweet tooth. She manages to record songs sung by her mother-in-law, has a romantic interlude with her husband (in the middle of his bath at noon), blows a kiss to him in public, has fun playing with kids in the neighborhood, works as a TV news anchor, even working over time, learns classical dance, and manages traffic on the roads. She returns home late to see her family members sleeping. They wake up at her arrival and celebrate her birthday with a party at nearly midnight. This woman works hard, supports her family and is in return loved by them, so the promotional campaign seems to suggest. The clip ends with the slogan “*Rishtawohi sochnayi*”. The TV channel proclaims that this ‘new woman’ is their audience, and their character(s), the viewer and the viewed, women who will bring ‘new thoughts’ (*nayi soch*) but

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoX5nhKnllw> (accessed on 8th March 2014)

with the 'same kinship' (wo hi rishta) that has existed, between the channel and its viewers, just as it is between female viewers and their affinal families.

There are hundreds of channels on TV in India at the moment. The business is booming. When TV began in India in 1959, there were 21 TV sets in Delhi (Narayan, 2014: 66). In 2011, there were some forty four million households with cable connection, and 825 channels, according to the regulating authority TRAI.² TV industry is said to be worth Rs.266 billion (Narayana 2014: 17). In the background of increasing visibility and reach of the television media, both nationally and internationally, this paper will look at one aspect of what TV serials talk about, 'class'. Through examples from TV serials, and ethnographic evidence from viewers and producers, the paper suggests that the process of 'class-marking' in Hindi TV serials occurs within the broader discourse of tradition and modernity. While attempts are being made to address the 'new'- new India, new viewers, the new Indian woman, the new middle classes etc., these attempts fall short of discussing the myriad changes that women face in the new globalizing India (see Fuller and Narasimhan 2008). This is due to the diversity in expectations and strategies amongst both the viewers and the producers. As a result, TV serials stop short of producing a genuinely rich debate on deepening inequalities and hierarchies in contemporary India. In following the call for anthropologists to 'follow the media, from producers to consumers' and seeing it as 'social practice' connected to people's everyday lives (Ginsburg et al 2002), I look at serials as sites where ideas about class are articulated under the rubric of modernity, in terms of the spatial (rural-urban) material (rich-poor) and ideological (traditional-modern).

In the next section, the paper will discuss the context in which the study is located and the debates in anthropology on class and gender in a popular medium like television. The paper then moves to a discussion about class as shown and seen in the serials, and among the viewers and the producers. I believe that TV audiences are not

² <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k12/apr/apr129.php>
(accessed on 21st July 2014)

“preconstituted”, and that they are brought into the picture “by tapping into desires and predilections salient at a particular historical moment” (Mankekar 2012: 28). This paper looks at these very such desires of the emerging new middle classes in India. I suggest that by focusing on a very “ambivalent” category such as the middle class, TV serials limit themselves to articulating middle class desires and fears and do not engage in a productive dialogue or debate (Mankekar 1999: 136).

Methodology and Fieldsites

I would like to mention here that this is a work in progress. I have been conducting fieldwork amongst viewers in Chennai since 2011. I also met and spoke in detail with people in the Mumbai TV industry whose class background is more diverse. In 2011, I started my fieldwork with a person known to me and then used snowball sampling method to locate more informants in the locality. My fieldwork in Chennai is at the moment located in the northern parts of the city. Chennai is not a major ‘TRP’ region for Hindi serials, but Hindi TV serials have had a significant audience among the ‘north Indian’ communities in the city (Gujarati, Marwari, Punjabi and Sindhi).³ Some native Tamil speakers also watch Hindi TV serials, but a majority of viewers of Hindi serials are from the communities mentioned above. Though they are spread out all over Chennai, many ‘north Indians’ reside in the northern parts of the city, colloquially referred to as ‘North Madras’ or ‘town’. North Madras consists of neighborhoods like Vepery, Sowcarpet, Tondiarpet, Mint Street, Kilpauk, Kellys, and Purasawalkam. Most of my informants come from these areas. They are engaged in trade and business and self-define themselves as ‘well-to-do’. Interestingly, even among informants who would be economically classified as rich or very rich, the discourse is about “values”, and particularly about values portrayed by female protagonists who are usually from middle class backgrounds.

³ Non-Hindi speaking people also watch Hindi serials in Chennai. Now, Hindi serials are being dubbed and telecast on Tamil TV channels.

In Mumbai, I contacted a few people associated with the TV industry online and they were kind enough to give me their time, and put me in touch with more people to whom I could speak. Interviews were conducted on the sets where TV serials are shot, in offices of the production companies and channels, and in the homes of some informants, and in one case, at a mall. Most of the interviews were taped with the consent of the informants. Interviews in Mumbai and in Chennai were mostly in Hindi, except for a few interviews in the TV industry which were in English. In this paper, all the informants have been given pseudonyms, to protect their identities.

A brief biographic sketch is necessary here. As a teenager in the 1980s, I watched the serials *Rajagopal* (2001) and *Mankekar* (1999) discussed, such as *Buniyaad*, *Fauji*, *Udaan* and *Mahabharat*. But I lost touch with Indian TV serials after I went abroad for higher education in the late 90s. I did briefly read about viewers objecting to the death of the male protagonist Mihir Virani (actor Amar Upadhyay) in the serial 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi' in 2001-2002, and producers being forced to bring him back from the dead, in the story.⁴ I lost touch with the serial world again until 2009, when I came to know that serials telecast on Indian TV are uploaded on YouTube soon after real time broadcast (sometimes longer) and thus, could watch them and found them interesting.⁵ Even more interesting was the fan following of these serials and the actors, and discussions in online forums and social networking sites. In this paper, I focus only on serials telecast on private satellite TV channels. I try to watch the telecast of serials while they are telecast in the evenings, failing which, I see 'repeat telecast' later on TV or online.⁶

⁴ 'Dead Man Walking: Amar Upadhyay'. *Times of India*. July 13, 2001. Accessed on July 9, 2014

⁵ These days, the channels themselves upload the latest episodes online.

⁶ Hindi serials of the previous day are telecast the next day in the mornings. This is not the case, for example, with Tamil serials where the ones telecast during the day are different from the ones telecast during the evenings.

Anthropology, Television Soaps and the Middle Class

Twenty years ago, Debra Spitulnik bemoaned that “there is no anthropology of mass media” (Spitulnik 1993). Since then, however, there has been a significant body of work by scholars, contributing to our understanding of the role of media. In the study of television soap operas, which are even now largely influenced by theoretical approaches from media and communications, cultural studies and film studies, some anthropologists have made interventions recently. Two edited volumes, *Media Worlds*, by Lila Abu Lughod, Faye Ginsburg and Brian Larkin (2008), and *Anthropology of the Media* by Kelly Askew and Richard Wilk (2002) are major contributions to anthropological understandings of media. Abu-Lughod’s (2004) work on television soap operas in Egypt and Conrad Kottak’s (2009) work on television in Brazil are rich ethnographies that document the links between what is seen and shown on television, people’s everyday lives, and the larger socio-political environment in respective societies.

Two studies of similar importance in the Indian context are those by Arvind Rajagopal (2001) and Purnima Mankekar (1999). These studies were conducted in the late 1980s-early 90s, when the state broadcaster Doordarshan was at its peak, and when Ramayana and Mahabharata were televised and widely viewed. Both the authors examine the impact of television in people’s understanding of politics, religion, and nationalism. More recently, Moti Gokulsing (2004) and Shoma Munshi (2009, 2012) have talked about the effect of satellite television in India since the 1990s, and the particular impact on specific channels and daily soaps. While Mankekar’s work listens to ‘television talk’ among viewers in Delhi (Richard Wilk, 2002) and the ideologies of gender and class that comes through the discourse, Munshi’s work, looking at TV serials telecast between 2000-2012, is almost entirely focused on those on and behind the TV screen- the actors, producers and the directors.

Debates and arguments about how to define middle class and who is middle class in India have occupied the attention of scholars in social sciences (see Fuller and Narasimhan, 2007). I wish to emphasize a few works that directly speak to the issue in this paper.

Ray and Baviskar (2011) rightly argue that the 'authentic middle class, progressive and liberal' as a category does not exist, it's more of a 'myth' (Baviskar, & Ray and 2011, p. 7). In order to understand this elusive category at the empirical rather than at a theoretical level, the scholars suggest looking not only at consumption practices but also 'production and reproduction, as well as the public sphere' (2011 p. 10). In particular they call for more ethnographic work to look specifically at the 'sites and practices' where the middle classes 'speak on behalf of others' (2011, p. 8). One example they give is the movement of people from small towns to cities, a major theme of many TV serials.

The middle classes are prone to becoming obsessed with a few characteristics. Some argue that it is 'morality' that defines the middle classes (Srivastava, 2011). This 'moral middle class', Srivastava argues, is able to consume modernity just as much as others, but also 'spirituality' (2011 p. 381). 'The middle class can take part in the processes of modernity, but also 'pull back' and return to tradition' (ibid). Expanding on the 'morality' of the middle classes, Saavala calls it the 'most striking and ubiquitous feature' of middle class sociality (Saavala, 2010, p. 6). Looking at the middle classes of Hyderabad city, she argues that a more useful way to study middle classes would be to see class as a 'culturally meaningful social process than a relation of production' or rather as a 'socio-cultural phenomenon' (2010, p. 7). Following the lines of many scholars who suggest not boxing the 'middle class' as a single homogenous category, Saavala points to the struggle taking place 'between layers of middle class' (2010, p. 8). She calls for a focus on what the middle class *does* rather than what middle class *is* (quoting Leichty, 2010, p. 11).

Some other scholars focus attention on the importance of 'education' for the middle classes (Donner, 2008 and Ganguly-Scrase, 2003). For Harriss, middle class is defined in terms of 'identities' and 'competences' (Harriss 2006, p. 447) i.e., those with cultural capital, not just property or salaried jobs. But many others emphasize consumption practices as the salient feature of the new middle class. Fernandes (2000) contends that the 'new' about the middle classes is more of an illusion than reality. She also suggests that consumption is the unit through which one can understand the 'new middle class'.

She calls the middle class “agents of globalization” (Fernandes, 2006, p. xiv). While referring to portrayal of middle class in the media, Fernandes mentions cinema but not television. She suggests that what separates the ‘new’ middle classes from the ‘older’ middle classes of India is their consumption practices, buying gadgets like ‘cell phones, washing machines, and color televisions—goods that were not easily available during earlier decades of state-controlled markets” (2006: xv). Elaborating more on the “newness”, Fernandes argues, “its newness refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization” (2006, p. xviii). One of the distinctive features that she mentions about this ‘newness’ is about speaking English, again a major focus of many TV serials.

Brosius on the other hand, points to some useful ways in which the ‘creative potential of the sphere of consumption’ of the middle class can be studied (Brosiu, 2010, p. 281). Calling them the ‘arrived middle class’ (2010, p. 277), she further says, ‘consumption has shaped a new public space in which social, moral and cultural values as well as identities could be negotiated’ (2010, p. 281). While she also agrees that this new middle class adheres fiercely to rituals and traditions, she suggests that it is only to ‘water-proof’ oneself/family against ‘westernization’ (Brosius, 2010, p. 282). Specifically on women, Brosius echoes Manekar and Munshi in saying, that there are limits to what they can and cannot do, depending upon ‘taste and suitability’ (2010, p. 304) with respect to marriage, education, and employment.

I will elaborate on Manekar’s and Munshi’s works as they speak more directly to the theme of this paper. Manekar (1999) calls TV a site for ‘culture wars’. She says, ‘increasingly culture is being defined in class terms and television plays a crucial role in these ‘culture wars’ (1999, p. 5).’ TV serials in particular enable the articulation of “class consciousness and conflict” through the stories and characters. But TV is also seen as a ‘source of information’ and ‘companionship’ which connects people to the larger society (1999, p. 78). And therefore, lately, she suggests that the middle class has become ‘assertive and vocal’ about what they want to see on TV. Programs have changed content and are less about development. There are no serials anymore

like *Nukkad*, a serial which was telecast on Doordarshan in the late 1980s, looking at problems of the working classes in a city. Serials now have a 'middle class orientation'. Working class women are rendered more invisible (1999, p. 77) except for some token attention paid to women who work as domestic helps in serials like *Uttaran* (Colors channel) and *Ek Mutti Aasman* (Zee channel).

Mankekar (1999) argues that "if the middle classes seemed eager to adopt modern lifestyles through the acquisition of consumer goods, they also became the self-appointed protectors of 'tradition' (1999: 9). Tradition emerges as a key trope in defining the middle class. Television not only creates a space to articulate 'middle classness' but it also enables the middle classes to become vocal politically and socially (Mankekar 1999: 9). Mankekar also takes the view that the primary character of the middle class is that of a consuming class, which is why it is the focus of television advertisements, especially those driven by companies selling consumer goods, like Proctor and Gamble and Hindustan Lever.

The other issue occupying the middle class is 'respectability' which refers to the preoccupation with women's "modesty and duty of the family" (Mankekar 1999: 99). In particular, the focus is on the 'new Indian woman'. The challenge facing them is to ensure that their daughters get employment outside the home and also maintain their chastity. This results in increased surveillance of girls (1999: 119). Saavala (2010) concurs with Mankekar. In her work done a decade later in Hyderabad city, Saavala also found that middle class families frequently had to make a choice between the extent to which they will let a daughter work and risk her reputation (Saavala, 2010, p. 39). Morality defined in the form of female chastity is very important for the middle classes. In order to get employment, education, especially of women, is recognised as important by the middle classes, but with a caveat. As Mankekar says,

'An 'enlightened' middle class woman was expected to be formally educated; at the same time, however, her education was oriented toward making her a companionable wife and a mother who could raise her children to be modern, middle class Indians.' (Mankekar, 1999, p. 137).

The other scholar whose work on Hindi TV serials is prolific is Shoma Munshi (2010, 2012). She has paid particular attention to TV serials that followed the ones Mankekar looked at, i.e., serials made by the well-known TV producer Ekta Kapoor since 2000. Since she named almost all of her serials starting with the letter K, rumored to be based on astrological advice, Munshi also refers to them as K-serials, as do people in common speak. Some famous serials of that period, still recalled by viewers, include *Kyun Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kasauti Zindagi Key* and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki*. The major difference between serials during the K-period (2000-2008) and since 2009 (the period in focus in this paper) is that ‘rich’ people as shown in K serials have given way to more ‘real’ people, like *Dadisa* of *BalikaVadhu* (Munshi, 2012, p. 229). The middle class was not seen in Ekta’s serials though ‘middle class values’ were. Munshi charts this move toward middle class in Indian television from the time of the serial *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin*, based on the American soap *Ugly Betty*, which itself was based on a Mexican telenovela *La Betty Fea* (Munshi, 2012, p. 240). *Jassi* was more ‘relatable’ to middle classes. From being housewives in many serials produced in the early days on satellite television, female protagonists in more recent times in serials like *Jyoti* (2010-2011) and *Hitler Didi* (2012-2014) earn and also support their natal families even after marriage (2012, p. 229).

Ethnographic evidence shows that the categories ‘viewers’ and ‘producers’ is extremely diverse. Different stakeholders such as writers, actors, producers, directors, and channel executives, occupy diverse positions in the hierarchical structure that makes up a dynamic but demanding TV industry. Their abilities to bargain and negotiate with each other, and with the audience varies significantly. TV serials and people associated with TV serials cannot be dismissed as outdated, irrelevant, backward, regressive etc. This branding is very general and homogenous, and does not help us understand why so many people watch them in such numbers. The evidence I have gathered also suggests that viewers are pragmatic in distinguishing between the mundane realities of their everyday lives, and the “reality” that comes into their drawing rooms every evening via TV screen. Important topics like class, caste, gender etc. are articulated in various ways in television serials, which require an anthropological approach.

The Serials

In TV serials, class is depicted in various ways. The protagonists come from poor (Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya hi Kijo), middle class (Saathiya, Pavitra Rishta) or rich (Qubool Hai) family backgrounds. Irrespective of the storyline, 'middle class values' is endowed in almost all female protagonists. Madhubala, a serial about a woman becoming a film star is touted as "a gripping story of middle class aspirations".⁷ Sasural Simar Ka, another hit TV serial that's more than two years old is about Simar who has "grown up with strong middle class values".⁸ Or Suhana, the chirpy and clueless heroine of Sasural Genda Phool (SGP) who came from a rich family and took a long time to understand 'middle class values' of her husband's family. As is the case with Suhana, if a heroine happens to be rich, she gets married by some twist of fate into a lower middle class or middle class family, and the rest of the story is about how she comes to terms with the new world view and values associated with it.

In the initial days of TV serials on private satellite TV channels, focus was mainly on urban sites. This has changed at present with inclusion of Marathi, Punjabi, Gujarati and Bengali women in characters, and also include Muslim families (Beintehaa), and families from rural and small towns (Sapne Suhane Ladakpan Ke). Some serials focus on urban middle classes, like Navya, Pavitra Rishta, Yeh Pyar Na Hoga Kam and Ye Hai Mohabbatein. And then there are others where the female protagonist is poor, from lower caste or tribe, and 'rises' in the story through marriage to a upper caste/class man. These include serials like LaagiTujse Lagan, Agle Janam Mohe bitiya Hi Keejo, Bairi Piya, Bandini, and Phir Subah Hogi. The rural, rich families are the focus in some serials like BalikaVadhu, Pratigya, Gunahon ka Devta, Sasural Simar Ka, and Na Aana Iss Des Laado. The urban rich are at the centre of the story in serials such as Iss Pyar Ko Kya Naam Doon, Pyar Ka Dard Hai Meeta Meeta Pyara

⁷ <http://www.india-forums.com/tv-show/841/madhubala-ek-ishq-ek-junoon/> (accessed on July 21, 2014)

⁸ http://www.india-forums.com/forum_topics.asp?FID=632 (accessed on July 21, 2014)

Pyara, Bade Ache Lagte Hain, Rang Badalti Odhani, Beintehaa and Qubool Hai,. The middle classes from rural/small town areas come on screen in the following serials- Diya aur Bati Hum, Veera, Sapne Suhane Ladakpan Ke, Rangrasiya, Bhagyavidata.

There are, however, problems in classifying TV serials neatly as urban/rural, rich, poor etc. While the male protagonist might be rich, the female protagonist would not be. Or it could be the reverse. And while the serial may start off showing the life of a poor person/family, it soon shifts to more urban locales, and is shot almost entirely inside richly designed studios. The viewer will have to work hard to remember where the serial started from. In the serials on air at the moment (2013-2014), modernity, the quintessential focus of the middle class (Ray and Baviskar 2011), is introduced in the forms of topics like adoption, surrogacy, mobile phone use and chatting on the internet. Class differences are mentioned clearly in some serials where there is constant mention of the protagonists' class backgrounds. In one episode of the hit serial from Star Plus, *Iss Pyar Ko Kya Naam Dhoon* (part 1), the heroine Khushi, a girl from a middle class family in Lucknow, is accused of cheating the Delhi-based businessman Arnav Singh Raizada's family. She comes to the Raizada house to sell saris, along with her sister Payal. But she is accused of trying to sell torn saris, when in fact it was Manorama, the aunt of Arnav, who tore the sari. But this one scene earns Khushi the epithet 'phati saadi' (torn sari) by Manorama throughout the serial, to remind viewers where Khushi comes from.

The 'new middle class woman' on TV is not someone working as a software engineer or a call center worker. A serial called 'India Calling' aired in 2005-2006 on the channel Star One had one, but did not create a splash. If female protagonists have a paid job, it is in certain 'new' professions, for instance as jewelry designer Akshara of *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*, professions which can be done by involving other members of the family, and working from home. The producers locate stories in smaller towns and cities where globalization processes in the form of IT industry may not be present but women's visibility and mobility are undergoing transformation. In *Iss Pyar Ko Kya Naam Dhoon* (2011-2012), Khushi and her sister Payal start a food catering service to help their parents but have

to close down their business upon marriage. Modernity is shown in serials like Sapne Suhane Ladakpan Ke and Beintehaa, in the tracking of the dark side of new media technologies. In both these shows, young unmarried girls are shown to be chatting online with strangers and getting into serious trouble. Yet by bringing the focus repeatedly to 'family', and 'tradition', the serials, and serial-makers, conflate 'aspiration' and 'empowerment'. Modernity is defined in more spatial (urban-rural) and behavioural terms ('western' dress versus sari) rather than in ideological debates.

Education of the female protagonist is a central premise of many serials. Saathiya, a serial airing on Star Plus, started in 2010, and has completed 1200 episodes as of September 2014. The serial does not explicitly mention class (*varg*) but it is the subtext throughout. It portrays the lives of the cousins Gopi and Rashi who get married to two cousins Ahem and Jigar. The heroine Gopi is supposed to be from a 'middle class' family because her uncle and aunt who raised her live in a chawl in Rajkot, Gujarat. She however gets married to the rich Ahem, whose mother Kokila is a kind-hearted but strict mother-in-law. While Gopi is shown as an 'innocent' person, Rashi is shown to be always scheming for more wealth. Rashi's mother Urmila Shah becomes the villain of the show as she constantly tries to overcome her 'middle class' status by unethical or immoral means. Ahem, already upset with his forced marriage to Gopi is aghast to know that she is illiterate. He refuses to acknowledge her as his wife. Thus the audience witnesses many episodes as Gopi tries to get educated, in spite of obstacles created by her aunt and cousin.

Gopi, however, manages to successfully finish her education and works as a teacher.

In 'Diya Aur Bati Hum', also on Star Plus, the more educated Sandhya has to pass several tests put forth by her mother-in-law Santosh in order to prove that education will not in any way prevent her from being a good wife to a less-educated sweet shop owner husband, Suraj. Suraj's literacy levels were hidden from Sandhya at the time of marriage by her brother. Suraj is portrayed as an ideal husband (*aadarshpati*) who articulates Sandhya's frustrations in subtle ways, and helps her to achieve her dream to become an IPS officer.

Desire to work outside the home is discussed in the context of continuing to work after marriage. While many female protagonists like Priya of *Bade Ache Lagte Hain* (Sony TV) do work before and after marriage, in this case taking tuitions for college students, many others are shown to give up employment after marriage. The few who do continue need a lot of familial support. Afsar Bitiya's (Zee TV) heroine Krishna, like Sandhya, wishes to join government service and becomes a Block Development Officer (BDO). But she too needed an extremely supportive husband to achieve her aim. So did Anandhi of *BalikaVadhu* who became a sarpanch with the support of her in-laws and her second husband.

The Viewers

Rajashree is in her early 50s. A Gujarati Jain, she grew up near Surat and moved to Chennai after marriage. She and her husband live in a predominantly Gujarati and Marwari area of Chennai (Vepery) with her in-laws. There are two TV sets in the house, one in the living room and one for the in-laws in their room. Her son is married and lives in Mumbai while her married daughter lives abroad. When I arrived at Rajashree's home at 2: 30 in the afternoon, rerun of the previous evening's Hindi serial was on. In 2011, Rajashree watched *Saathiya*, and *Sasural Genda Phool* (SGP).

Rajashree likes the soft-spoken and sacrificing character, Hetal, in *Saathiya*. Hetal is the mother of Jigar, who is also soft-spoken like her. Hetal's daughter-in-law Rashi (mentioned in p. 202) is however, very cunning and lazy. Hetal is shown as a contrast to her sister-in-law Kokila, Ahem's mother and Gopi's mother-in-law. Rajashree prefers the way Hetal handles her daughter-in-law, than Kokila's way of behaving with Gopi. Kokila is always shown to be very severe in her tone, always keen on propriety and lacking any sense of humour. Hetal on the other hand overlooks her daughter-in-law's mistakes, and always says “*javaa de*” (let it be). Rajashree and her mother-in-law have a great laugh when they see episodes in *Saathiya*. In-laws do not behave the way Kokila is shown to be and real life has changed, said Rajashree. Having observed ‘*ghunghat*’ as a young bride, she notes that she no longer observes the same in front of her in-laws,

wears salwar kameez at home, and goes on vacations abroad with her husband.

Rajashree's favourite character in another serial, *Sasural Genda Phool* (SGP) is Badi Ma, the intelligent, patient and kind-hearted aunt-in-law of the female protagonist Suhana. Badi Ma was deserted by her husband, but continued to live with her in-laws and raised her two children. The in-laws call her 'badi' (the eldest one) and forsake their son, in favour of her, their daughter-in-law, and treat her like a daughter. Rajashree's attraction to SGP comes from the story of a very rich girl like Suhana marrying a middle class man, Ishaan, and moving into his house. From being a pampered daughter of a rich father and living in a huge house with just a sister and a few servants, Suhana moves to living with Ishaan's extended family consisting of his grandparents, parents, unmarried sister, two cousins, their wives and children, an 'adopted' aunt and her adult unmarried son. Suhana has to make a number of adjustments. Many episodes were dedicated to discussing her difficulty in sleeping in a non-air-conditioned room and whether her husband could afford to buy an air-conditioner for her.

Rajashree's relative Gita, who also resides in the same neighborhood, echoed the same view that life has changed for women as daughters-in-law. She said that when she was a young bride in the 1970s, she was asked to wash quilts (*razai*) but these days no one would ask a daughter-in-law to wash it, unlike in the serial *Saathiya*. But this view is challenged by another informant Kanchana, a young woman in her forties and mother of two teenage daughters. She said that while it might be an "exaggeration" to show a daughter-in-law being made to wash a quilt in a rich household, the main point of that scene was to convey that "we should do our household work ourselves". Joking about the problems one encounters with domestic helps (about how they do not turn up on time etc), Kanchana said it would be good if women knew how to do household chores and not be dependent on their servants. "We have not become so modern" said Kanchana ("*Itna modern nahin ho gaye hum*") pointing to her own family background. To become modern to the extent where a woman no longer knows how to do household chores did not seem appropriate

to her. She said everyone in her neighborhood is rich, but they also know how to be simultaneously modern and traditional.

Kanchana was born and raised in Chennai, went to college, spoke good English and is now a home-maker. Her husband is a well-to-do businessman. They belong to Gujarati Brahman community. Her apartment is huge, well furnished, almost like in TV serials. But she also took pride in saying that she (and members of her community) would not employ a cook, even though they would have a full-time domestic help. Her daughter Uttara, 17 years old, first dismissed Hindi TV serials as rubbish and claimed she only watched music programs and English shows, but as we started talking about different serials, she joined the conversation. She liked Anandi's character in *Balika Vadhu*. Kanchana also pointed to the track going on at the time of interview (summer 2013), which was about Anandi getting an education. “They show you can be traditional and study”, Kanchana said. When I asked them if they wonder about their own married futures, Uttara and her sister were sure they would not be asked to wash quilts, like Gopi was. Kanchana responded, “what is wrong in that?” She did not share her daughters' views about household chores not being the focus of a married woman. However, both mother and daughter agreed on one thing- while TV serials may be exaggerated, they do show reality.

Such a portrayal of reality in TV serials was also felt very strongly by Jaya, a woman I met in June 2014. Jaya is the middle daughter-in-law of a big joint family involved in diamond and financial trade. She was raised in Chennai and married into a family that lives in one of the oldest parts of the city. Talking about the impact of television, she said that even though some issues could not be openly spoken about and resolved at home, watching women in TV serials handle them could suggest possibilities for viewers like her as well. Talking about the changes in her community (Marwari), she said that mothers-in-law are more like friends and not as strict as before, and this change has come about only because they emphasize the issue in TV serials. Like Rajashree, Jaya also remarked on the fact that she is allowed to wear salwar kameez even in front of her father-in-law and brothers-in-law. She takes part in her husband's business, spending a few hours every day in his office, as does her sister-in-

law but they also cook food at home, even while there is a person employed to cut vegetables and wash utensils. Although Jaya belongs to a very rich family, her values are more middle class, in focusing on women's work in the kitchen in spite of gadgets and domestic helps (Mankekar 1999: 5).

The Makers

Tejaswini Ganti's (2012) work on Bollywood is useful in discussing how makers of films and television create and visualise their audience. Ganti talks about "audience imaginaries" (2012, p. 281), the ways in which film producers (directors and writers) imagine their audiences to be, and the difficulties involved in that process of figuring out who the audiences are, and how to cater to them in order to make film-making profitable. Film-makers classify audience into two groups—'masses' and 'classes', which is based on the way the two groups affect commercial reception for the movies. Masses are working class males, with little education, while classes are 'educated men and women, English-speaking, sophisticated, preferring realism, etc' (2012: 297). There are further classifications such as "interior audience", "ladies audience", "family audience" etc... 'Interior' for instance denotes people who are poor, less educated and conservative in thinking. As for women audience, one writer told Ganti that they will only be convinced by good story and characterisation, qualities which are seen as equally important by TV viewers but not necessarily by the producers. TV serial makers have to be conscious of weekly ratings called TRP (television rating points) which decide the popularity and economic viability of the TV serials.⁹ I will now discuss the ways in which makers, those behind the small screen, conceive their audiences and how that shapes the way, class, amongst other issues, is shown in a TV serial.

A serial has to be "inspirational", said a young executive working

⁹ TRP are measured by calculating the number of times a person switches on the TV at the start of a program. This is measured by an instrument called peoplometer, installed in the homes of a select sample of viewers. The higher the TRP, the more popular a program is.

in a prominent TV channel, when I met him for an interview in April 2011. Seated in his modern-looking cubicle, Navin was very enthusiastic and said he relished the challenging and stressful environment of television. He came from a non-metropolitan city in northern India, and joined the TV industry, a few years after moving to Mumbai for employment. He described the protagonist of his channel as having three main attributes:

- She doesn't cry
- She asks questions (but is not *badtameez*)
- She scripts her own destiny.

The one show that I followed on this channel, with which Navin was associated, did not always stay true to these attributes. The heroine did not cry much perhaps, but neither did she script her destiny nor did she ask relevant questions. He agreed that the “vision” for a show is given by the “creative head”. Navin also claimed that because the channel had a target audience, they had to locate their stories in urban India, or move stories back to urban settings even if their origin is rooted in some village. For him, at the end of the day, it is about satisfying the audience, and by that he means the ones who tune into the channel from tier II and tier III cities, and smaller towns, and not necessarily the educated youth living in urban India or abroad. As he put it, “who is your boss?” (*jajman kaun hai aapka*). It is the loyal viewer who is the boss, the one who matters to him and the channel, because it is that boss (*jajman*) who brings the ratings.

What are the characteristics of this *jajman*?? Navin described a typical viewer as a ‘twenty-four year old, unmarried, educated woman, employed in HDFC, in a smaller city’. Note the mention of the job and the employer- private bank, seen as more well-paying, customer-friendly and less bureaucratic when compared to public sector banks. To such a woman, what facet of his channel’s heroine would be inspirational? Navin referred to shows where the female protagonist moves from rural to urban India, and “has not changed, and has managed to get everyone...to love her”. Usually, such migration follows marriage, and usually such marriages are sudden occurrences (a common feature in many serials). Urban areas contain

'modernity' which would require a person to 'change'. One who does not change in her values and beliefs is therefore seen as inspirational. Navin was honest in admitting that his female colleagues (and I) are not the expected *jajman*.

In two serials in 2011-2012, the female protagonist was shown washing her husband's laptop. Both the girls had little or no education and came from rural areas or from a lower middle class background. When I asked him about the rationale for such scenes, Navin explained it thus; "the girl may wash the laptop but her intent was right". The same scene had another writer distraught that such a thing could even be attempted! In another episode, the heroine is shown going to a beauty salon. Navin saw such scenes as introducing the viewer to a certain kind of modernity represented in spas and beauty salons. Tracks like these are conscious decisions taken as part of introducing 'change' in the lives of the millions of people watching TV. However, assessing whether that 'change' has occurred is tricky. Navin acknowledges that TRP, like 'exit polls' may not be reliable. He travels the country to gauge the mood of the audience through research surveys. Navin also interacts with viewers whenever possible. He believes that when a viewer says, "Huh...see what he has done" while watching TV, that shows how the viewer was able to "relate" to what was being shown.

In another interview, Jigna, a woman writer born and educated in Mumbai and working on a serial located in another geographical/cultural context, stated that the imagined audience for the serial was not people like me and her. It was for housewives in smaller towns. "It is not to our wavelength", she said, but the "housewife in Rajkot" as she described her typical viewer would watch serials of the kind she works in. It seems, from this writer's description, that there is a "traditional" India mapped by those in the studios in Mumbai. That "traditional mindset" is then targeted. In her view, serials made between 2000-2008 (the Ekta Kapoor phase) were not really "aspirational" but "voyeuristic". Serials now show much more grounded "aspirations", such as love after marriage. In the serials she works on, Jigna used "rooted kind of approach" to understand the audience "mindset". Her targeted audience is located in small towns

like Rajkot which are economically on the upward trend but not exactly urban.

For this targeted audience in smaller towns and cities of India, topics such as “love after marriage” are about introducing them to modern sensibilities without upsetting their traditional, joint-family roots. Modernity is shown in the form of mothers-in-law who are affectionate and not necessarily adversaries of their daughter-in-law (like Hetal in *Saathiya*). An actor speaking to me pointed out how “we are emotional... we value our tradition more... *Pair choona*, it is only in our culture”. While she did not agree with the way stories shape out in TV serials, she also placed them in the larger logic of tradition. In my conversations with many people in the industry, this point was emphasized very strongly. While they accepted that their audience is middle class, this middle class is not the urban English-educated class, but one which is based in the hinterlands, speaks many languages, and is firmly “rooted” in “tradition”. Class values shown on TV serials therefore have to appeal to this segment.

Conclusion

Television is described as ‘a nonhuman, technologically animated family member’ (Dasgupta et al, 2012, p. 104). TV serials are seen as everyday experiences, like daily food, ‘dal-chawal’ (Munshi, 2012, p. 225). Given the ubiquitousness of television, this paper discusses the class discourse occurring in and about Hindi television serials through the myriad voices that make and consume them. The question is, how do we understand the articulation and expression of class ideologies in the media, especially powerful ones like television? In this paper I have tried to show the various features of ‘middle class’ that TV serials selectively focus on, in their efforts to articulate ‘new thinking’ (*nayi soch*). The actors dress a little differently, come from places other than Mumbai and Delhi, and some of them seem to have jobs outside the house. Some protagonists focus on education and others on issues within the family. But for the most part, TV serials do not create serious debates about class and inequalities. The nature of the industry, aims of the various stake holders, and a very diverse audience, allows for this situation to persist.

Munshi sees the depiction of middle classes on TV now as both “exclusive” and “universal” (2012, p. 241). Some middle class “values” such as respect for elders and attachment to rituals are seen as traditional and common across the nation (*wohi rishta*), while the ‘new’ middle class woman is distinguished by her bravery, by her job as a TV anchor, by her ability to multi-task and by her closeness to her husband. TV addresses not just women, but the ‘aspiring woman’ (Munshi, 2012, p. 255), aspiration being the key aspect of all middle class women’s identities. Aspiration could be for financial benefit and success (Mankekar, 2012, p. 33). However, while aspiration for social mobility can and is shown in the form of women taking up new jobs and becoming more assertive, in TV at least, it is predominantly shown in the form of marriage, a woman aspiring to marry a man from a higher class group, or transforming a man from a lower class group into one of hers. Aspiration is also seen in maintaining “middle class values” irrespective of whether a woman marries a rich man or a poor man.

The typical viewer (if there is one) does actively choose what to see and what to reject. But the reasons are not the same. Viewers like Kanchana and Jaya look for ‘reality’ in TV serials, while Rajashree thinks there is no reality to TV although she looks for possibilities offered by characters like Suhana. Though makers like Navin and Jigna suggest that their target audience is not women in the metros, it is apparent that women in cities are just as much involved with characters in serials and identify their own life trajectories in the stories. Viewers also criticize stories and characters which they believe are extremely unrealistic or portray negative stereotypes. They hold the producers responsible, even though the producers often say that they only show what the viewers want, one of which is ‘middle class values’. As one viewer said, times have changed and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are more like friends, but this aspect is not reflected in many TV serials. This *musical chair* play in shifting the responsibility for television content enables the system to continue in this chaotic fashion, for the present. As an actor said to me, “no one can point fingers at anyone”. Only a detailed multi-sited ethnographic study of viewing habits, with simultaneous studies of the serials themselves and the actions that go behind the screen,

would elucidate why and how TV serials focus on the topics they chose.

One important topic that is the focus of almost all TV serials is class, interjected with gender. TV serials are predominantly about women and families and are assumed to be watched enthusiastically by women (Jensen and Oster 2008). There are tendencies to classify the audience into various categories and the serials are no exception. The vibrant advertising market that sponsors a number of TV serials classifies the “new Indian woman” further into ‘ultra-modern’ and ‘family-oriented’ (Gooptu, 2012, p. 141). This new middle class woman, however, is not someone working in the IT industry as most of the literature on the new middle class in India would suggest. The ‘new’ about the middle class is in the reiteration that traditional notions such as upkeep of the joint family or respect for elders should go hand-in-hand with modernity in the form of mobile phones, and internet. While this ‘tradition and modernity’ debate is not entirely new, how this manages to keep the audience continually hooked to TV serials in the midst of fierce competition, is worthy of academic inquiry. My argument in this paper is that TV serials since 2008, with the arrival of Colors channel and the serial *BalikaVadhu*, have maintained their popularity by addressing an audience outside of the metropolitan India, by bringing to them ‘new ideas’ but without challenging their attitudes to family and kinship. While female protagonists may change from saris to salwar kameez, may move from Lucknow to Delhi and may get an English education, they still conform to age-old ideologies, with some support from their husbands, parents and in-laws. This gives a new dimension to the articulation of class under the rubric of tradition and modernity.

This paper also suggests that TV serials are not “a passive mode of engaging women as viewers” (Gooptu, 2012, p. 142). While the producers may imagine their viewers and categorise them into various labels, the viewers themselves see TV serials as sites where multiple realities of their middle class lives are played out, challenged, conformed and resisted. That is why they watch them in such large numbers. Whether it is about cooking food in spite of the presence of a help, or about taking up new forms of employment, it is about ‘small battles’ waged at home and the world (Gooptu, 2012, p. 147).

Far from being an idiot box, television, and in particular television serials, seem to hold a mirror to the audience and producers, sometimes showing reality, and sometimes exaggerated aspirations and imaginations.

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“Don’t be Santushṭ”:
Media, Women and the New Middle Class

Sanjukta Dasgupta

The year 1991 can be identified as the Year of Change in the socio-economic environment of a burgeoning New India. It ushered in radical transformations in the life of the educated and cultured urban middle class families in India. Globalization, liberal economic policies, the emergence of multinational companies, corporate ventures, retail brands, unprecedented purchasing power introduced into the society and culture of India concepts of subtly engineered desires, seductions and craving for material products attractively packaged in shopping malls offering endless choices. The erstwhile Indian value system and ethics that was about disciplining desire began to be regarded with skepticism. Self-denial was about committing suicide, feeling complacent and satisfied began to be regarded as stagnation, sterility and non-performance. Satisfaction increasingly became a signifier that generated embarrassment, whereas dissatisfaction became a positive signifier that could trigger evolution and progress, an aspirational agenda.

When Shahrukh Khan, the Bollywood superstar declared in a dish Television advertisement that being satisfied, “santushṭ”, was the worst enemy in the road to progress, and urged everyone to wish for more and more, (*thora aur wish karo*) it was time to recognize the paradigm shift- that greed was good after all. But in this celebratory festival of material culture, were the roles of women re-defined? Could an urban, educated woman feel dissatisfied and declare her sense of dis-ease and her cravings, fantasies and desires with equal zest and assurance as her male counterpart in this changing

scenario? Can we therefore ask whether the new middle class has also constructed a new paradigm- the twenty first century New Woman as a multi-tasking role player? These are some of the issues related to consolidating gender stereotypes or deconstructing stereotypes that this paper will endeavour to address.

Before 1991, if we can use that date to historically tag the beginning of the era of liberalization and globalization in India, in Bengal in particular, but in the rest of India too there was the widely honoured and showcased notion of plain living and high thinking. Tagore's lyric "Because I live with less that's why my heart is able to get what (who) it desires" (*Alpo loia thaki tai mon jaare chay taarey paye*), was almost a signature song to stop anyone on their tracks if they wanted to acquire or purchase more than what was necessary for a decent living.

However in the last twenty years or more, when the marketing target is the affluent urban middle class, the emphasis is not on necessities in terms of essential products but on indulgence and endless choice. Shopping in the 21st century is about 'de-stressing' and 'wanting more' is a positive sign of energy. There are no guilty Oliver Twist's who were severely punished for wanting more. In an economically enabling environment, more is good, less is about inconvenience.

Ironically, pursuit of pleasure does not lead to happiness as its end result. This is commonly known as the paradox of hedonism, which implies that the more one gets, the more one desires, and instead of happiness from such stressful competitive pursuit of products there emerge possibilities of psychological restlessness and trauma, depression generated by stress, tension, low self esteem and a sense of being a loser in the frenzied chase to acquire the latest products of seduction that are "mind-blowing".

The rapid obsolescence of high end products is carefully essayed in order to sustain the competitive race based on dissatisfaction. John Mackenzie in *A Manual of Ethics* observes, "The feelings of satisfaction that belong to the universe of self-interest are very different from those that belong to the universe of duty; those that belong to the universe of animal enjoyment are very different from those that belong to the universe of poetic or religious emotion" (Mackenzie, p. 180).

Of the four goals enunciated in Hindu philosophy that map human experience, the goals being *dharma* (ethics), *artha* (material power) *Kama* (pleasure and desire) and *moksha* (liberation), the emphasis now seems to have shifted to the second and third concepts, the concept of *artha* or material power and *kama* or the principles of pleasure derived from material power. Enhanced pleasure leading to happiness and the state of psychological or mental composure generated by a blissful state of spiritual transcendence leading to a sense of liberation from the pleasures of the carnal desires has been replaced by pleasure as an end itself, pleasure derived from unabashed acquisitiveness and display of material wealth. Therefore from the much cited Indian concepts outlined in the Upanishads, the concepts of *Daya*(give), *Dayadham* (*sympathize*), *Damyata* (*control*), concepts that students of English literature are routinely introduced to as they read TS Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*. In the last two decades, students perhaps are more enthused by the banners in shopping malls that declare,

“I shop, therefore I am.” that seems to have replaced the 17th French philosopher Rene Descartes's (1596-1650) Latin phrase *cogito ergo sum* (*I think, therefore I am*), an integral component in the discourse of rational philosophy.

So, in this era of globalization we find an unprecedented zest for consumerism noticed among the members of the middle class, from school children to urban professionals ethical distinctions categorizing the binaries that define need and greed, pleasure and happiness, appetite and desire, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are all rooted in the philosophic discourse of psychological and ethical hedonism and utilitarianism. However, any discourse on ethics and its intellectual complex specificities however rarely consider desires and appetites of women. It is difficult to construe whether women's desires are at all addressed in the concepts of hedonism, which show overt gender bias and no perceivable features of gender neutrality. In other words, can an Indian female superstar such as Priyanka Chopra urge the consumerist classes to desire more and step out of their strait jackets of traditional sense of satisfaction with whatever is available for consumption.

Would such a paradigm shift be considered a radical and threatening image if a woman is projected as a dissatisfied consumer? In TV ads the only evidences of dissatisfaction with products by women have been about the efficiency quotient of detergents, pest killers, pursuit of meals in minutes for children, heart friendly cooking oil for husband and family members and pain balms for the self. Jewellery advertisements are about gifts from men to women; in fact women are not seen buying an apartment or car either for themselves or their loved ones. Regular viewers of prime time Indian television shows, from news to films and serials, are just not allowed to miss advertisements of products, which are often described as break time bonanza. The compulsory condition of commercial breaks, often even interrupting breaking news, has been a matter of irritation by viewers, but of course there can be no remedy.

We may compromise with personal preferences but any compromise with material profit is not permissible in the new market economy of globalized India. In such a scenario, television viewers will have noticed the new 2014 Airtel advertisement of the Indian middle class represented by an apparently happy family of four members, *hum do, hamare do*. In the advertisement the son is invariably shown as laid out on the sofa or on a swing in the living room proving to his father that he is gizmo savvy and can send money, pay electric bills or recharge the cell phone by just using his fingers. But the role of the mother and young daughter in the advertisement narrative is remarkable. The mother does not speak despite the fact that she looks intelligent and seems to participate in that age old battle between generations, the love-hate tussle between father and son. But her participation and that of her daughter is about smiling with lips not parted, smirking, or laughing with her eyes as the man complains that his duty is to work as provider for the family (*main naukri karta hoon*), her duty is to look after the household (*tum ghar sahalmati ho*) whereas the young man behaves like a President. The daughter seems to enjoy the situation but seems redundant in the narrative, but her inclusion completes the family furniture. This is the sense of cultural continuity, in terms of consolidation of patriarchal norms embedded in our collective cultural psyche. We

tried to address this issue in my co-authored book *Media, Gender and Popular Culture in India Tracking Continuity and Change* (2012)

In 1952 Franz Fanon, the guru of anti-colonialism had stated in *Black Skin White Masks* that the middle class which was glorified as the preserver of tradition and culture symbolized stagnation, hypocrisy and corruption. Fanon wrote, “Intellectual alienation is a creation of middle class society. What I call middle-class society is any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, and all discoveries. I call middle class a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt. And I think the man who takes a stand against this death is in a sense a revolutionary. (Fanon 1967).

Sixty two years have passed since then. When Fanon’s book was first published in French in 1952, India was a five year old independent post-colonial toddler nation, and most of my generation was either very young children or still waiting to be born!

It is necessary to refer to the cultural critic Pavan K Varma’s observations on the emergence of the New Middle Class in India, (Times of India November 23, 2013),

“There is an unfamiliar animal sprawled across the war rooms of most political parties ahead of the 2014 polls. It is the Indian middle class. Not so long ago, its presence was insignificant. Hard-nosed political strategists dismissed it as of little consequence, and they could not be faulted. Most members of this class were self-righteously disinterested in politics; they voted but sporadically; their vision rarely transcended their immediate familial and municipal concerns; and their numbers constituted neither a tactically consolidated bloc, nor a significant numerical size.

But something has changed this time round. The docile, half asleep animal is stirring itself. And nobody is really sure of the consequences of ignoring its importance. There are tangible reasons for this turn around. If we take a strictly economic criterion of defining a middle class person as anybody who belongs to a household which has a monthly income of between Rs 20,000 and Rs 100,000 a month, the middle class starts to look very substantial. Estimates reveal that as

per this criterion the size of the middle class in 1996 was a paltry 25 million. Today, it is in excess of 160 million. And, by 2015, its numbers are expected to go up to 267 million”.

Significantly, referring to the tensions experienced by the modern woman of the 21st century who tries to balance traditional practices with the modern aspirations, psychologist Sudhir Kakar's comments on the reception of this change understandably emphasizes resentment by traditionalists and support by modernizers. He observes, “And within this expanding middle class, it is the woman who is at the centre of changes taking place in contemporary Indian society.” (Kakar, 2008)

Kakar's summing up is quite riveting as he refers to the concept of psychological nuclearization that can happen even within the joint family and extended family structures. He observes, “This then is the modern Indian woman- in a white cotton sari at one moment, carrying out an age-old ritual with an attention to detail that both absorbs and animates her, and in a pair of blue jeans at another time, sprawled on a sofa in front of the television watching a soap on family intrigues with an intense interest that lights up her entire face. Hers is the driving force in the changes taking place in the Indian family, an institution that is inherently conservative and changes at a much slower pace than the political, economic and other institutions of society.” (Kakar 680). The reason for this slow paced transition has been defined by Partha Chatterjee (*Nation and its Fragments*) and Tanika Sarkar (*Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*) among others, and is well known.

It is this journey of exploration that is crucial to the understanding of the transformations that are increasingly visible in 21st century India. The paradigm shift in the upper-class, upper-caste educated communities in the relationship between men and women both at home and in the world has identifiable transformations in the family structure of these social groups and educated women belonging to these groups have enough enabling power to become active agents of social change. Therefore, from the dependent women being considered as the essential burden that society has to bear for its collective self-sustenance, women in families are now able to sustain themselves through their professional skills and therefore the educated

women remaining dependent on male members of the family has now become a matter of choice rather than compulsion. In a way, female victimhood and male machismo have to some degree become a matter of specific conditions, not a pattern, at least in the case of the new urban and suburban upper classes.

This shift in the socio-economic structure of the mostly urban and quite often suburban families, with married heterosexual couples as earning members has changed the family set-up and the roles of the family members, including the children. In the absence of joint families and obliging relatives or active grandparents, children are often admitted to day care facilities and crèches, which is emerging as a good option, as professional child care can be more effective than very outmoded norms that untrained senior family members may resort to. Though affection is a pre-requisite of child care it cannot be a substitute for uninformed value systems that may create a culture shock for the growing children as they negotiate the real world outside their family homes. However, it is there in the literary writing: poems, short stories, novels, plays as well as in films, television and even commercial advertisements that the ripples of change are being registered. Sometimes the literary and cultural representations resist alternatives and valorize the stereotypes, but we also notice a growing tendency to engage with innovations in all aspects of family life from shared domestic responsibilities to micro-waved dinners.

The family has inevitably been the site for challenges, changes and compromises. In recent times the validity of the monolithic concept of family has been interrogated frequently. Consequently, the problematic of gender, class, religion and culture form an integral part of any discourse that prioritizes the family as agency. Globally, in all cultures, the position of the family has been redefined. Yet despite disturbing statistics of the gradual disintegration of the urban middle class family and erosion of family values resulting in a paradigm shift, the need for familial bonding has simultaneously re-emerged, debunking the notion that contemporary times register the death of the family.

Interestingly, the year 1994 was declared by the United Nations to have been the International Year of the Family and the one liner slogan “Building the smallest democracy in the heart of society”

(Desai & Thakkar,2001) clearly underscores the ideological interconnections between the family and the state. The approach paper of the Indian government regarding the International Year of the Family significantly stated, “If the family is facing problems of instability and disintegration today, it is not because women are asking for their rights. It is because of the socio-economic changes, market forces, and consumerism and environment degradation that contemporary families are facing a range of challenges for survival.” (ibid p.92)

Increasingly, television, print journalism, films and advertisements all carry the four-pronged imprint of a changing 21st century, and urban suburban and rural India have not remained unaffected by the *four* identifiable categories that have generated change in cultural structures (Brants,1998). According to Brants these are *globalization* that also incorporates migration of labour from homeland to the lands of opportunities, *individualization* that celebrates self- image constructions, leading to the reflection that the 21st century is the age of imagology as opposed to ideology or even stretching the idea of re-invention of identity further one can venture to state that the present times pursues the ideology of image constructions and *fragmentation*. This obviously leads to flows of images, flux, change and skepticism about static universal non-invasive value systems. The fourth category, *depoliticization* once again underscores the lack of trust on the state apparatus and a self- seeking desire to identify with a civil society as its vigilante, ombudsman and watchdog in a participatory democracy that distances itself from the macro and meso and valorizes the micro politics of everyday experiences.

Gender Politics

From the epics to the epicentre of contemporary popular culture Indian women remain the second sex, trapped in the triple bind of religion, patriarchy and capitalism. Referring specifically to the silence of the Indian press Bathla states, “The silence of the media on women’s issues and the movement also hints at the insignificance attached to women as citizens and to their participation in the public sphere. In other words, media has rendered insignificance to

women's voices and conveyed that their concerns are irrelevant to democratic polity thus also indicating that a free press in itself cannot guarantee representation of opinions and values of marginalized sections.”(Bathla, 1998).

Interestingly therefore, popular culture continues the traditional paradigm of the ideal Indian woman, self-effacing care-giver and the maternal grace that is her essential mystique. Margaret Gallagher refers to Mankekar's observations about Indian television, in her essay, *Feminist Media Perspectives* points out that “ Indian television of the early 1990's addressed upwardly mobile women as the prime market for consumer goods, while simultaneously trying to engage them in the project of constructing a national culture through television serializations of the great Indian mythological epics-The Ramayana and the Mahabharata-in which women's role in the family, community and nation was depicted as cardinal. So the “liberties” of consumerism were in constant conflict with the duties of nation and family- building as presented in the televised epics.

However, the oppressive and exploitative factor of women's bodies, the embodiment and encoding of women's sexuality emerge as concerns among cyborg affiliates and theories and practices of cyber feminism. Even the liberating technological domains remain male-centred instead of gender neutral. In the post-human, post-gendered, meat and metal cybernetic conceptions too the defining roles of women remain ambiguous and ambivalent. In the essay “*Cyberspace, Feminism and Technology*”, Stacy Gillis (Richardson & Robinson, 2008) points out that despite technological advancement and the liberating environment that the internet provides, it is in visual pornography that women's bodies are “most prevalent”, thereby suggesting the persistence of the notion of cyclical progression, which is regulatory and exploitative in its representation of young women's bodies as the perennial and ultimate seduction.

Missed By Media

I would, however like to conclude by drawing attention to the unrepresented, invisible urban poor in the media. Targets of advertisements for consumer goods is not for casual labourers, blue

collared labour, factory workers, farmers, men and women who work in unorganized sectors, engaging in piecemeal work and often exploited by middle men. In fact, in almost all media images that represent the new middle class, from news readers to advertisements of cars and detergents, all men and women have fair skins. It seems for the media, India today is about fair skinned people, men, women and children. Dark skinned Indians have become invisible. And yet they exist all around us. The euphoria about the rising curve of the new middle class derecognizes those who support the zoom of the new middle class, that is the urban poor, housed in the fringes of the metros, mostly living in slums. Ranabir Samaddar points out the lack of universal prescriptions that seems to be implicit in the neo-liberal market economy and culture of the market, which is most often selective and exclusionary. (Samaddar, 2002)

These dark brown Indians, illiterate, semi-literate, literate, precariously flitting around or above the poverty line are not represented in the media. Their small makeshift homes without running water, toilets and kitchens, with members of a family from four to ten occupying tiny spaces and yet using mobile phones, working in shopping malls, luxury stores, beauty parlours, going through low end beauty regimen is not the target of the mass media. But it must be acknowledged that the urban poor is steadily emerging as an integral part of the new middle class. If we elide the presence of the burgeoning new urban poor, educated, skilled, trained in Indian schools, colleges and universities, working in call centres, malls, and educational institutions, the disparities between the rich and poor will be further consolidated, as stated by Robert A Isaak, "...India provides a testing ground to see whether it is possible to bridge the gaps between the poorest and the well-to-do or whether the amplifying effects of technology and the mobility of finance and skilled people will merely produce even greater inequalities." (Isaak, 2005)

History in the Making

The image above, tracks this transformation despite the normative practices and cultural continuity. The bride in the picture has a BA



Honours degree in Bengali literature from Calcutta University and a MA degree in Bengali literature from Burdwan University, distance learning course. The guests in the picture are senior members of the advantaged urban new middle class who had not only donated a significant amount for the wedding, but they attended the wedding and also enjoyed the wedding dinner. This too is a remarkable attitudinal shift.

The parents of the bride Kamala (name changed) could never have dreamt that their daughter would be a postgraduate degree holder in Bengali literature. Kamala's mother is illiterate, she is a domestic worker and Kamala's father is a middle school drop-out . The groom works as a driver and has a BSc degree from Calcutta University. The families of both the bride and groom live in slums located in the fringes of upwardly mobile south Calcutta.

This can be regarded as the image of radical change in the socio-economic dynamics of the new India, it is no longer about the traditional binaries of shining India and suffering Bharat. As it is necessary to recognize that the new urban middle class includes both the young upwardly mobile generations as well as the senior citizens and the position of women therein, it is necessary to recognize the need to initiate socializing strategies between the urban rich and urban poor, the two indivisible categories that constitute the new middle class post-liberalization.

Media representations can be more holistic if the focus is on those who had been marginalized for centuries, such a holistic approach can ensure both power and profit for the economy, highlighting a narrative of change. The urban poor, both men and women, as part of the new middle class must be recognized as the cutting edge component that can be regarded as the crucial game changer in the economic and social class structures of 21st century India.

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SECTION IV

NEW MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN:
WORK AND CONCERNS

Employment, Education and Aspirations of Urban Middle Class Women in India

Preet Rustagi

Introduction

The notion of the “new” middle class is linked with the view that income and equality form a virtuous circle. Income supports better spending on development of human capabilities, which in turn contributes to growth. Growth at the same time should continue to bolster gender equality. It is in this frame that the growing middle class and even the new additions to the middle class irrespective of whether these are adding to only the sociologically and culturally motivated middle class-ness rather than to the coveted middle class, may appear irrelevant for purposes of this paper. What matters is whether it is enabling women to be better equipped in terms of education and capabilities and whether this in turn is influencing their aspirations to move away from the dependent patriarchal gendered roles to begin thinking and acting as contributing and independent income earners.

The growing interest in the middle classes globally as well as for large countries such as India, is associated with the high growth periods which alleviated the relatively poorer households into what may be viewed as the ‘new’ middle classes, who are the consuming classes with an increase in their purchasing power. Bulk of the literature focuses on these middle classes, their measurement and growth trends. While several studies emphasise on the growing numbers of the middle classes, there are a few which challenge this

belief and based on alternative measures find the numbers declining or at least not rising (Krishna and Bajpai, 2015).

The proportion of population under the poverty line declined from 37 per cent (407 million) in 2004-05 to 22 per cent (269 million) in 2011-12, while the urban poor declined from 26 per cent to 14 per cent over the same period (GoI, 2013). With a decline in the proportion of population below the poverty line and rising incomes, there has been a rise in real wages¹ and earnings. A new band of households would move up into the middle classes and these may be viewed as the 'new' middle classes. The opportunity to consume or demand newer products with a rise in dispensable income and to yearn for better quality services in the spheres of education and health services, for instance, is highlighted (Shukla, 2010). There are certain characteristics which may be considered as representing this new middle class. Is the dimension of women's economic contribution critical to this or not?

When it comes to looking at the gendered dimensions of the new middle classes—it poses and modifies the perspective in certain ways. Since women's work participation is generally seen to be higher among the poorer sections of the population, the household incomes are supplemented by women's contributions. As the upward mobility occurs and there is movement into the new middle classes, does the economic contribution of women undergo some changes? Does the household income effect argument kick in for the middle income households? This argument is offered as explanation for withdrawal of women's work participation as household incomes increase. Is this what is occurring? Or is it the case that women with educational attainment and changing aspirations are likely to continue working? There may be variations across different class categories depending on the extent of patriarchal forces operational which might serve as barriers. Also, in several cases, it may well be the women's earnings which supplement the household income so as to make it cross the low to middle income bracket.

¹ The term real wages refers to wages that have been adjusted for inflation, or, equivalently, wages in terms of the amount of goods and services that can be bought. Wikipedia

In this paper, our interest is to find out whether women belonging to the new middle class households are found to be working in paid domains and gaining from being educated. Since the definition of middle class and new middle classes are not water tight quantitative categories, but descriptive constructs, household income for which consumption expenditure is a proxy used in India, the monthly per capita consumption expenditure based quintiles are used for the analysis. As the motivation of the paper is to examine whether gender related norms and attitudes with respect to education and paid employment undergo change among the middle classes, the entry point into classification for middle class is through work of women, especially relatively secure regular work, which often requires some basic educational qualifications.

Since income of the household is the core dimension which helps in categorising the threshold level of income that brings one into the new middle classes primarily, we could find examples of women among the lesser educated domestic workers, sweepers in government employment, sanitation workers and security workers—all women who are mostly second earners or part of the double income households (at least, if not more) on the one hand, and the service sector professional jobs as in finance, information technology enabled services (ITES), education and health related occupations among the better educated women on the other hand. The former category of women workers from the new middle classes hold strong prospects of bringing about an intergenerational change with ensuring education for their daughters and building aspirations for their improved job prospects. Some of these women may well be able to make the shift from the former set of jobs to the latter with better education. So, a domestic worker's daughter may become an insurance agent, health worker, billing counter manager or computing assistant. Capturing such shifts in status requires primary survey based data to assess, but it may be hypothesized as one form of transition marking the movement towards 'new' middle classes.

The analysis based on unit records of National Sample Survey (here after NSS), data that allows for monthly per capita expenditure, (here after MPCE) quintile wise categorisation, is limited to urban locations as the more stark distinctions and shifts are noticeable

amongst the towns, cities and metros. The implicit environment for women's participation and the infrastructural avenues together with avenues for paid employment are relatively more prominent and discernible in this urbanised context. Following this brief introduction, the first section provides an overview based on the literature on the significance of the growing middle classes and the different definitions proposed globally and for India. The second section reflects on who comprises the new middle classes in the urban Indian context and how gender concerns are likely to change among these new middle classes. These changes are explored broadly in terms of education among women in the third section, and the work participation and employment status across classes are discussed in the fourth section. The fifth section deals with the urban women's regular employment and occupational profile. The changes over time are from 2004-05 to 2011-12 throughout the paper for different MPCE quintiles. Based on this analysis, the concluding remarks are provided in the final section.

1. Definitions and Significance of the Growing Middle Classes

The middle class is not as clearly defined or discussed as poverty or the measurements of the poor. The term is often defined in cultural, social and psychological ways pertaining to norms and values associated with an upgradation as households move from a situation of deprivation to one of relative affluence. The middle class ought to fall somewhere between the rich and the poor, or the upper and lower classes. The term was originally coined to denote a section of society that falls between the aristocrats and peasants. It is commonly understood as ordinary working class people: those in either blue collar or white collar clerical jobs (as opposed to higher professional ones). It is often referred to as a social class usually comprising of non-manual workers, lower level managers, small business owners, self employed own account workers such as auto rickshaw drivers in the Indian context is one example. The income of the middle class is higher than that of the working class, but lower than that of the upper-middle and upper classes.

There is no standard definition of what constitutes the middle classes, it is subjective and comparative, thereby connoting different things for different people. Either shared norms and values or common points of view or those who have similar incomes may be perceived to be middle classes. Since it is a construct influenced by social, cultural, psychological and economic factors, it is difficult to narrow down to what defines middle classes or what does one mean by referring to middle class.

Globally, several country studies emphasise that bulk of the population think themselves as middle classes. Given that the upper class or the rich constitute a small proportion and more than an absolute conception, middle class is a relative construct as well. The locale and earnings profile therein of all others also influences this, so for instance, a double income household within a low income milieu may push the household up in comparison to the other households on average. This is also reflected in the consumption profile and services that the double income household can access. Most definitions for middle classes tend to be based on income or earnings.

Several benchmarks exist in the literature that signify the middle classes. These are based on income or consumption expenditures, assets or a combination of these factors. For instance, Birdsall (2007) considers individuals earning 10 per cent above and 10 per cent below of a society's median per capita income; while Banerjee and Duflo (2008) defines those whose daily consumption lies between \$2–\$10 {2005 purchasing power parity,(PPP²)}\$

The consumption based estimates attempted by corporate and

² The concept of purchasing power parity (PPP) is an estimate that provides the exchange rate between two currencies which enables the purchase of the same quantity of any individual good and service.

A purchasing power parity (PPP) is a price relative which measures the number of units of country B's currency that are needed in country B to purchase the same quantity of an individual good or service as 1 unit of country A's currency will purchase in country A. UN glossary

The concept of purchasing power parity allows one to estimate what the exchange rate between two currencies would have to be in order for the exchange to be at par with the purchasing power of the two countries' currencies. Wikipedia

market analysts such as the Deutsche Bank Institute estimates middle class to be anywhere from 30 million to approximately 300 million people—definitely not more than 30 per cent of the population. Indian middle class is projected to grow from 5 per cent in 2005 to 20 per cent by 2015 and over 40 per cent by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), 2007). Apart from these there are the few such as Goldman Sachs Global Markets Institute (2009) research which anticipates that nearly 90 per cent of India's population will be middle class by 2040.

Amidst these almost celebratory estimations from the corporate researchers, there are the more conservative and contrary questions being posed of whether there is a middle class in India at all. The analysis of several village studies highlight that leaving apart the minuscule 10 per cent of the top end, there are low levels of variations across different deciles of the population in terms of most attributes such as asset ownership, education and so on (Swaminathan and Athreya, 2015). Raveendran and Kannan, 2011 based on the proportion of population across the different consumption expenditure levels linked to the poverty line³ reveals that almost 77 per cent of the population is poor and vulnerable with only less than 4 per cent being categorised as high income and 19 per cent as middle income. Given the concentration of the upper and middle classes amongst the top 20 per cent, while the rest are all in the bracket below twice the poverty line level, bulk of the population is in the vulnerable segment.⁴ This is also not found to be changing over time.

³ As information on income/earning is not collected in India, the consumption expenditure is used as a proxy. Even for calculating the poverty line, consumption expenditure is used by the Planning Commission. Sengupta et al., 2008 used different levels to consumption expenditure compared to the poverty line and divided the population into six categories—extremely poor; poor; marginal, vulnerable, middle income and higher income as shown in the table 1.

⁴ The categories of vulnerable households refer to those whose household expenditure is between 1.25 times poverty line and 2 times the poverty line. Notionally, these categories of households are vulnerable since any shock can push them down below the poverty line.

TABLE 1: Distribution of Population in India by Income Levels

Extremely Poor (<0.75 PL)	6.3
Poor (0.75 PL to 1 PL)	15.5
Marginal (1 PL to 1.25 PL)	19.9
Vulnerable (1.25 PL to 2 PL)	36.3
Middle Income (2 PL to 4 PL)	18.9
High Income (4 PL and above)	3.9

Source: Sengupta, Raveendran and Kannan (2008).

As opposed to these estimates which foresee an increase in the numbers over time, there are studies which seem to indicate stagnation or no increase (Krishna and Bajpai, 2015). This is based on the Indian Human Development Survey, (here after IHDS) dataset from National Council of Applied Economic Research, (here after NCAER)⁵ which provides income and assets information. They also emphasise the distinctly urban bias of the Indian middle class (58 per cent lower middle class and 66 per cent upper middle class), even though urbanisation levels hover around 30 per cent.

It appears that most studies are inconclusive on the definition of middle class. The global estimates and income categories are too high keeping the average income levels in India, with a majority working in the informal, unorganised sector. However, some of the things that are clear are that bulk of the middle classes are in the urban areas. The metropolitan and larger cities are witnessing the better opportunities and returns that pushes the income levels up and thereby the demand for other goods and services. As emphasised by Banerjee and Duflo, 2008, the middle class which is associated with better access to jobs with regular wage are seen investing larger shares for healthcare and education services.

This is also reflected in the improving literacy among younger generations of women with the 15-24 years having 82 per cent

⁵ The NCAER conducts an Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) through proper sampling and generates detailed information all over the country on several parameters

literate compared to 59 per cent for all women above 15 years of age for the year 2011 (NUEPA, 2014, based on Census of India, 2011). Over time, the gains in literacy that are witnessed among younger women (15-24 years) is from 68 per cent in 2001 to 82 per cent in 2011. The gender parity is improving for the secondary education with the ratio of female to male enrolment increasing from 0.63 in 1993 to 0.94 in 2011.⁶

II. Who comprises the middle classes and what about the 'new' middle classes?

Who are the middle classes? In global context versus the Indian context, middle classes can be viewed as those households which have income/earnings beyond a threshold or within a certain range. However, this alone appears inadequate since the concept of middle classes connotes sociological, psychological and economic factors. Are the values and norms adopted by those who consider themselves as middle classes distinct and can these be identified so as to classify these sections of the population or are there overlaps and different domains within which changes occur as the lower classes enter into becoming the 'new' middle classes?

What explains or describes the 'new middle classes'? It could be the new entrants into the erstwhile middle income categories in terms of available incomes or dispensable incomes. Thus the new patterns of consumption witnessed in the market scenario with changes in multiple spheres such as cultural, social, fashion, attires, exposure to media and the new aspirational classes, are perhaps all indicative of this new middle classes. The basic factors which serve as drivers are often the rise in incomes and educational attainments, which facilitate the transition and change in attitudes. While some of the changes are part of a phenomena similar to 'aping the joneses', some of the goods and services are made feasible by the markets having products priced at variable ranges that makes these affordable.

The question that is most difficult to find answers for is whether

⁶ <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=613>, accessed in October, 2014.

the changes in the attitudes among the new middle classes vis-a-vis women will undergo major shifts and in what ways? Will the new middle class households now avail better education for their daughters as well as sons? Perhaps yes. After having provided similar opportunities in this respect, will this translate into their entry into the labour markets or not? Will this category of households tend to follow the sanskritisation process and begin to move away from the practice of women's labour market participation which was common among them when they were poor due to the compulsion of survival, or prefer for their women to take up better work opportunities wherever available? In other words, does the middle class thinking with growing aspiration for a better lifestyle and quality of goods and services stimulate its own level of compulsion for women to undertake paid employment and therefore hold the potential to break the gender stereotype based constraints?

Among the many views expressed regarding the middle class, one is that of increasing consumption expenditures for accessing better quality goods and services. Researchers examining the middle class proportions and its consequences on other dimensions of the economy note, that countries with large middle classes tend to have higher levels of income and growth, better economic policies, more human capital, better infrastructure and less political instability (Shukla, 2005, 2010; Easterly, 2001 and the references cited therein).

Education has increased and improved job opportunities for women although jobs have not been commensurate with the economic growth experienced. The expected labour intensive growth with opening of the economy has not been witnessed. Manufacturing sector has not grown or generated employment of the scale expected. It is largely the services sector jobs which have provided women employment. This is in education; health; finance, banking and insurance; retail; information technology enabled services; and so on. The education of women and their aspirations for earnings are critical for middle class households both for trying to retain its middle class position or seeking to be among the new middle classes.

The use of the term 'new middle classes' seems to be more one of the social clash between erstwhile middle classes and these newer entrants. The conflict towards granting the middle class status

to these households is part of the creation of this new category. Sociologically, the entry and exit into and out of any class category has been theorised for its pains and pleasures rather than only viewing it from one perspective (Lawler, 1999, Skeggs, 1997). The mobility of the poor into the new middle class is both a signal of arriving into a group through upward movement and also a sense of estrangement associated with this class movement. These class configurations are cultural and symbolic, as Bourdieu conceptualises the self as class-marked, since the symbolic capital and habitus is inscribed into the self. Such class embeddedness in people's history tends to be rooted and cannot be escaped so easily.

The rise in the middle classes tends to be associated with consumerism or changing consumption behaviour with increasing incomes and purchasing power on the one hand, and the opening up of economies and globalisation making available a wider variety of goods and services to choose from on the other hand. However, several of the norms and behaviour patterns especially in the socio-cultural spheres may be more difficult to change. Gender norms and behaviour is resilient and persistent among households, and yet some changes are witnessed.

Often women traced their trajectories to a middle class position through mainly two routes—education and marriage (Skeggs, 1997). The latter to a middle class man is reinforced by the social circle they move in. Changes in the marriage practices among the middle classes of specific cases have been examined to highlight the end of child marriages and rise in the age of marriage (Fuller and Narsimhan, 2008). Apart from companionate marriage being arranged by young men and women, education, employment and personal compatibility have become important criteria. These have been analysed for the role they play in reproducing both caste and middle class.

The pursuit of education and entry of women provides the base for their improved participation in the labour market, wherever feasible. It is increasingly common concern that women among the middle class households especially in urban milieu have to work, since the aspirations and expectations of families are changing. It is no longer possible to access the kinds of goods and services that are desirable

with a single earning member's income, especially with children. The increasing needs of urban households require double incomes and therefore a gradual change is witnessed with increasing acceptance to women also taking up paid employment. There may be restrictions on the nature and kind of job taken up, the distance at which such job place must be located and other occupational considerations, but the increasing acceptance to women working and contributing to household incomes is a major shift witnessed among the new middle classes.

The question this poses is whether such participation is to be viewed as empowerment or a double burden for the women? As in the case of the erstwhile lower or poorer sections of the population wherein women had to work to make ends meet for the households basic needs, is the participation of women among the middle classes also similar? This question brings in the element of choice being exercised by the women herself—is such work participation an outcome of compulsion or own decision? Where the element of vulnerability and necessity drives such work involvement under situations when the women would rather choose not to be in the labour market, or is doing it out of compulsion and insistence of others, it may be seen as a burden. Alternatively, where the women is working not because it is mandatory or critically essential for her to contribute to household income otherwise survival or the basic needs will not be fulfilled, but because her additional income adds to the pool which can be used for expanding the households choices in different spheres, which is a shared desire or aspiration. This distinction may be viewed as a marker of middle class context.

Simultaneously, there is also the point of how this work participation of women by adding to the household earnings, can in fact be the basis for pushing a household into middle class. As women's educational attainments improve even among the poorer households, they are likely to enter the labour market with better earnings prospects. The higher the earnings and contribution women make to the overall household incomes, the higher the likelihood for women's empowerment, in terms of having a greater chance of exercising their choices, being involved in decision making, and so on. The social and economic status ascribed to the women workers

also depends upon the nature of employment, sector or activities/tasks undertaken, position within the job structure/hierarchies and similar considerations.

Women working in the billing counters of retail units; as lab technicians or in health clinics; in the hotel and restaurants; in beauty parlours; shop floors and similar jobs which require middle level education of at least secondary or above levels, are considered middle class jobs. As opposed to the sanitation and personal services for instance, which tend to be low educated and unskilled (or at best semi-skilled) are considered to be low paying jobs. While the former are relatively better, those engaged in the latter tend to often undertake their jobs as social or family compulsion reportedly having lower status especially because of the stigma and indignity involved in undertaking such chores. Nevertheless, the formal sector sanitation workers who are working for the government, given the security and the salaries, tend to be ascribed a relatively higher value.

Having differentiated between the social notions surrounding different kinds of work responsibilities, the sheer income contribution the women make with their paid work tends to be significant in a large number of cases. This addition, it may be seen, can very often push the household incomes beyond the threshold, thereby transforming the household from poor to new middle classes. A second income contribution even from domestic workers and low-end jobs is significant in this respect, apart from what potential it has for women's empowerment.

Using consumption expenditure quintiles,⁷ which serve as proxy for income, the next section examines how educational profiles are changing especially for women. In the global context, several researchers have considered all those lying in between the 20th and 80th percentile;⁸ on the consumption distribution (Easterly, 2001).

⁷ Government sources of data do not collect information on income and hence consumption expenditure information is used as a proxy for income. The monthly consumption expenditures of households is ranked and divided into quintiles (20 per cent each into five categories).

⁸ The monthly consumption expenditures of households can be divided into percentiles (every per cent) referred to as 10th, 20th,.....80th, 90th percentiles. A percentile here implies dividing the households into 100

While considering the Indian middle classes, this could be among the three middle quintile groups—Q2, Q3 and Q4. The rich and upper middle income categories tend to fall in the top two quintiles, the Q3 and Q2 may be viewed as middle-middle and lower middle, which can be perceived as the ‘new’ middle classes. Given the change in the income profile, a household may move into any of the middle quintiles, Q2, Q3 or Q4. With increasing household incomes and aspirations, the views of these new middle classes towards girls schooling and pursuit of higher education may undergo change. This might also influence the female work participation in these households. Is this being witnessed?

III. Women’s education trends over time

Over the last few years, from 2004-5 to 2011-12, women’s educational attainment has been increasing. The graduates and above increased from 8 per cent to 11 per cent, while secondary and higher secondary education of females increased from 17 per cent to 23 per cent over the same period. Is this concentrated more among the new middle classes as defined by the consumption expenditure quintiles?

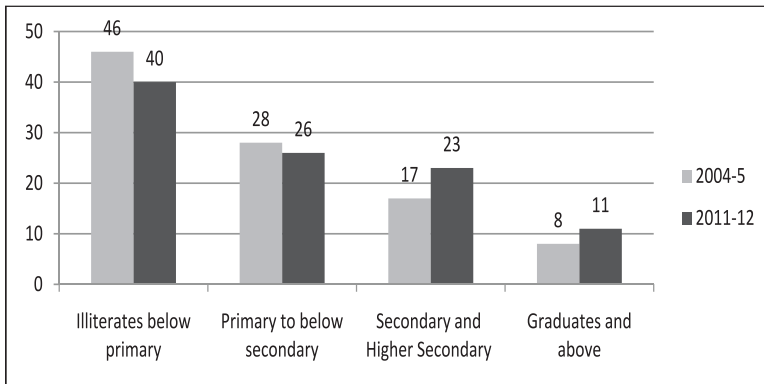


FIGURE 1: Women’s Educational Attainment from 2004-12: India

equal groups by their monthly consumption expenditures according to the distribution of values, which is being used as deciles (that is every tenth of the 100 percent).

Is this gain in education noted over these seven year period experienced more among certain sections of the population? Examining the quintile-wise data reveals that the educational attainment gains are far more among the Q3 and Q2 at the secondary and higher secondary levels; while for the graduates and above category, the increase is expectedly more for the topmost Q5. Although Q2, Q3 and Q4 have also witnessed gains in this higher educational category (see table 2).

Thus, it is clear that the gains in education are witnessed for women in almost all sections of the population. Even the quintile 1, poorest households, record an increase in the proportion of females with secondary and higher secondary education from 5 per cent in 2004-05 to 10 per cent in 2011-12. The highest increase is experienced for the Q3 women from 16 per cent to 25 per cent over the same period.

Among the graduates and above category, quintile 5 registered the highest increase from 26 per cent to 31 per cent; although even Q3 increased from 4 per cent to 8 per cent (an increase in actual numbers of almost 15.6 lakh urban females over the seven year period. Both

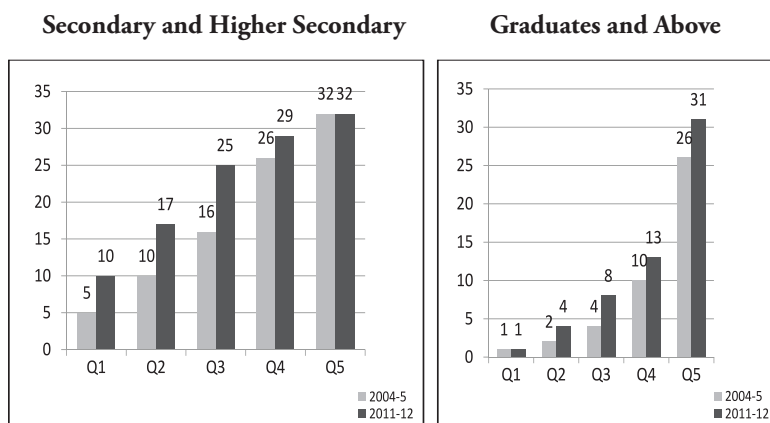


FIGURE 2: Quintile wise Share of Urban Females with Educational Attainment Beyond Matriculation

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data, 2004-05 and 2011-12.

TABLE 2: Change in Distribution of Educational Attainment of Urban Females across Quintiles

	<i>Illiterates below primary</i>		<i>Primary to below secondary</i>		<i>Secondary and Higher Secondary</i>		<i>Graduates and above</i>	
	2004-5	2011-12	2004-5	2011-12	2004-5	2011-12	2004-5	2011-12
Q1	71	62	23	26	5	10	1	1
Q2	58	50	30	30	10	17	2	4
Q3	46	39	33	29	16	25	4	8
Q4	34	31	32	27	26	29	10	13
Q5	20	18	23	18	32	32	26	31

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data,¹ 2004-05 and 2011-12.

¹ The National Sample Survey Organisation collects information on employment and unemployment every quinquennial period all across the country. This information is available for researchers interested in analysing different cross tabulations in the form of unit level data.

quintile 2 and 3 doubled over this period. Is this educational gain also reflected in the employment profile and status of urban females?

IV. Work Participation, Status and Changes Over Time

The urban labour markets for females have witnessed a few significant changes which are in large part due to the contribution of the increasing educational levels among them.

Although, overall work participation rates for the country have not changed drastically, except for the spurt seen in 2004-05. Whether this information for 2004-05 is spurious, an outcome of recruitment of contractual staff in the enumeration of the NSS or some reflection of the opening up of the economy and globalisation continues to be debated.

The changes in the work participation among urban women appear to be strongly associated with the fact that there are more graduates and above women in the market and several of them are into regular jobs as well. Rustagi (2013) provides a detailed account of work participation and employment status for men and women over time. Broadly, agriculture is declining in a big way, with actual numbers of women engaged in it declining too. The growth of secondary sector is still not getting into a mode of generating adequate employment avenues, although urban females have crossed the quarter per cent mark in manufacturing over the seven year period from 2004 to 2012. Bulk of the urban females, especially the educated, will find their jobs in services.

IV.1 What Does the Employment Status Reveal?

In terms of the employment status and changes over time for urban females, the share of self employed has been declining just as the casual workers. The only category of workers that are increasing relates to regular employees. The decline of self employment category relates to the decline in unpaid family workers while the own account workers are increasing. The latter implies that women working as entrepreneurs or involved in the running of enterprises are on the rise. This is definitely a positive indicator as it implies either

ownership or control over the livelihood and economic resources on the one hand while the invisible or unpaid component of women’s work is declining.

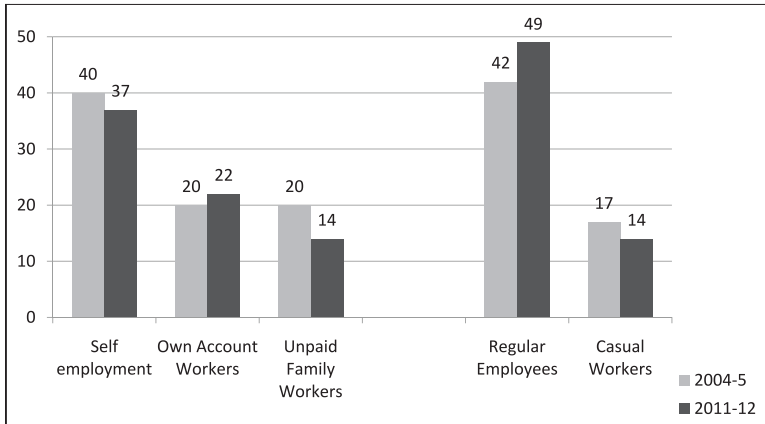


FIGURE 3: Distribution of Urban Females across Employment Statuses–2004-12

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data, 2004-05 and 2011-12.

IV.2 Changes in Self Employment

As seen from the literature there are a lot of expectations from the middle classes for markets and democracy; improving quality of services with the introduction of a discerning consumer; and so on. Apart from the demand side situation, as Banerjee and Duflo (2008) highlighted in their exploration of consumption behaviour especially of the middle classes in developing countries, there are distinct changes. The emphasis has been laid on the middle class values, which emphasise on accumulation of human capital and savings—making them central to capitalist accumulation. One of the expectations associated with the growing middle class was the growth of entrepreneurship, creating employment and productivity for the rest of society, but as the study (op.cit.) shows there is very little difference in the self employed category of work undertaken by the poor and the middle classes.

What is the scenario for middle class women in urban cities of India? Given the low degrees of freedom and control over economic resources, including access to credit facilities, the route of entrepreneurship which can definitely be one pathway is likely to be a limited one. Several studies which have examined women's entrepreneurship reveal the relatively lower productivity and returns compared to enterprises which are operated by males (Deshpande and Sharma, 2013).

Over the period 2004-2012, the share of self employed has been declining largely due to the unpaid family helpers category. The richest or better off sections (Q5) have registered an increase in the share of self employed among urban women (see figure 4). While it was stated earlier too, the decline in the self employed among the middle classes is almost entirely due to the reduction in the unpaid work, especially among the middle classes. The only category where some slight increase is reported is with regard to the Q5, where share of women has increased by 2011-12.

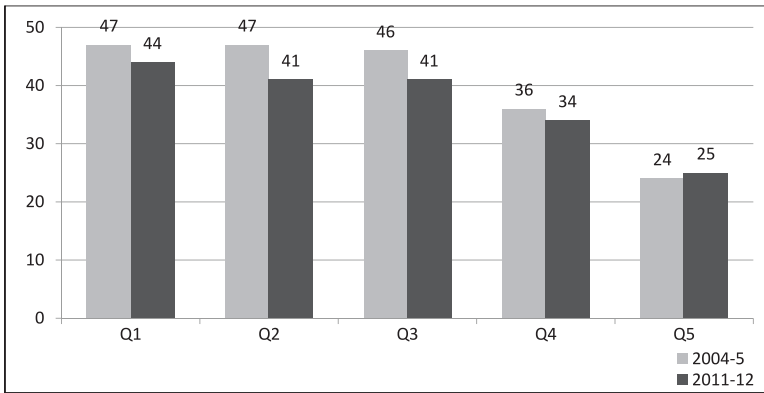


FIGURE 4: Quintile Wise Share of Self Employed Urban Females

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data, 2004-05 and 2011-12.

IV.3 Own account workers and unpaid family workers

Among the urban females, it is interesting to note that the own account workers have actually increased over this seven year period

by 2 percentage points. The increase in own account workers is more or less uniform across the quintile groups. Urban women are involved in a host of activities—vending, cooking, different types of homebased and artisan related work, carried out on a piece rate basis, and so on. A bulk of the women involved in such activities are vulnerable and belong to the poorer sections, although depending on the nature of work carried out on own account basis, there are women from relatively better off sections who are also involved. These may be involved in some IT related activities, copyediting and proofreading, stitching and designing and a range of such tasks/job, which women who are in situations that do not allow them to take up a regular full time job may prefer to opt for.

Women who have quit their jobs after marriage or childbirth but are skilled and interested in continuing to work subsequently after the break could well be one category who will be found undertaking own account work. Those who have resources to invest in setting up their own unit or enterprise, retail or services, to make an earning but may not have the interest or skills to hire workers and expand their activity could well fall in this category. The running of child care centres or crèches, tuition classes, supply of homemade food, snacks and so on are other activities which are commonly undertaken by middle class women. The entire range of retail chains for example, Oriflame, and similar other group product chains are a common activity in which many middle and upper middle class women are involved on a part time basis. The presence of such options and the educational levels of the women make it feasible for them to take up these activities.

Several insurance and other products also hire women on a commission basis rather than a salary or daily rate, which makes them own account workers. Although how they report their activities and how the enumerators enter these always pose some challenges. But assuming that they would take the mode of payment and work conditions into account to classify workers as self employed, own account workers or other statuses, we could expect these workers to be included in this category. In any case, these are the kinds of work women belonging to middle classes are generally involved in,

especially if they are not entering the usual formal sector jobs, be it public or private.

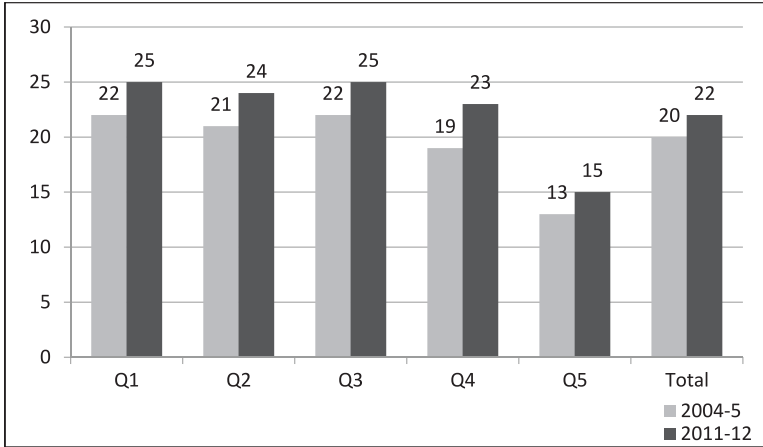


FIGURE 5: Quintile wise Share of Urban Female Own Account Workers

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data, 2004-05 and 2011-12.

IV.4 Decline in Unpaid Family Workers

The decline in the unpaid family workers appears to be something positive, if the share of paid workers is increasing. Although it is important to find out what is leading to this—is this due to household income effect acting as a deterrent for women's labour participation; lack of employment opportunities or changing nature of jobs available for women. Given that the self employed category of work tends to be a residual survival strategy rather than an active option, the prospects of such participation leading to substantial gains, so as to propel households to move upwards in the income levels continues to remain minuscule. Since it is the poorest segment of households among which urban women's share as unpaid family workers has declined, it may well be either due to rising household incomes or shift away from self employed activities by the owner-entrepreneur (generally the male) which leads to a decline in the unpaid work of the female as well.

There is also the constant fear of how accurate and well the survey process has been which enumerates such work of women, since very often it is this kinds of work that tend to slip beyond counting and accounting. For what is witnessed is that it is the quintile 5 that is the richest segment of households, where women reporting unpaid family workers is increasing. The entrepreneurial classes often have women as partners and this is formal, registered and will tend to be reported accurately. However, except for the top, all other quintiles have reported a decline in the share of unpaid workers over this seven year period.

IV.5 Regular Employment

It is the gains in regular jobs that are more promising which Banerjee and Dufflo (2008), have rightly demarcated as the prominent distinguishing factor between the poor and the middle classes. The most significant distinction between the middle classes and the poorer households is regarding relatively secure, regular employment, “who they are working for, and on what terms” (Banerjee and Dufflo, 2008). Using the payment schedule as a proxy, they note that while casual jobs are often paid daily or hourly, regular jobs are paid weekly or monthly. The middle classes are more likely to hold salaried jobs compared to the poor. From the analysis undertaken in this 2008 paper, the contribution of women among the middle classes is not entirely clear. This is one dimension that begs further exploration through primary research in the near future.

V. Regular Employment Across Classes— How do Middle Class Urban Women Fare?

The discussion above clearly shows that it is the regular employees category of urban females which have experienced an increase, while both the self employed and casual workers have declined. Is this pattern similar across different classes or is there a difference? Whether it is own account workers and unpaid family workers, a more or less similar pattern of increase in the former and decline in

the latter is witnessed. The difference if any is noted for the regular employees.

Regular work engagement includes non-secure, weekly and daily wagers who are working on a regular basis in any activity. Even the subsidiary workers are included in this. If we separate the principal status from the subsidiary workers, the urban regular Usual Principal Status (UPS) workers across consumption expenditure quintiles, it is the Q3 and Q4 for which there has been an increase over time.

The subsidiary workers share has been dwindling, while the principal status workers are increasing. The increase in the usual principal status regular employees has been witnessed across board for all classes. But the higher proportion of increases is recorded among the middle classes. It is the females belonging to Q3 and Q4 who are entering these regular jobs largely in services sector activities. The low end, low paying jobs comprising of domestic workers for example, do not have any registration or recognition. The regular jobs for women are at two ends—one comprises of the domestic workers, sanitation workers and similar service providers; the other is that of health, education, public administration, banking, insurance, ITES, and so on. Very few jobs have been created in manufacturing—with the concerns of this being researched in the quest for the missing middle (Mazumdar and Sarkar, 2008).

The largest share of regular employment is expectedly among the richer sections of the population, wherein nearly three fourths of urban female workers are involved. Since the own account workers are increasing among the urban females belonging to the richer households, their share in the regular employment is proportionately declining from 74 per cent in 2004-05 to 72 per cent in 2011-12. The proportion of regular employment has increased among the females in Q2 and Q3 much more compared to the other quintiles 1 and 4. Quintile 2 and 3 which can be considered as the new middle classes, have 36 per cent and 48 per cent of urban working females respectively in 2011-12. Q3 has increased from 39 per cent in 2004-05 to 48 per cent in 2011-12, while Q2 increased from 29 per cent to 36 per cent over the same period.

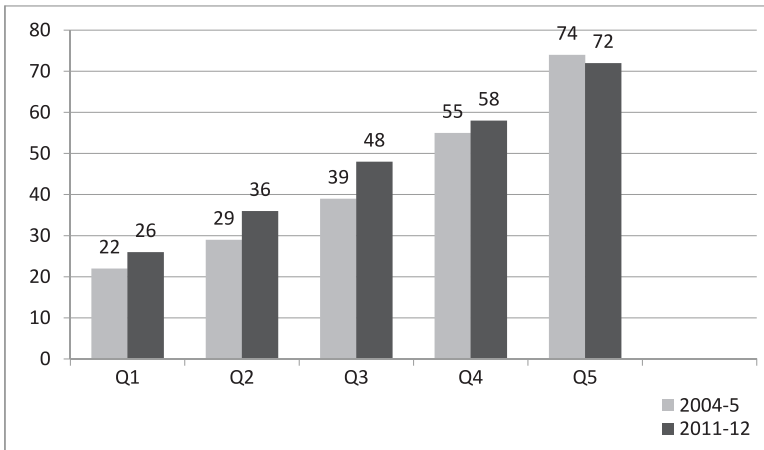


FIGURE 6: Quintile wise Share of UPS⁹ Regular to Total Employment of Urban Females over time

Source: Calculated from NSS unit level data, 2004-05 and 2011-12.

As mentioned earlier too, the contribution of women as regular employees itself can propel or push household incomes to cross the threshold of being poor to enter the new middle classes. In other words, it will not be surprising to find that households where the women are not earning may be more likely to be in poverty while the ones where women are working and earning are clearly the ‘aspiring class’. Although the NSS data does not provide information on the same households and hence cannot be used like panel data to show the trends and changes therein, an examination of the subsidiary and principal status women workers reveals the decline in the former with increases in the latter. Is this some kind of an indication that women, who were earlier able to or only getting subsidiary work, are now moving on to full time regular employment? Of course this would only be feasible with opportunities for such employment being available for females which they can get into.

⁹ UPS refers to the Usual Principal Status. The national sample survey data defines UPS as activities in which a person spent relatively longer time during the 365 days preceding the date of survey.

Measuring the overtime change in the distribution of regular workers among urban females across MPCE quintiles shows the increase of the proportion of Q3 and Q4 while the relative share of all other quintiles i.e. both the poorest and richest have declined, while the share of Q2 remains similar over this period. This is an indication of more urban females belonging to the middle MPCE quintiles getting into regular employment by 2011-12.

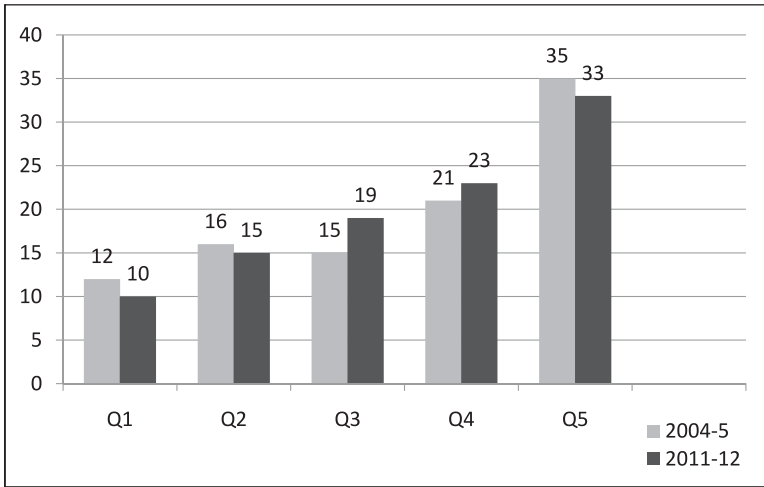


FIGURE 7: Change in the Quintile wise Distribution of UPS Regular Employment of Urban Females

Several studies in urban contexts refer to the aspiring educated females and their desire to take up and continue paid work (Fernandes, 2000; Ganguly-Scrase, 2003; Clark, 2008 and in this volume). In fact, this aspect turns out to be one of the few positive factors that are viewed as being beneficial for women amidst globalisation and liberalisation. Even the unemployment figures especially of the educated urban females is a reflection of this (the aspiration for getting into paid employment) with unusually high rates. The next section briefly looks at the occupational profile of urban women regular workers.

V.1 Occupations and Industries in which Urban Regular Women Workers are Employed

What are the occupations in which the new middle classes, especially those who are just beginning to move out of poverty, are involved? While the urban females of poorer households are involved in the elementary occupations, as sales and service workers, skilled primary sector workers, craft and related trades, the richer and better off sections are involved in official and managerial jobs, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, even clerks. The latter are probably largely working as government regular employees or other similar corporate/private sector formal employment.

The higher end occupational categories largely tend to engage women from Q5 and Q4, especially as senior officials and managers. More than four-fifths of all legislators, senior officials and managers among UPS female regular workers are among the Q5, while the Q4 reports 12 per cent in 2011-12. Apart from technicians, a bulk of the professionals too belong to these topmost categories, however, there are some women from among the lower quintiles also who are reported in these occupations. The proportion and numbers of middle class women in comparison to the total number of women in this category may not appear significant, but the change is occurring gradually. Similarly, even among the middle classes, women work as technicians and associate professionals. An almost similar profile is witnessed for the clerical occupations which are largely in the Q5, Q4 and Q3, although these last two categories of occupations are also getting women from Q2 and Q1.

Jobs on the billing counters and managing units across shopping complexes, malls and retail chains are common places where urban women belonging to the new middle classes are seen working. This is made feasible due to the school level education of young girls and their aspirations to get into a paid, salaried employment. The gradual changes in the mindsets of the parents and society regarding women's employment outside the household in a public space as well as the relatively better work environs of these job places, together facilitate such participation. The salary returns of course are also an important

element for taking up such work, but the other infrastructural facilities such as transport etc make it a lot more acceptable.

The low end income classes are found involved in manufacturing, Q1 and Q2 report 56 per cent of all women regular UPS workers in plant and machine operation, elementary, craft and related trade occupations. Even Q3 and Q4 record substantial number of women in these categories. Trade, hotels and restaurants is another category of workers in which women belonging to the middle and lower classes are seen getting employment.

Several of the women workers tend to be involved in public administration, health, education etc. These jobs involve women with different qualifications and at different levels. While there are middle class women, both erstwhile and the newer ones finding employment in these jobs, those belonging to Q1 and Q2 would include all the para health and education workers, the women who work as cooks and helpers under the mid day meal scheme. This is also inclusive of the class four, multi-task employees in the government and private jobs.

Concluding Remarks

The paper is not focussed on highlighting what signifies middle classedness, especially from the point of view of women, yet, it may be stated that it is unlikely to find any girl out of school in the middle class households, certainly not because of lack of investment/resource crunch, or outright gender discrimination. It is also not difficult to expect that there will be no child labour in middle class households. The age at marriage for females is definitely increasing, but it cannot be stated that no middle class households would get their girls married before the legal age. However, by and large most of them would be doing so in urban areas.

The focus of this paper is on whether the educational and work profiles of women, especially those who are among the middle classes, have changed. The attempt is to explore an understanding about whether the new middle classes would encourage their women to take up jobs and become a part of the labour force. As more women attain better education, the enhanced capabilities together

with more employment avenues for women is likely to result in changing the structure of employment as witnessed. Even amidst the overall decline in female work participation as witnessed, the share of regular workers has increased. This is partially taken up by the middle class households. However, what is not feasible from the existing information, since this is not panel data, is whether being in the labour market itself as second earners supplementing or even augmenting the household income may indeed push the household into becoming part of the new middle classes.

Overall, it may be stated that the gains in women's employment are noted especially in the regular salaried jobs. These are mostly facilitated by the educational improvements noted in the urban population as well as the labour force. The aspirations to take up a paid job for women would not be possible to match unless the basic educational attributes and investments are made.

The analysis in this paper brings out the fact that it is with higher education that the aspirations undergo change—the desire to work and earn for instance—which is central to economic empowerment. The middle class aspirations of the households both aid in facilitating the investment into women's education and training building their human capabilities, but also simultaneously raise expectations for their work participation and earning. Where it is the shared recognition of the household and women themselves also feel that it is essential to earn and contribute to the household earnings, the potential for gender equality also undergoes a significant change. In cases where the women are capable, there is a relatively higher likelihood that they will exercise the option of working and earning since they will be demanded by the labour market. With the gradually changing social milieu, this is a route to change mindsets through participation in paid work domains which compels everyone to view women not as dependent and more as contributors or even better independent earners!

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Gendering the IT Sector: The Culture of Managing Home and Technology

Govind Kelkar

In a 2002 study on gender and technological change in Asia, I wrote:

It is not technology itself that has inevitable consequences but the economic and social situation in which technologies are introduced and the balance of forces at any time. Certainly systems to reduce the labour of cooking, house cleaning, domestic laundry etc may make it easier for working couples to share domestic duties. But it is also possible for such technologies not to lead to such changes in sharing. In Japan, for example, labour saving technology does not lead to any sharing of housework between the two genders. So long as women do not insist that their careers are as important as those of their husbands, and that housework be shared or socialised (even commercialised in parts, like using a laundry, or external catering), there need not be any change in gender relations, no matter what technology is available. (Kelkar and Nathan, 2000, p. 434)

A decade after the above observation, a key argument in this paper is that our relationship to technology is pivotal to the relational processes of gender difference and dualism of work between women and men. Admittedly as feminist theory stresses (Haraway, 1991), gender is not fixed and is constructed in interaction with production and use of new technology, in turn, creating new meanings and new categories of masculinities and femininities. Our objective is to gain insight about social change or changing position of women in the existing social structure of male power and hierarchy within and outside information technology (IT) industry.

Women Professionals in Information Technology

In Asia, India has emerged as an IT superpower and the second largest software developer in the world. To expand a variety of IT services and engagement capabilities with clients, in the 1990s, Infosys set up development centres in a number of places in the country (Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Pune and Mangalore) and later in North Indian cities (for details see Parthasarthy, 2013). With annual revenue of USD 60 billion, the Indian Information Technology—Business Processing Outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry has come up as the largest private sector employer in the country, with direct employment of 2.23 million professionals and indirect employment of over 8 million people in different industry sectors (NASSCOM & MERCER, 2009). The percentage of women employees steadily increased from 21 per cent in 2003 to 36 per cent in 2008, especially at senior levels (NASSCOM, 2003; NASSCOM & MERCER, 2009). Importantly, the percentage of women working in human resource development (for long an assigned career for women seen as soft non-technical area) dropped from 55 per cent in 2006 to 25 per cent in 2008, which shows that women are opting for non-gendered careers.

In a study undertaken for UNDP (2004) of nine Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam) the authors noted that despite the absence of gender segregated data at national levels, the role of IT industry in promoting gender equality was positive. On an average, among professionals, there is one women employee for every seven men employed in the IT industry. Women professionals constitute 12.5 per cent of the IT industry, with the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) having the highest proportion of women employees (29 per cent), and Rolta the lowest (4 per cent). Nearly 20 per cent of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) employees, 19 per cent Wipro employees and 17 per cent of Infosys employees are women (Rani and Mahalingam, 2003).

There is a definite male preference in hiring and promotion at the senior levels of management in the IT industry. There are fewer women in the high echelons of the IT industry. The higher the

position in the corporate ranks, the more serious is the gender divide. Even within the same hierarchy, female executives earn much less than their male counterparts” says Ranjit Shahani, CEO, Novartis India Ltd. (Financial Express, 2001). In a recent report by Monster Salary Index, 30 percent of the total IT sector workers in the country are women, and there is a huge gendered salary gap of 29 percent. The gross salary of a male employee in IT work is Rs. 359.25 per hour, while a woman employee receives Rs. 254.4 per hour (The Times of India, July 23, 2014). The report further noted that men get promoted to supervisory positions more often than women workers in the IT sector.

Notwithstanding the glass ceiling in the IT industry, the development of IT in Asia has had clear impact on women. Studies of ‘Village Pay Phones’ in rural Bangladesh (Richardson, Ramirez and Haq, 2000), and computer aided technologies and teleworking in India (Mitter and Sen, 2000; Gothoskar, 2000a, 2000b) have observed that household income has increased, and women have more mobility and say in household matters. But women’s work has multiplied, as professionals and lower level employees have continued with household work and care responsibilities. Further, communication via the internet is itself gendered and strongly shaped by patriarchal yardsticks of class and gender (Veena N. and Kusakabe, 2004).

Individualisation of Capacities

Information Technology is characterized by a production system of networking, outsourcing and subcontracting which requires individualization of capacities. The nature of the work in the IT industry is different as compared to other industries. In the IT industry, labour loses its collective identity and individualizes the capacities of workers. The positions of owners, producers, managers, and workers, are increasingly blurred in a production system of variable geometry of team work, networking, outsourcing, and subcontracting (Castells, 2000). The networking of capacities required by information technology increases women’s capability to take decisions on their own and constructs greater space to enhance

their agency, though within limited terms of culturally embedded, structural inequalities of women.

Importantly, women's presence in decision-making positions as partners or entrepreneurs makes a difference to the recruitment and promotions of women in higher positions. A woman who is a partner in a growing IT company said, her physical presence at the interviews led to the recruitment of more women, otherwise, even gender-sensitive men do not look for alternatives or other ways of recruiting women. The attitude of the people in charge of recruitment plays an important role in the number of women and their positions (interview with the author, Bangalore, March 2009)

Primacy of Domestic Work

A major concern of feminist scholarship has been the impact of new technologies on women's lives, particularly on women's work (Cockburn and Furst-Dilic, 1994; Folbre, 1994, Kelkar and Nathan, 2002; Omvedt and Kelkar, 1995; Mitter, 2000). While employment in the IT industry has decreased the time available to women for domestic work, their responsibility for these tasks has not diminished. Women are expected to balance both home and work. Most women have mothers-in-law or housekeepers to count on. Men do help in the housework, though this help manifests itself mainly in childcare or when the woman is travelling. The housework remains the woman's responsibility and is unshared or minimally shared, with the exception of one or two cases where it is almost equally shared.

The primacy of domestic work has several consequences for women who seek wage employment. Given the patriarchal structure of the Indian family, women are swamped in never-ending demands of housework and domestic care. We noted women in the IT work are agitated by the culturally defined gender-based division of labour, which they feel is unjust. A 30-year old woman employed in a call center in Delhi reported, "I am frustrated when my unmarried junior colleagues are promoted. However because of my household responsibilities, I cannot work long hours and therefore cannot expect or progress at work" (author's interview, 2009).

There are, however, some innovative examples of attempts to

introduce a change in the gender-based division of labour, NIIT, with a large proportion of women employees, has instituted part-time and flex-time schemes for both women and men as some men were found to be involved in childcare. Paternity leave and part-time/flex-time work for men are also being instituted in some companies in Delhi and Bangalore. Women's entry into the labour market and the changing socio-economic structure of the family may help change the gender division of labour.

The Gendered Mobility in the IT Sector

During the last 20 years, women's participation in IT-enabled services has been increasing. Many women have moved from the hotel industry, sales, fashion, designing, teaching and so on to IT-enabled services. They view the IT sector as an emerging phenomenon, an ideal working environment for women. Gender differences operate in how women and men are differently placed in availing these opportunities. Men, for example, move from one company to another as they find better opportunities. However, the percentage of women who move from one company to another for better opportunities is very small. Restrictions on women's mobility due to household responsibility and societal barriers make it difficult for them to change jobs frequently. Women have fewer locational choices than men do. This makes them less competitive with regard to exploiting the opportunities. Married women cannot spend a lot of time on commuting to work unlike single women and men who can. So they negotiate for a lower position in companies near their house. One woman in a call center in Delhi said; "Although the work is monotonous, I do not want to quit this job, because it is close to my house" (Authors' interview, 2002).

Restrictions on women's mobility have however, loosened over the years since such mobility has a direct bearing on their ability to take up employment outside the house (Kalpagam, 1992). While a large number of married women are still bound by domestic childcare responsibilities, single women seem to find a significant change in their mobility enabling them to take up jobs and advance their careers. However, women are not as mobile as men. A Dataquest-

Jobs Ahead Survey in 2003 found that 52 per cent of the women (and 28 per cent of the men) were 'not open to relocation' (Kalghatgi and Seth, 2003).

Strangely enough, women's lower mobility has influenced the recruitment policies in the industry in their favor. Several instances during my discussions at Delhi and Bangalore in 2009 have led us to realize that women (and men), who are unable to get into the more competitive areas of the industry, such as Multinational Corporations (MNCs) or large Indian firms, join the IT-enabled sector. Therefore, they do not opt for more challenging and better paying jobs. Hence employers prefer married women with children, as they are not too mobile and would be willing to stay on in 'a boring job' for domestic reasons. Women were viewed as 'efficient in the work and would not leave the company as they get better opportunities'. (Interview with the author, Bangalore 2009)

Good Practices in Women's Employment

In exploring some of the good practices, it was noted that 70 IT companies in India have implemented policies on sexual harassment, flexible working hours, transportation policies and flexible leave usage as the most common policies, others (as shown in the figure below) while remain less common. Few companies provide a counsellor for women employees. There were others (45%) who have institutionalized 'gender neutral career advancement opportunities' followed by grievance management and reward an increase in women's inclusivity in the IT industries (NASSCOM-MERCER, 2009: 17). As the following figure shows, 68 percent of women employees have flexible work schedules.

Importantly, there has been undeniable improvement in the social mobility and work participation rate of women in the IT industry. The nature of work (such as flex-time, tele-working and working from home), the tools (such as email and internet), and the individualization of capacities required by information technology make women more capable of taking decisions on their own and construct greater scope to enhance their agency.

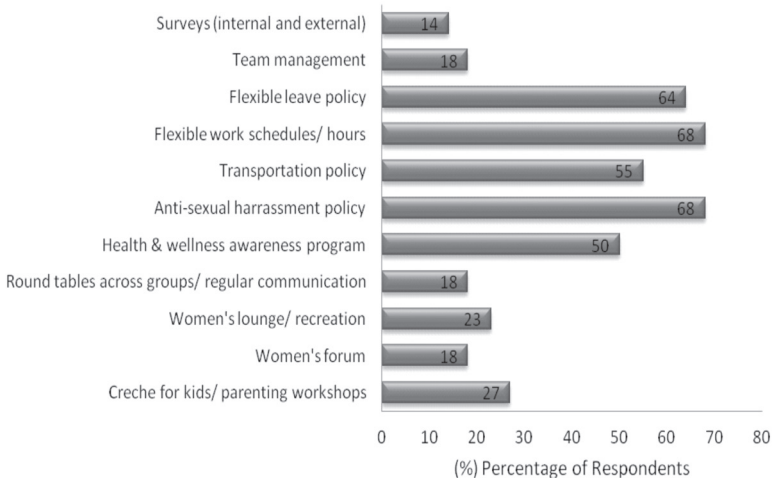


FIGURE 12.1: Best Practices to Support Women at Work

Source: NASSCOM-MERCER, 2009.

Towards Transforming Structural Inequalities and Gender Relations

Women's groups in various parts of Asia are able to keep in touch with each other and with groups in other parts of the world through email and other such communication systems. The resulting networks of such organizations are able to work in close coordination in conducting campaigns on various issues affecting women. Women's groups, indigenous people's organizations, organizations protesting against large dams—all such groups are now networking in a manner made possible by the new communication technologies.

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai has set up an innovative program for village knowledge centres in a number of villages in 18 districts of Southern India. Two major features of the program are the inclusion of women from low socio-economic groups in the management and training programmes run by these centres; and gender sensitivity (for example, considering the health and skill development needs of economically poor rural women) in

assessment of the information needs of the local people. A significant outcome of the skills gained from the village knowledge centre is that many women in the age group of 20-40 years were able to take up jobs as computer teachers in the neighbouring schools or as data entry operators in agri-knowledge centres. Reportedly women/girls “who were once diffident and had no exposure to the outside world, are today very happy that they can support their families with their own income. Besides this, they are now looked upon with respect and admiration by the family and neighbours”, and this has given them confidence and prestige in the communities (M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, 2010: 126).

In Kuppam district in the state of Andhra Pradesh, Hewlett-Packard developed a solar powered camera with an easy to carry small printer. This was given to women’s self-help groups (SHGs) to help them to generate additional income by taking photographs at social events (Parthasarthy, 2013)

The computer knowledge and skills introduced by IT does not however end power inequality, but it does allow women and the disadvantaged groups more scope to project themselves and meet their livelihood needs. IT, therefore, constitute the basis of the redefinition of traditional gender norms and supports a media of information, understanding and knowledge in which women’s interests, opinions and rights are taken into account. Nevertheless, they function within the dominant interests of the market and the state. This provides a non-threatening mobilization of women’s labour for the benefit of their families and communities without much change in gender inequalities. It has not yet been possible for women in the IT sector to challenge and transform structural inequalities and gender relations.

The gender-equitable answer lies in working out systems, whereby society, industry and government institutions share the cost of social services (a critical component of economic growth) required to keep women working on a regular basis like other employees (unlike on two tracks—full time employees and employees with full domestic responsibilities).

An Appraisal of Change in Gender Relations

Can information technology play a leading role in spurring change? What questions will be addressed, what answers will be promoted, are all based on social structures, with embedded gender hierarchies. Information technology, like any other technology, does not merely have an effect on social structure. It is the process of gendered power and hierarchy of the economy, polity and society that determines technology itself. Hence, the relevant questions are: has the movement of women into the information technology weakened the grip of patriarchy? Or, does it function within the confines of traditional structures of power and hierarchy between women and men?

We examined these questions keeping in mind women as employees in the IT industry. There is socially acknowledged role of women as income earners, which is different from their former and traditional status as dependent, contributing family workers. With the spread of IT, and more so, with the mobile phone technology, women have learned new methods of work organisation.

With IT employment, women have gained greater prestige in the household and also have increased control over how their income is spent, which is what Amartya Sen's (1990) theory of household bargaining as cooperative-conflict would predict.

The unitary household model, expanded originally by Gary Baker in the 1960's suggests that the household is a collection of individuals who have a single set of interests and thereby precludes any conflict or inequality among the members. This unitary model has increasingly been questioned. (Sen 1990; Kelkar, Nathan and Walter 2003; Seebens, 2011). In his analysis of gender and cooperative conflicts, Sen propose that household members do not necessarily share the same preferences and that they try to pursue their own interests and claims in the pluralistic level of existence. The household members face two types of problems at the same time: a) of working in cooperation and adding to total availabilities; b) of conflict related to dividing the total availabilities among the members of the household. Arrangements regarding the division of paid and unpaid work, differential consumption patterns, and decision making, impact the combined problem of cooperation

and conflict. If the household allocation of paid and unpaid work and asset ownership are not gender balanced, it may influence intra-household bargaining, inter-spousal decisions concerning production, consumption entitlement, and formation of human capabilities and thereby accessing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Further, the respective bargaining power of women and men within the cooperative existence depends much on their asset ownership (or its potential) through inheritance or employment earnings, including the social perception of their economic contributions and power outside the family/household. To exit from a non-functional, unwelcome marriage is more costly for women than for men in most cultures, as it is likely to withdraw women's bargaining power over custody of children, management of household assets and their right to consumption and freedom of mobility (Kelkar, 2013).

Sticky Areas

There are **two sticky areas** that resist a transformative change in gender regimes in Asia. First, the gender division of housework and domestic care and second the gender tag in the labour market. Public policies, social norms and familial grooming nurture men to be 'breadwinners' and head the households for any kind of major decisions around them. In most situations, men are therefore reluctant to undertake any responsibility with regard to housework and domestic care that is likely to affect their market work and potential advancement with promotions. This position of men within the household and outside in social, economic institutions as well as in the development planning, provides men the power to disregard women's housework, its long working hours without any public recognition and economic remuneration. Housework and domestic care—so critical for the maintenance of human society—is condemned to remain invisible and sexually characterized as the women's duty. And, women's strategic interest for advancement with market work continues to be ignored. The feminist analysis of household work and domestic care considers it an important value

in itself and the gender equality issue lies in its adequate recognition and its replacement with equal sharing by women and men.

The so-called productive activities may be parasitic on the other work being done, such as housework and food preparation or the care of children. Technology is not only about equipment and its operational characteristics but also about social arrangements that permit the equipment to be used and the so-called production processes to be carried on.

A second area that has been largely resistant to change is the gender tag in the labour market: segregation of women and men in the market work and occupational structures. Employers tend to hire women for 'women's job' and men for 'men's job', so that women do not lose utility from working in men's jobs and men do not lose utility from working in women's jobs. Firms generally consider that women are efficient in their traditional occupations (assistants and carers) and men do not feel threatened of giving up their skilled work or technological superior position, as happened in the case of keyboard operators in Kabyle society in Africa. The Kabyle society, studied by Bourdieu shows that 'women's entry into the publishing trades as the keyboard operators aroused formidable resistance on the part of men, who saw it a threat to their occupational mythology of highly skilled labour' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 60-61). It was only after a long struggle by women that their keyboard operating skills were recognized. However, women's technological work was arbitrarily redefined as of lower quality, while maintaining the higher value of men's 'skilled work'.

Discussing how norms affect economic behaviour and choice of gender identity in labour market relations, Akerlof and Kranton in their recent study (2010) conclude that men do not generally dislike working with women. Their dislike is job-specific, for example, women as secretaries and men as executives. Therefore,

- I. Women invest in skills for jobs that are appropriate for women (education rather than business schooling or engineering).
- II. Women may have a lower attachment to the labour force because of wider gender norms (women are expected to stay home and raise children).

III. The real problem is the norms that regulate that women and men should do particular jobs, irrespective of their individual tastes and abilities.

Firms do not have much incentive to change gender norms, which are generated within the household and then manifested in the labour market. Furthermore, whatever gains have come up as a result of the feminist critique of labour market relations and of conventional economic interpretations of work, they are likely to be at risk with the new forms of women's incorporation in global production systems.

To advance the struggle of women employers for decent work, two major issues need to be confronted. First is that the gender differentiation of the labour force between a core of men who have somewhat decent work standards and flexible mass of women workers who do not have these standards, largely proceeds on the basis of presumed skills. Women are kept out of skilled categories or their labour, even though skilled, is classified as unskilled (Bourdieu 2001; Mason, Rozelle and Zhang, 2000). This skill-based gender differentiation of the labour force needs to be confronted and changed, if the conditions of women employees are to change. Second, since it is considered to be women's responsibility to do most of household labour, the enormous increase in women's work burden with their entry into income-earning work needs to be tackled, if women are not to continue mining their bodies. The provision of sufficient infrastructure, like clean and efficient energy sources that would both reduce time in cooking and the health hazard from cooking, along with moves to bring about an equal sharing of household work, both together are part of a move for decent work for women.

Conclusion: IT and Change in the Gender Division of Work and Social Norms

Research shows that social attitudes towards gender roles are passed from generation to generation and such cultural transmission has implications for women's pressure in the labour market. For women, the effect of attitudes results in limiting their opportunities in the

labour market (Farre and Vella, 2013). To improve labour market prospects for women, it would be important to encourage change in the male attitudes toward the conventional role of women, and for the men's sharing of household work and domestic care responsibilities. These can be instituted through the firm and factory policies for a) regular gender sensitization workshops/discussion on gender responsive work practices with in the home and in the labour market; b) publicly funded child care programmes, along with the subsidized low cost commercial care; and c) a concerted effort at changing the gender segmentation of labour markets.

Undoubtedly, these create challenges for labour markets and threats for social norms, cultural institutions, the state machinery and employment policies. Despite frequent declarations for mainstreaming of gender equality in the labour markets and the state policies, feminist analysis shows that traditional gender roles are reinforced not just by cultural norms but also by employment policies. (Seguino 2007; Sandberg, 2013). The existing employment policies and the labour market relations encourage women for the maintenance of traditional gender roles and do not allow changes in the gender division of labour. Based on a panel study of income dynamics for 1991-2009, Elizabeth McClintock found that occupational interaction influences the gender division of work in the home (McClintock, 2013). Her study points out that when men of the household are employed in traditionally female occupations (e.g. nursing, childcare or teaching), they spend more time doing housework compared to men who are employed in the traditionally male occupations (as machine operators, masons or supervisors). And that their wives or partners spend less time in caring and household activities. Further, when married women or women in live-in-relationships work in traditionally women's jobs, they tend to increase the amount of time on housework and caring compared to when they are employed in traditionally male occupations.

Is there no change in social norms and labour market relations? In urban systems of major cities in Asia (Bangalore, Beijing, Delhi, Mumbai) men reportedly are taking on more household responsibilities. However, this change is happening very slowly and women are still

far from parity in the household tasks as well as in ownership and control of productive assets. While employment policies tend to say that motherhood is the most important and difficult work of all, women who do this work get no reward or recognition for their contribution. In contrast, all the work related to motherhood is seen as the women's duty. In most cases women pay a big career penalty for raising the human resources for the future. In gender analysis of the labour market in North America, Stephen Rose and Heidi Hartmann noted: "Controlling for education and hours worked, women's annual earnings decrease by 20 percent if they are out of the workforce just for one year. Average annual earnings decline by 30 percent after two to three years, which is the average amount of time that professional women off-ramp from the workforce" (quoted in Sandberg, 2012: 102).

Burdened with housework and child care, women find it difficult to move up in the career. Once laid off, it is very difficult for them to be re-employed in any formal sector job; and they, therefore, have to seek informal employment with poor working conditions lacking any social security. Can the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment be assisted by change in employment policies?

Some preliminary steps towards economic empowerment of women require a bold and transformative change in social norms which prohibit women (and also some castes and indigenous peoples) from accessing employment opportunities. Discussing the limits of women employed or seeking employment in the IT sector, Sheryl Sandberg Chief Operating Officer of Facebook observed: "Women must be more empowered at work, and men must be more empowered at home" (Sandberg 2013: 108)

Culture is not a historical necessity, nor is it static. Change in cultures is part of an ongoing process of social, economic change. Women's movement, like any other social movement, creates its own culture and new social, gender norms. Such new social norms or cultural configurations also create social conflicts or possible contradictions arising from the existing and newly created norms. These new gender relations and norms operate in a dialectical way, introducing the germs of change that a new society may carry. As

correctly pointed out by Duflo (2012), outsourcing of telemarketing and related tasks present market opportunities for women who had been traditionally kept out of the labour market. This leads to a rapid increase in women's freedom of movement to access market work and increase in capacity with English-based education. The cultural ceiling that effectively prohibits women from being recognized as economic contributors needs to be overcome in order to increase the potential of human society, including women's agency and empowerment.

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Reproductive and Genetic Technologies, and New Aspirations and Practices of Urban Indian Middle Class Women in a Neo-liberal Market Economy

Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta

Introduction

“What is meant by the term ‘modernity’? Is it about being technologically acquisitive and inhabiting places that are plush and expensive? Or is it a certain attitude that we bring to bear in our relations with other people?” queries Dipankar Gupta (2011, 11). In his book ‘Mistaken Modernity: India Between Worlds’ he argues that “modernity ... is not about technology and consumption, as is mistakenly believed in India, but has to do with attitudes, especially those that come into play in our social relations...” (12). Taking a cue from this statement, I contend that modernity **is** about technology and consumption, in fact it is about the consumption of technology, as it plays a crucial role in determining our attitudes and social relations. To substantiate my contention, I explore urban Indian middle class women’s engagement with reproductive and genetic technologies, in order to understand their aspirations and life choices in a neo-liberal market economy.

The paper is structured as follows: It begins with an introduction to globalisation and India’s neo-liberal economy which has made advanced reproductive and genetic technologies and services available. This is followed by a brief discussion on what constitutes and characterises the emerging social category of the new middle class (NMC)—an NMC identity that is associated with

consumption practices of commodities made available through market liberalisation. An important element of the new middle class women's lives is the issue of biological reproduction. To highlight this, some contemporary practices and attitudes of the new middle class in urban India are described in relation to reproductive and genetic technologies. I ask: What is the interrelationship between this neo-liberal economy, technology and culture? Reflecting upon these, in the concluding section I argue that the manner in which NMC women 'consume' these technologies they straddle a space between the traditional and the modern. In embracing 'biomedical modernity' they perform a delicate balancing act between tradition and modernity in their own interest.

This paper is based on (a) library research for a theoretical understanding of the (new) Indian middle class; (b) use and analysis of secondary sources such as media reports on women's practices regarding use of reproductive and genetic technologies to map the field and (c) empirical research using qualitative research methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews regarding use of certain technologies.

Neo-liberal Economic Globalisation

Globalisation refers to the "growing interconnectedness and interdependence on a world scale." One of its characteristics is a liberalised free market economy that allows capital flows around the globe without hindrances. Several authors have remarked on the phenomenon of global cultural homogenisation. There is an increasing 'transnationalisation of economic and cultural life', the 'cultural convergence' of cultures and lifestyles around the world in the societies exposed to its impact (Robins 1991 cited in Woodward 1997, 16). Globalisation involves an interaction between economic and cultural factors whereby changes in production and consumption factors can be seen as producing new shared identities—'global' consumers—indistinguishable from one another, found around the globe. In the early years globalisation was generally perceived as a western process of homogenizing and universalizing aspects of different parts of the world, equated with an abandoning

of local 'traditions' and cultural decadence. However, as later studies have shown, the process of globalisation and influencing local communities is not a passive process. The receiving society selects and chooses what it considers useful; the negotiations which take place at the local level within cultural contexts may lead to the occurrence of new phenomena. This is not simply the opposite of homogenisation; it is rather the articulation of the intersection of the local and the global in cross-cultural consumption (Howes 1996, 6).

Although the market is the primary motor of globalisation, the implications of globalisation are not limited to the commercial arena alone. The rapid growth of global capitalism and consumerism has created "new regimes of consumption" (Gupta 2006, 31). Globalisation also implies the spread of new technologies on a global scale. Advances in human reproductive technologies and their applications, usually pioneered in the West, have led to new ways of relating to our bodies. Bodies are seen as economic capital under conditions of neo-liberal economic globalisation. In the free market of a globalised world women's reproductive bodies and body parts (such as eggs, embryos and uteruses have been turned into commodities that are donated and traded. In the market transactions of reproductive body parts, biomedical research interests, business interests and sometimes also consumer interests come together (Gupta and Richters 2008, 243). The 'baby business' (Spar 2006), in particular egg donation and surrogacy, has become an expanding and lucrative billion-dollar reproductive industry in terms of revenues (Gupta 2012). A large number of clientele also consists of middle and upper class Indians and Indians resident abroad (NRIs).

Much has been written about the liberalisation, globalisation and modernisation of the Indian economy since the early 1990s. The rise of India's New Middle Class (NMC) has often been viewed in the context of policies of economic liberalisation. "Public commentators, media images, and academic analyses have depicted the NMC as a consumer-based group benefiting from economic reforms through the availability of new commodities and increasing opportunities for consumer choice" (Fernandes 2006 cited in Fernandes and Heller, 2008). There is a sharp growth in the numbers of the Indian middle class which has reaped the benefits of globalisation and the neo-

liberal market economy in India. In this context, the 'new middle class' which has emerged may be characterised by new aspirations and new practices of consumption, investments and savings. But what is the new middle class? As this question will come up in other papers in this anthology, I will keep it very brief here, mentioning only aspects of NMC that are relevant in the context of its members as consumers of reproductive technologies.

Defining the (New) Middle Class

Definitions of the (new) middle class in India, as elsewhere, are problematic and confusing, almost defying definition. Class boundaries are constantly being (re)defined and tested; they are elastic and keep absorbing new entrants. Its size is important for the growth potential of the Indian economy, as measured in terms of an untapped consumer market which could be mobilised to consume. The significance of the new "discursive practices of commodity consumption point to the ways in which such consumption practices now serve to distinguish this new middle class from the traditional middle class and from other socioeconomic groups" (Fernandes 2006, 72). It is not simply about purchasing particular commodities or certain brands. Rather, it rests on the creation of a distinctive lifestyle associated with a broader set of social practices (Fernandes 2006, 73).

The 'new' in the new middle class refers both to the novel and the recent (Saavala 2010, 11). "[I]ts 'newness' does not refer to upwardly mobile segments of the population entering the middle class." Rather, its newness refers to "processes of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization" (Fernandes 2006, xviii). It also refers to the adoption of modern (western) ideas—"the cultural meanings of being middle class are inextricably linked to ideas of being modern and urban" (Baviskar and Ray 2011, 13).

"There is an emerging social category of 'new middle classes' in the context of developing new consumer societies" (Saavala 2010, 1), and a middle class consumer identity and lifestyle associated with newly available commodities advertised through the media.

Economic liberalisation in the 1990s set in motion changing trends in consumption practices, lifestyles, and aspirations of the urban Indian middle class. Class determines what people must do, what they have the freedom to do, what they cannot do. It structures the realm of choice, although there is no choice independent of constraints external to the individual decision maker (Herring and Agarwala 2008, 2). Middle class definitions and desires articulate hegemonic notions of the normal and normative (Baviskar and Ray 2011, 10).

This raises the question: What is the interrelationship between economy, technology, and culture? How does the liberalisation of the economy and the availability of reproductive technologies affect cultural practices and attitudes of the NMC? To understand this I will look at one field in particular, viz. biological reproduction, which is a key field of cultural activity and highly influenced by the availability and use of reproductive and genetic technologies.

Reproduction

Reproduction is an essential life function intimately associated with marriage, family, and parenthood. Through these powerful associations, reproduction shapes the way we experience life. Reproduction has always been central to women's lives, which, more than those of men, are to a great extent characterised by the proper functioning, or not, of their reproductive organs. Right from puberty through their fertile years, until the end of their menopause, women's lives are determined by their reproductive bodies. Fertility and motherhood (even more than fatherhood) are irrevocably linked with cultural notions about womanhood; this is more so in some cultures than in others. Motherhood is considered central to adult feminine identity, for women are defined generally in relation to their actual or potential maternity. It provides full adult status (particularly in traditional societies), the chance to be a real woman at last, a sense of security and belonging by proving to themselves and others that they are like other women. Children are considered to provide a feeling of being needed and wanted, and purpose and stability to heterosexual relationships and continuation of lineage.

From a very young age girls are socialised into believing that marriage and motherhood should be the most important if not the goals in their lives and central to their identity.

The socio-cultural normative framework of society often stigmatises heterosexual married women who are unable to bear children. Those women who cannot fulfill this desire experience a lot of pain and seek the help of technology in realising their desire for motherhood through technologies (such as IVF, including donor ova or surrogacy) as part of strategies in their own interest. The proliferation of technologies in the field of assisted reproduction and the large number of women who seek access to them demonstrates that once again women are seeking their identity in motherhood and desire the experience of mothering.

The activity of having children has been construed broadly to include choices both before and after conception, choices that have been made possible by reproductive and genetic technologies. By reproductive and genetic technologies, we mean technologies used to intervene scientifically in the human biological reproductive process in 3 areas: (1) to prevent conception or birth (include contraceptives and methods for pregnancy termination); (2) (a) to test for genetic and congenital diseases and conditions, and (b) to test for pre- and post-conceptual sex-selection and detection; and (3) to assist reproduction (aid or stimulate conception). Technologies range from 'low-tech' (artificial insemination through husband or donor sperm), requiring little or no medical intervention to 'high-tech' (variations of in-vitro fertilisation, egg donation and surrogacy), involving sophisticated medical, surgical and laboratory procedures.

Reproductive technologies, in particular those used to assist reproduction, are deconstructing conventional scripts of sexuality, parenting and biological age. Initially meant to help infertile heterosexual couples to fulfill their desire for their own genetic child, in the past few decades assisted reproduction technologies (ARTs) are also being used for building alternative 'families' that both constitute and challenge our traditional understanding of parenthood and have far-reaching repercussions for ideas regarding family and kinship (Strathern 1992; Franklin 1993). Technology even assists new ways of 'making parents' (Thompson 2005).

In the West, the number of women who choose to give birth and

raise children in a single parent or lesbian household has increased. In India, it is still a very small group, because unmarried motherhood still by and large carries social stigma. However, it can be expected that increasingly more women will choose to become mothers in such a situation. This development coincides with developments in the field of ARTs, recent changes in the ideological climate regarding relationships and living arrangements that are becoming more liberal in urban areas, and changing notions about motherhood and fatherhood, particularly in the NMC that is adopting western ideas.

For many Indian women who often lack power from other sources, their reproductive capacity is an important source of power as biological motherhood is supposed to be the central axis of gender identity for adult women. In the Indian cultural context, for instance, the body is seen as a shared rather than a private resource. Being able to produce a child out of her body is not only important for a woman to achieve personal happiness, fulfillment and self-esteem, but also esteem/status within the family and the treatment she will be meted out by other family members. Inability to conceive and bear a child often gives rise to feelings of self-worthlessness, making her vulnerable to ill-treatment, violence and in extreme cases, abandonment by the husband and his family and the loss of security of having a roof over her head. The enormous familial and social pressure on women has increased further with the availability of ARTs and explains the increasingly large numbers of women, ranging from the very young to the old who flock infertility clinics (own participant observation) to give shape to their traditional cultural gender identities primarily as mothers, or as mothers of sons (through sex-selective abortions).

However, some interesting new trends are visible regarding women and their relation to their reproductive bodies which are described below.

Reproduction and the (New) Middle Class

Birth Control

India was one of the first countries to adopt a family planning programme in the early 1950s. Since then, the Indian government has been advocating a small family size, ostensibly as a key to

development and family welfare and happiness but also to control population size. The middle class has increasingly adopted the small family norm by espousing reproductive technologies for family planning (in terms of timing, limitation and spacing) through scientific methods of contraception and abortion (the latter being legal on broad medical and social grounds since 1971). Since the 1960s hormonal contraceptive pills and intra-uterine devices have been in use, besides sterilisation. In the 1990s hormonal injectables and implants were introduced, while more recently the repertoire has expanded to include emergency contraceptive pills such as i-pill and Unwanted72, in addition to regular oral contraception or condom, taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex to prevent a possible pregnancy and a traumatic abortion.

Birth Practices

Increasingly there is a trend towards medicalisation of pregnancies and births among urban women. Birth by caesarean sections, many of them unnecessary, have increased globally, according to the World Health Organisation, which reviewed 110,000 births from nine countries in Asia during 2007-2008. In India nearly one in five births is by caesarean section. The practice of elective caesarean births in private clinics is widespread. "Part of the explanation lies in the use of private clinics and doctors who recommend caesarean births to middle class women as a matter of course" (Saavala 2010, 32). Citing Donner (2003) Saavala (2010) states that "middle class women do not regard their bodies as capable of standing the ordeal and pain of normal delivery". In my opinion, this explanation for the rise in caesarean births is to be viewed with some measure of scepticism, as there are also reports that attribute the rise to obstetricians who earn a higher fee for conducting caesarean sections rather than normal (vaginal) deliveries, which is corroborated by Sinha (2010).

Of India's population of nearly 1.2 billion, 70 percent live in rural areas where basic healthcare services are unavailable, inadequate or inequitably distributed, with class and literacy/education being important factors determining access to medical settings. Only 60 per cent of rural women and 86 per cent of urban

women receive ante-natal check-ups (Agarwal 2006, 144). Of the 26 million births a year 65 per cent deliveries still take place at home under the supervision of trained (35 per cent) and untrained birth attendants (IIPS 2007). India is in a transitional phase from home-based deliveries to institutional deliveries. Maternity clinics and super-specialty hospitals, established in metropolises in the wave of economic liberalisation of the economy under globalisation, cater to the urban middle and upper classes that give birth in health care institutions. Ante-natal care during pregnancy is becoming common practice among this group. Pre-natal testing of the foetus forms a part of this.

Prenatal (Genetic) Testing

Prenatal testing (PNT), including pre-natal genetic testing through technologies such as ultrasound and amniocentesis, is becoming common in urban areas. Most people in India appear to be completely unaware that the tests they know as 'sex tests' or 'boy/girl tests' were meant primarily to diagnose genetic diseases and congenital anomalies in the foetus. Pre-natal testing followed by abortion of the female foetus is prevalent among the middle classes, although it is illegal under The Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Regulation and Prevention of Misuse Act of 1995 and the Amended Act of 2002. As certain state governments have imposed a ban on sex detection through ultrasound machines, people are now buying sex determination kits online from China and the US.

The main reasons for sex detection and (pre-) selection in India have to do with (a) the population policy of the Indian government which prescribes that one or two children are enough; families with more than two children face certain disincentives and even (penal) sanctions. These include the two-child norm as a criterion of eligibility for public welfare access, including programmes for the weaker sections, public distribution system, and government school education in Maharashtra and Andhra, disqualification of a member of a village council in Haryana for violating the two-child norm, etc.; (b) cultural reasons—the prevalence of son preference and daughter discrimination. If couples are exhorted not to have more than two

children, they want at least one or more sons based on traditional ideas regarding higher value accorded to sons as compared to daughters; and last, but not the least, (c) the proliferation of technology offered by unethical service providers. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the number of gender-related foeticides went up from 132 in 2011 to 210 in 2012, a jump of nearly 60 percent making a mockery of laws that ban PNDT (Sengupta 2013). This is also a clear example of how neo-liberal market mechanisms, culture and technology intersect and even co-create each other. Advertising and media play an important role in shaping identities.

Increasingly pregnant women in large cities and small towns of India are undergoing prenatal genetic testing on the advice of medical practitioners to ensure foetal health, and to prevent the birth of disabled children. As the number of children per couple is going down, especially in urban middle and upper-income households, there is more emphasis on 'quality' rather than 'quantity'. Public awareness regarding the role of genes in the incidence of disease and the possibility of making use of PNT is increasing; it is associated with modernity and good parenthood. Eugenic ideas are widely prevalent among lay people, particularly the elite, as well as medical specialists and population planners. The risk of giving birth to an affected child is a valid reason for abortion, legal up to 20 weeks under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 and the Amended Act of 2002. Due to the publicity and proliferation of PNT for sex selection, there is awareness regarding testing technologies among a large segment of the population. Thus, if services are more widely available and accessible, PNT for genetic conditions may find a larger uptake among the population.

Of the women interviewed for my research in two Delhi hospitals (a public hospital and a charitable trust hospital), the majority sought genetic counselling after an indication of higher risk identified through the triple marker test, advised by their gynaecologist. Others had experienced primary amenorrhoea, repeated miscarriages or were 'high-risk pregnancies' due to advanced maternal age (the cut-off point used is 35 years), a family history of certain diseases, such as identifiable syndromes, mental retardation and so on, or those who had a previous affected child. In the private genetics outpatients

department (OPD), where they have to pay a consultation fee, the majority belonged to the upper- and upper-middle class; in the general OPD respondents belonged to the lower-middle class. Only 10–15 percent belonged to the lower class; lower class clients generally go to public hospitals which do not charge a consultation fee (Gupta 2010).

My research findings indicate that in deciding to undergo prenatal testing and abortion afterwards in case of an affected foetus pregnant women are making very pragmatic decisions. They see genetic testing as their duty, to their family and to their own and the unborn child's future. The information they possess is highly inadequate and incomplete; their choices are limited and their life circumstances (pressure from family members, dearth of institutional facilities for the disabled and, above all, financial limitations) are too constraining. They rely largely on the genetic counsellors to decide what is best for them regarding which tests to undergo and thereafter whether to continue the pregnancy. After this, the husband and family play an important role in translating the knowledge and advice into further action (Gupta 2010). A woman's status within the marital family is an important factor in determining how far she can take reproductive decisions autonomously. Often, this depends upon the household hierarchy, her educational attainment and financial contribution to the family and whether she is actually residing with her in-laws. Sometimes, the consequences of a 'positive' outcome of a genetic test (meaning the foetus is affected) may be disastrous for a daughter or daughter-in-law. Women are often blamed by others and blame themselves and feel a sense of guilt and shame for producing a disabled child (Ghai and Johri 2008; Gupta 2010, 2014).

Assisted Reproduction

Even though technologies for assisted conception such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and in particular surrogacy, are quite expensive, increasingly middle class women are seeking these modern technologies in case of infertility. Surrogacy — where the embryo created from the egg and sperm of the genetic parents or donor(s) is transferred in the uterus of another woman who acts as a gestational

carrier — is an option, generally recommended only if it is medically indicated. Having a baby through IVF, especially through a surrogate mother was once fraught with stigma. Even married couples chose to hide the fact from their families and friends. Now, attitudes are changing, say infertility experts (interview material).

The mass media plays a vital role, both in publicising the availability of services as well as the proliferation of the phenomenon. The role of the Internet is crucial in information provision and publicity for the service providers, as well as bringing individual buyers and sellers together. Often the print media and television (news, soap operas and feature and documentary films, such as ‘Vicky donor’, ‘Afia’, ‘Google Baby’, ‘Made in India’) also feature stories on assisted reproduction technologies (ARTs).

A majority of egg donors in various countries are university students and young single professionals who respond to calls for egg donors on websites of fertility clinics or advertisements posted on university notice boards of universities in the US. Although, the desire to help an infertile couple is also mentioned as a motive, most egg donors acknowledge doing it for economic reasons. In India, many of egg donors are students who live away from home in hostels and who need extra cash to augment their pocket money in order to maintain their expensive lifestyles. About 10-12 eggs are extracted in one cycle and they are paid between rupees 20-50,000 (US \$ 500-1,000) for it (Sharma 2010). As reported to me by medical service providers during interviews, even educated, upper-middle-class Indian women have found a new occupation as egg donors due to the recent financial crisis. Surrogates, however, are generally from the lower economic strata who rent their wombs under economic compulsion to survive, to provide education to their children, medical care for their families, to invest in a home or a husband’s business. Some clinics are reporting a surge in the number of women from impoverished families seeking to earn an income from surrogacy. Also, clinics report an increasing demand for surrogacy for non-medical reasons.

“Make my baby for me. And, oh, I’ll pay extra for twins“ is the title of an article in *The Telegraph*, that comes as a shocking revelation of current attitudes and practices regarding reproduction among the

middle and upper classes. “It’s not just Bollywood celebrities. Many affluent Indian women are opting to have a surrogate child [sic!] simply to avoid the pain of pregnancy”, contends its author Shuma Raha (2013), whom I will cite here in detail. She writes further that it is not because of a medical need for a surrogacy, but simply because they did not wish to take a career break in order to have a baby, or even to avoid the discomfort of a pregnancy. If we are to believe Raha (2013) “It’s not quite a fashion statement yet. But it’s getting there. A growing number of affluent Indian women, married or single, are looking at surrogacy as their reproductive silver bullet, one that allows them to have a child without having to compromise on their lifestyle. No pain of pregnancy, no stepping back from one’s career, no post-partum fat to get rid of — if you have the money (anything between Rs 12-15 lakh), why, it seems like the perfect way to get yourself a baby!”, writes Raha (2013). “To them it is just another piece of enabling modern technology. Only this one pops a readymade baby,” according to Raha (2013).

“A trend set by Bollywood, the arbiter of fashion in our country, has set the trend here too”, comments Raha. She mentions the examples of Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao, Sohail Khan (Salman Khan’s younger brother) and his wife who had their second child through a surrogate, and more recently, Shah Rukh Khan and his wife Gauri — both in their late forties and already having two teenage children who had a third child, this time through surrogacy. “The celebrity endorsement of surrogacy has given it an aspirational aura...,” observes Raha. “Suddenly, surrogacy is not just acceptable — it’s cool. It’s what the rich and famous do. So a practice that was once viewed with squeamishness, revulsion even, is now being seen as something to be emulated. As a Bangalore socialite says on the condition of anonymity, ‘If it makes life easier, why not surrogacy?’”

“While most of them are women in high-powered careers or those in showbiz, there is the odd homemaker too.” Raha quotes Dr Anoop Gupta, medical director of Delhi IVF and Fertility Research Centre, who revealed that “out of every 10 queries on surrogacy that he gets these days, at least three are from women like this. Dr Gupta recently had a case where the 32-year-old wife of a top builder in Delhi had a child through surrogacy because she felt pregnancy

would make her look old and leave her with ugly stretch marks on her stomach.” It is not only married women, but single women, too, are resorting to surrogacy as a path to motherhood. Dr Duru Shah of GynaecWorld, a Mumbai-based infertility clinic, recalls a single woman from Calcutta who came to her to have a child through a surrogate. “She wanted a child with donor sperm, but did not wish to carry it herself as she was single”, says Dr Shah (Raha 2013).

It is not only the married heterosexual couples who are going for surrogacy. “First they tried to find a suitable boy for their daughter. Then they busied themselves finding a suitable sperm donor. ‘My parents’ earlier search didn’t yield any results but this one is going to give us all such a precious gift,’ says Richa Aneja, who is single and looking forward to a surrogate baby [sic!] soon. Parents, and even in-laws, are openly supporting—and often paying for—their children’s decision to try assisted reproduction techniques to have a baby” (Dhar 2013). Dr Rita Bakshi from the International Fertility Centre sees a change in the attitude of career women towards ART and surrogacy. She says: “These women would love to carry their own child but they are not confident of openly showing their pregnancy” (Dhar 2013). Dhar (2013) also mentions the case of a young divorced woman whose parents didn’t want their daughter to go through another marriage but wanted her to experience parenthood. They were ready to pay for the treatment”, says Dr Bakshi. “Parents want to see their children happy”, explains Dr Aniruddh Malpani, a Mumbai-based infertility specialist. “Children have a mind of their own. So parents reconcile and bow to their child’s wishes.”

With an unregulated surrogacy industry thriving in India, rich couples are preying on domestic helps and housemaids coercing them to step up to the task, observes Dhawan (2013) quoting Ranjana Kumari, Director, Centre for Social Research (CSR), Delhi. Recently CSR conducted a study on surrogacy. “Just as we appoint maids to do our household work, some women are now appointing surrogate mothers to bear their children for them. It shows the degradation of our value system” (CSR 2012). The observation of Dipankar Gupta (2011, 21) seems appropriate in this context. He says, “To put it bluntly, the Indian middle class has no desire to alter the pre-modern attitude that exists in India when it comes to relations between

people.” These are some striking examples of the way in which NMC women espouse modern technologies while paradoxically holding on to traditional attitudes and practices.

Interestingly, just as surrogacy has gained currency among the affluent set, it has also become popular among lower middle-class women, who form the supply side of the industry. Many of them choose to be surrogate mothers as they see it as a good way of earning a lump sum and “more meaningful than other forms of paid employment” (Rudrappa 2014). “They used to be hesitant to act as surrogates earlier, and were scared of the social stigma”, says Dr Shah, “but not any longer..... Seven-eight years ago I had to persuade women to do this job”, she says. “Now they come to me on their own and request me to take them to a hospital or a clinic. They all feel it’s a good way of making some money”. In fact, the practice is so widespread now that most surrogates stay in their own homes during the pregnancy whereas earlier, they preferred to go away to a shelter provided by the clinic lest people found out” (Raha 2013).

Egg Freezing

Another emerging trend among the upper middle class is egg freezing. The technology of egg freezing was seen as a solution for women undergoing cancer treatment to realise their desire for an own genetic child at a later date. The technique is also being propagated and used for social and lifestyle reasons. It is a known fact that higher-educated women marry later and delay child bearing. The age at first birth has steadily gone up over the last several decades. As more and more girls in India are pursuing higher education, young women are able to find (well-paid) employment in the new global economy. In pursuit of a career they postpone motherhood, but aware of their ticking biological clock, they now have an option to freeze their eggs. Highly educated professional Indian women aged between 30-38 years who have not found a match and wish to delay marriage are going in for egg freezing, according to Dr Hrishikesh Pai, a fertility specialist in Mumbai. Putting motherhood on hold is ‘a back-up plan’, says Dr Malpani (Dhar 2013). Single women in their mid-thirties accompanied by their mothers are seeking the help

of fertility experts to freeze their eggs because they haven't found Mr. Right yet.

The procedure of retrieving and freezing eggs costs 1.5-2 lakh rupees (US \$ 2,500-3,300) and the annual storage fee varies from 30,000-50,000 rupees. One cycle of IVF costs between Rs 1.5- 4.5 lakh (US \$ 2,500-7,500). The IVF-surrogacy package—including costs of hormones for egg retrieval, egg transfer, hospital delivery etc. costs around Rs 15 lakh (US\$ 25,000). Given these high costs, unmarried girls and couples are helped out by their parents and/or parents in-law, who not only give their blessings but also foot the bill. While earlier it was the NRIs, now local girls are also coming with such requests (Dhar 2013), although they are few in number yet (personal interview Dr Gaurav Mazumdar 30/10/2013).

Umbilical Cord Blood Banking

Another novel practice of consumption, investment and savings among the NMC is umbilical cord blood banking (UCB).

“The miracle is not just your baby. It's what comes attached.”

This text was seen on billboards in the western part of Hyderabad, also known as 'Cyberabad' India's high-tech city, which is host to one of several umbilical cord blood (UCB) banking facilities in India. “This part of the city is populated by young techies and their young families, couples just about to embark on parenthood, a sub-section of the population that lives by and with high technology” (Raman 2006).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s scientists began to realise the importance of blood from the human umbilical cord and placenta as a rich source of stem cells for use in transplants (Rubinstein 2006). UCB stem cells can be banked in either a private or public bank. The primary difference between the two is that in the former the individual/family pays for collection, processing and storage of UCB for the donor, the donor's siblings, or unrelated donors, while the latter collects UCB free of cost from anyone who wishes to donate and stores it for the benefit of the general public. UCB banks claim

that UCB could be used for therapeutic applications to cure up to 75 serious ailments, including leukaemia, Hodgkin's disease, varieties of anaemia, inherited metabolic disorders and autoimmune diseases not only for the individual, but also for its siblings and parents (Gupta and Sharma, 2005). In 1993 the first public and private UCB banks were established in the US (Waldby 2006). The first private UCB bank in India was opened in Chennai, in south India by Life Cell in 2004. It claims to be Asia's largest UCB bank having over 50 centres in the country. Since then, several other UCB banks, many with international collaboration, have established themselves in different parts of the country. Most of them are located in prestigious hospitals in urban metropolises; UCB collection centres have been set up also in small towns. In India UCB transplantation is in its infancy (McKenna and Sheth 2011, 262).

The cost of banking per umbilical cord at a private bank is approximately 75,000 Indian rupees (at current rates US\$ 1,250) all-in, or a one-time payment of 27,000 Indian rupees (US\$ 450) for enrolment and processing fees plus 3,000 rupees (US\$ 50) per year for 20 years. Various options are available with the price going up to rupees 119,900 (US\$ 1973) (promotional flyer Life Cell). Another fee is often charged when a sample is removed for testing or treatment. Stem cells derived from the UCB are to be initially stored for 21 years, after which the individual would get to decide regarding further storage of her/his cells. Undoubtedly, this is a huge sum of money for the vast majority of Indians who live on less than US\$ 2 per day, but not for the NMC. In February 2014 the Indian government announced a lower tax on the services of UCB banks. Whether this will bring down the price of storage, making banking affordable for more customers is yet to be seen.

While celebrities such as Bollywood film stars and cricketers (who often serve as role models) were some of the first parents who banked the cord blood of their newborns, they have since been followed by many other well-to-do parents. Preliminary research shows that the majority of the customers now are from the new middle class who are made to believe it is rational and responsible behaviour and an investment in the future health of their progeny, and perhaps of the whole family. There is a sharp growth in the numbers of the Indian

middle class which has reaped the benefits of globalisation and the neo-liberal market economy in India. This category looks to the West for inspiration in life style; these are the main targets of the UCB banks.

Viewing the promise of cord blood stem cells as a form of biological health insurance, about five per cent of parents now bank their newborn's cord blood, with about 80 per cent of that going to private banks for the child's/family's own possible use and about 20 per cent going to public banks. UCB banking is poised to grow in the years to come because of three reasons: a) more and more cord banking companies are operating actively; b) more Indians are increasingly becoming aware of this facility and are keen on ensuring their child's lifelong health; and c) the process of UCB banking has been granted regulatory approval. A high growth rate is expected, but it is subject to various factors such as successful stem cell research, government policy etc. Health risk perception is dependent on knowledge and access to information, which often correlates with (higher) economic status in the Indian context. However, genetic literacy is not only a complex issue for the (semi-)literate, but even for the educated. Expectant parents are not aware that banking umbilical cord blood does not guarantee a cure. The perceived use of UCB as a source of stem cells may affect parents' willingness to bank.

Life Cell has leading Bollywood stars Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan as its brand ambassadors. Lisa Ray and Yuvraj, it is claimed, had cancer cells cured. Direct-to-consumer advertising via the Internet is one of the primary sources of information on UCB banking and recruitment. Web-based advertisements include video clips of patients/client testimonials. Information on cord blood cells/ stem cells is made available mainly through flyers, posters, information kits (containing brochures, DVDs and CDs), which are distributed in gynaecology/maternity wards of hospitals to recruit 'moms-to-be'. Marketing representatives of private cord blood banks admit that they are getting good support from the doctors, who confirm an increase in banking. Currently, the prohibitive factor is the cost, but once it goes down the demand is bound to rise (Suryanarayan 2010).

Most UCB banks call upon the parental responsibility for the future health of the child and its family members as well to take

timely action by not missing the once in a lifetime chance to bank the cord blood on delivery of the child. The marketing and recruiting practices of private UCB banks are rather aggressive and persuading (Raman 2006). My interview material and participant observation during two ante-natal classes offered by a private UCB bank in two clinics in Delhi and Noida in 2010 and 2011 respectively, confirms this.

UCB banks lay the onus for the future health and treatment of their child and family members on women. Most respondents (expectant mothers) I spoke to indicated positive response/willingness to bank. Clients of UCB banks (those who have already banked or are considering banking), are mostly from the upper middle economic strata of Indian society, from business families or professionals. Often they are knowledgeable about advances in medical technology and believe in the newly developed therapies and regenerative medicine. UCB banking is seen as a good and wise investment by expectant women/couples, mostly from higher income groups.

As one pregnant woman put it, “We’re quite contented with the decision to bank. We’ll see ten movies less, but bank” (U. interview 2011). “What’s the harm? It’s not as if we couldn’t afford it”, said another (A.C. interview 2011).

“Lisa Ray, famous actress has been cured of cancer. We spend so much on other things. At that price we didn’t have to think twice” (S.N. interview 2011).

In Europe, and the US professional bodies actively discourage private UCB banking and instead recommend publicly funded banks that collect voluntary donations (AAP 2007; McKenna and Sheth 2011). Some Indian gynaecologists are rather critical of private banking of UCB but stipulate that all cord blood should be banked in public banks for use by the general population. “I’m not recommending it. It’s a racket. The gynaecologists are getting kick-backs. The marketing guys take a list of pregnant women from gynaecologists and approach them directly. In India it is not a big thing. In the US it has failed....Those people who bank don’t have minds, only money which they don’t know what to do with.” (Dr AG, gynaecologist, and IVF specialist, interview 2011)

“UCB is more of a fashion statement, where pregnant mothers

discuss about it: 'I've banked my umbilical cord. Have you?'" (Duru Shah, President-elect of OBGYN Societies of India (FOGSI) (Dutta 2005). Some women interviewed by me who had not banked at the birth of their first child regretted it, and were definitely planning to do so the next time.

Consumerism and Biomedical Modernity

The new middle class is embracing new reproductive and genetic technologies in a big way. Sometimes there is a tension between the global features of these technologies (globalisation) and the local practices and meanings given to the technologies (localisation) and gender relations. Researchers have engaged with the question of the cultural appropriation of these technologies and with the role of the user in shaping these technologies. How 'traditional' identities respond to the availability and consumption of these new technologies is bound to vary across cultures. However, cultures are not homogeneous and monolithic in themselves. Cultural meanings of gender and technology are further enmeshed in the constructs (spaces and constraints) of the daily lives of individuals. How they are used and how much is a matter of individual choices, which is bound to vary in different contexts. In the intersection between tradition and modernity it is interesting to observe what is accepted and what is rejected. Whether these technologies are empowering tools for self-actualisation or they serve to consolidate entrenched ideas regarding women's subordinate role in society depends on diverse factors.

Women as (potential) users of reproductive technologies are subject to market forces and sometimes government regulations and legislation that (either by their existence, or the absence thereof) regulate their use. In different social, cultural and political settings negotiations take place which define the space within which women seeking recourse to these technologies make their choices. These choices are influenced by and in their turn influence cultural notions of gender and gender relations. The sum of many of these choices creates a tapestry of meanings and behaviours that may be quite different from the behaviours and meanings anticipated, or

encouraged by, for instance, service providers (Saetnan *et al.* 2000). They are sites around which (gendered) social relations are played out.

For some women reproductive and genetic technologies have become another item of consumption in the repertoire of commodities brought to them in the wake of globalisation and liberalisation of the Indian economy. Both literature research and my empirical observations confirm that the choices of pregnant women are rarely individual. They are embedded in constellations of family, kinship and community. In a highly patriarchal society such as India, traditionally men make important decisions within the family. Women often face coercion from husbands and mothers-in-law in making reproductive choices regarding not only the number of children (quantity) but also the kind of children (quality) to be born (Gupta 2000; Patel 2007), thus making it more difficult to ensure their free and informed choice. In choosing to determine the sex of the foetus and sex selecting in favour of males not only do they demonstrate a consumerist attitude to children, but also reaffirm the hold of entrenched patriarchal ideologies that traditionally discriminate against females. With the principle of informed choice and the ethical imagining of the pregnant woman as an autonomous individual, the woman is perceived as responsible for this choice and thereby also for the possible future of the child and the family unit, the prevailing theme in the advertising of commercial services. Once again, as with other reproductive technologies (contraceptives, pre-natal testing technologies, etc.), the onus for UCB banking too, is laid on women. “Sex selective abortions, caesarean births and New Reproductive Technologies exemplify how the role and conceptualisation of the feminine body are changing among the Indian new middle classes and also the ways in which new expectations are created of technology that it [can] control the largely uncontrollable” (Saavala 2010, 33).

Young women in the West find it a challenge to pursue their careers while also being conscious of their biological clock ticking if they postpone pregnancy. In comparison, the Indian middle class has the privilege of having household help and nannies, besides often a family network to manage balancing their professional and personal

lives. Yet some of them are considering hiring other women to carry their babies for them as surrogates. Class privilege has taken another meaning hereby. In lieu of dowries consisting of cash, jewellery and consumer goods—a vestige of tradition—young women are having their parents finance their desire to become mothers with the help of surrogates, thus embracing biomedical modernity. Egg freezing brings out the dichotomy and wealth divide, between the women who can afford to freeze their eggs to pursue their careers, and those who cannot.

Jacoba Urist (2013) quotes Dr. Frederick Licciardi, a fertility expert and OB/GYN at NYU who says “Egg freezing is seen as this big revolution now, like the contraceptive pill was for reproductive rights, women’s health, and family planning in the 1960s”, because of all the positive press. “But egg freezing, he reminds patients, isn’t like the birth control pill yet (in terms of cost, relative ease, or outcome), and women need to understand that while it may feel empowering to freeze their eggs, it is far from a foolproof method to optimise career success and family planning” (Urist 2013). Also, a woman’s egg is only one part of the fertility equation. Several other factors contribute towards a successful pregnancy. Regardless of the age of a woman’s eggs, those who get pregnant later in life have a higher risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, pelvic inflammation, placenta previa, miscarriage and early delivery because of preeclampsia. Are women who are going for egg freezing considering these health risks?

In conclusion, we can say that women are actively using reproductive technologies to give shape to their lives, although it is difficult to determine how far these are informed choices and whether they are acting as agents in their own right or making certain choices under familial and societal compulsions. They are embracing biomedical modernity through consuming reproductive and genetic technologies while simultaneously holding on to traditional ideologies, and practices. In straddling the space between both worlds, the traditional and the modern, are young new middle class women having the best or the worst of both worlds?: This is a question that certainly requires further research.

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Negotiating with Legalities of Sexual Harassment: New Middle Class Women, New Meanings of Respectability

Vineet Pandey

The white collar private/corporate sector employment has been one of the key sites where the aspirations of the new middle classes in India are located (Fernandes, 2000; Baviskar & Ray, 2011). One of the impacts of globalization has been on the mobility and visibility of women in the workforce. The studies have shown that within the desired sector of employment for the new middle class around 50 percent of employee base comprises of women (Singh & Pandey, 2005; Macmillin, 2006). The recent media reports (Daily Bhaskar, 2013; NDTV, 2013) indicate the educated middle class women being subjected repeatedly to sexual harassment. This makes it imperative that within the narratives of agency and autonomy for the middle class women in globalized India, one must understand the reality of such autonomy and empowerment when it comes to sexual harassment.

In this backdrop, the present study examines the negotiations of middle class women with legalities of sexual harassment at workplace amidst an expanding globalised work world. The rise in incidence of sexual harassment at workplace in India since globalisation can be partially attributed to increased participation of women in almost every sector of employment which was hitherto dominated by men, like the Information Technology Enabled Sector and the field of Journalism amongst others. In this context it is important to explore that how the issue of dignity is negotiated by the middle class women at the workplace.

The genesis of an international treaty in this regard can be traced back to The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It was in accordance with Article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which was adopted at Beijing in 1979. The Convention was signed by India on 30th July, 1980 and ratified on 9th July, 1983. The Convention recognized the right of women to equality at workplace. The text of the Convention, unambiguously stated that, women shall not be subjected to harassment at workplace; as such harassment vitiates the working environment.

While the text of the CEDAW, as part of the international treaty framework of the United Nations clearly and unambiguously states the need for prevention of sexual harassment of women at workplace, the context of a liberalized, privatized and a globalizing Indian economy continues to pose new challenges in the realization of this goal.

It has been argued that globalisation has provided opportunities to middle class women in India to negotiate the conventional gender relation at home (Sen, 1999; Kelly, 1997) but the issue of sexual harassment reflects the existence of unequal power relationship between males and females at workplace (IWRAW, 2005).¹ These unequal power relations, both structural and informal, render the women employees vulnerable to the possibility of being subjected to undue reward and punishments by their male superiors, something which can potentially lead to direct and indirect economic outcomes for such women (Singh, 1998). “This form of harassment in which the victim suffers concrete economic loss for failing to submit to sexual demands, is simply one manifestation of sexual harassment”.² The incidence of sexual harassment connotes a reminder to women of their status as being sexual objects even at work (Sikri, 1999). Sexual harassment stands embedded in power relations as it exists in social, economic and political contexts. In this manner it shares

¹ International Women’s Right Action Watch (IWRAW) Asia Pacific, 2005, a technical report by International Labour Organization, P.2.

² Janzen v. Platy Enterprises Ltd., (1989) 1 SCR 1252, Supreme Court of Canada, per Dickson, CJ.

historicity with all other types of manifestations of violence (Mathur, 2004).

A recent survey conducted by Oxfam India at Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, Ahmadabad and Durgapur indicated that, 17% of working women experienced sexual harassment at workplace (Oxfam, 2012). Unfortunately, the statistical data on the incidences of sexual harassment, like all other sexual offences, suffers from the limitation of under reporting by the victims. The 'sustained gradualism' in the growth and development of the middle class is a prime contributor of women at workplace in India (Sridharan, 2011). The sustained gradualism of the work participation of middle class women is accompanied with a concomitant rise in the incidence of sexual harassment of women at work place. As indicative from recent media reports,³ working women belonging to the middle class have become more vulnerable to the attempts and incidences of sexual harassment. "The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013" came in force on the 9th of December, 2015.⁴ The present study aims to examine how the enactment of this statute is perceived by middle class women employees amidst the rise in the incidences of sexual harassment of women at workplace in India in the recent past. Temporally, the study aims to position itself in the time period which lies between the 'coming into force' of the Act and the pouring in of the actual outcomes of the implementation of the Act. In this manner, the study aims to explore the reception and expectations of the target beneficiaries of the Act. If it were not for the brief temporal window immediately after the 'coming into force' of the Act, the perception and expectations of the intended beneficiaries regarding the Act, would be petered out by the data of actual outcomes of implementation and working of the Act. It is important to know how the middle class women employees perceive the act, their hopes, their faith and their doubts as they may be, from the time of its enactment.

In this regard, the present study examines the negotiations with

³ <http://thewip.net/2014/05/15/hidden-harassment-the-challenges-of-indias-pink-collar-worker>

⁴ <http://wcd.nic.in/wcdact/womenworkrules.pdf>

legalities of the sexual harassment in those sectors of employment where the aspirations of the new middle class women are located. Predominantly located within the white collar private sector jobs and professions, where the educated middle class women share space along with male colleagues, seniors and subordinates.

Methodology

The paper is based upon a study of 85 women employees of MNCs at Gurgaon in the State of Haryana and NOIDA in the State of Uttar Pradesh, to understand the erstwhile process of dealing with sexual harassment cases in their workplaces and what they expect as an outcome of the new Act in this regard. The data has been collected primarily through in-depth interviews with the women working in corporate sector. The research questions of the study explored: (a) how the issue of sexual harassment has been dealt with at the workplace of the respondents, and (b) the opinion of the respondents with reference to the practicality and the effectiveness of “The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013” at their workplaces. The interviews were conducted outside the workplace, and in majority of cases the data collection was done at the informal home settings. During some instances, focus group discussions were also conducted where women working in different organizations shared opinions about the status regarding the policies against sexual harassment at their respective workplaces.

The study also includes secondary data sources of news reports and documentaries relevant to the context. In this way, triangulation method has been adopted to analyse the findings of different data sources.

Post Vishaka: The Act of 2013

Till 1997 there was no statutory definition of sexual harassment in India in spite of notable judgements,⁵ highlighting the existence of

⁵ Radha Bai v. Union Territory of Pondicherry, AIR 1995 SC 1476, Rupam Deol Bajaj v. K.P.S Gill AIR 1996 SC 309

this problem. Before 1997, the complaints of sexual harassment at workplace were lodged either under Section 354⁶ or Section 509⁷ of the Indian Penal Code before 1997. However, in both the sections women's modesty was left to be interpreted by the duty police officer at the time of complaint. At the very stage of inception of a complaint, the question of an alleged act amounting to sexual harassment at workplace or not was left open and subordinate to the subjective and contextualised sensitivities and appreciation of the duty officer. While the law enforcement agent was not subject to any statutory definition of sexual harassment of a woman at workplace, including the employer, till *Vishaka*,⁸ was not legally obliged to protect the women employees from sexual harassment. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* case, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in a three Judge Bench including the Chief Justice of India in its judgement, acknowledged sexual harassment at workplace as a recurring phenomenon and laid down guidelines to ensure a secure and fair work environment for women at their workplace. The judgement of this particular case laid down certain guidelines for the employer to ensure the safety of women at the workplace. These guidelines were called the Vishaka Guidelines.⁹

The Vishaka guidelines laid down duties for employers of public as well as private sector to take appropriate steps to prevent sexual harassment which included awareness, complaint committee, complaint mechanism and third—party harassment. These guidelines were to be treated as a declaration of law by the Hon'ble Supreme Court until the enactment of an appropriate legislation, in this regard. After sixteen years of the Vishaka Judgement, the sexual harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2012 was passed by Lok Sabha on 3rd September, 2012 and Rajya Sabha on 26th February, 2013 that received President's assent and thereafter was published in the Gazette of India. This Act came into

⁶ Section 354, Indian Penal Code, 1860 – Criminal assault of women to outrage women's modesty.

⁷ Section 509, Indian Penal Code, 1860 – Using a word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman.

⁸ *Vishaka and others v. State of Rajasthan and others* (1997) 6 SCC 241

⁹ For details please refer <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/Chrseq.aspx>

force on 9th December, 2013. This Act marks the culmination of Supreme Court's initiative to provide a safe workplace environment for women. The act has been critically analysed by the legal and gender experts, however, it remains significant to analyse this act from the point of view of the working middle class women, which forms a predominant part of the group, for whom it has been enacted. The following sections of the paper deal with the same by discussing the outcome of the study, reflecting both positive as well as negative perspectives of the middle class women on the Act.

The Act and the Sense of Security

In the private sector, women are almost touching the 50% mark of the total employee base, so there has to be a mechanism to deal with threats specifically faced by women. This Act is like a good reminder for both men and women. The women are reminded of a sense of security because of it and the potential perpetrators amongst men also indicated that there is a serious law to deal with it, in case they are complained against (A respondent from Gurgaon who works in a France based Multi-national IT Company).

The findings of the study indicate that the incidences of sexual harassment form part of the experiences of women at workplace in the corporate sector in India, and the Act has provided a sense of security amongst women employees. Earlier, the mechanism to deal with such cases did not form part of the popular knowledge of women working in the corporate sector.

Vishaka guidelines undoubtedly formed the fountainhead of the matrix of dedicated legalities around the issue of sexual harassment of women at workplace. The case law origin of these guidelines bereft them from percolating beyond the level of policy tables, both inside and outside the boardrooms and higher management circles. Vishaka could not become part of the popular imagination of women employees, in general. As a reason adjunct to the former, it may also be argued that the impact, reach and role of the media in knitting popular discourses was much smaller in 1997 than what it stands today in 2014.

The Act of 2013 has had benefits as far its entrenchment in

popular imagination is concerned. First, that it is an instance of proper legislative enactment; therefore it became and remained part of a protracted legislative discourse. Second, it has benefited from the media attention which it received in the backdrop of increasing gendered crimes in India during the recent times. Third, it has arrived at a time which coincides with the growth and expansion of the private sector in India. When Vishaka guidelines were laid down, the rise and growth of the private sector in India post 1991, was still in its initial stages, especially with respect to the participation of women in its workforce. The fact that there were not as many women working in the private sector in India then when Vishaka guidelines were laid down, it could not become part of the linguistic code of the workplace of hitherto private sector of India. A cumulative effect of altered demography of the workplace, active involvement of the media, impetus and alarm created by rise in gendered crimes together manifested into an etching of this Act into popular imagination. It acquired larger dimensions than just being a black letter of law, which gets enacted by the legislature and then is implemented by the law enforcing agents. This Act enjoyed the benefit of being talked about by the same people for whose protection it was being enacted. In other words, it was being talked beyond the formal precincts of law making and implementation. This advantage was not available to the Vishaka Guidelines given its timing and case law nature. The implementation of Vishaka guidelines remained uneven in the private sector where it was either chosen to ignore the guidelines or they were not implemented with due diligence (Sarpotdar, 2013).

A survey conducted in the year 2010, revealed that 88% of women working in IT, BPO and KPO companies had suffered some form of sexual harassment at their workplaces (Dhar, 2010). These are the sectors where the professionally educated middle class youth is placing its employment aspirations in the globalised Indian context. Therefore, these sectors form sites of quantitative expansion of workplace participation of the women workforce. Qualitatively, the middle class women work force who constitute this expansion of workforce are better disposed, educationally, to appreciate the absence or presence of an Act for redressal, prohibition and prevention of sexual harassment at workplace.

The discussion about the reception and expectations arising out of this act revealed that women looked at this act as a deterrent for both actual and potential perpetrators of sexual harassment at workplace. A woman employee working in a Multi- National Bank in NOIDA said:

While the implementation of this Act is yet to be seen, but even the fact that it has been passed, it will definitely work as a deterrent, even if the employer makes a complaints committee and spreads awareness about it, it will have its impact as earlier there was nothing like this.

The study found that the concretized usage of the term 'Internal Complaints Committee' in the Act invoked a sense of security amongst women employees. It was perceived as an unambiguous policy tool which was now also a legal obligation on the employer. An affirmation, that in case of a sexual harassment complaint, a victim would either have a well defined location where she can lodge her complaint, or even if in cases where such an internal complaints committee has not been constituted, the employer would be legally obliged to constitute it. The fact that the language used to define the point of redressal was non-jargonised, simple and easy to remember; it lent a sense of empowerment to the women employees even as they used the term 'Internal Complaints Committee' in the course of their interview or discussions. Thus, the responsibility and redressal coordinates were perceived to have been clearly set out, in respect of the in-house mechanism.

A few respondents also reported awareness and reposed faith in the mechanism of the Act as it laid a statutory obligation upon the Company to report, include in its annual report the number of cases filed, if any, and their disposal under the Act. The submission of this annual report is to be made to the Registrar of Companies, which falls under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Likewise, the appropriate government as per the industry concerned is to monitor the implementation of the Act and maintain a database. Additionally, the State Government was also statutorily obliged to receive a brief report based upon the annual reports submitted to the District Officer.

A respondent of an MNC in Gurgaon found

The idea of a multi-pronged reporting system is comforting, because now the companies would be bound to take sexual harassment complaints seriously, because they now know that they cannot keep the matter limited to the four walls of the local office, and the matter is bound to get escalated once the matter is formally lodged.

Another employee however questioned this hope by saying that *“may be now the management would resist taking complaints on record, just because of the fact that if it comes as a formal complaint, it would get escalated.”*

However, another respondent concluded by saying that *“one thing is sure that in most cases, a company would see the alleged perpetrator as a bigger burden than the complaint maker and it would at least ensure that some action is taken and the culture of sexual harassment will get mitigated and discouraged.”*

Comparables of the above expressed faith, doubts are also to be found in the discourses around the evolution of the Act itself. A Report by a Joint Parliamentary Committee in 2011 recorded that the unavailability of a centralised mechanism for recording of number of sexual harassment complaints, their resolution and the action taken, especially in the private sector, had resulted in an absence of database with the Ministry of Women and Child Development. As a consequence the extent of implementation of Vishaka guidelines in the private sector could not be ascertained. It was concluded that in the absence of penal provisions, the compliance by employers in the private sector could be lax, due to which the guidelines remained on papers in a majority of workplaces (Sarpotdar, 2013).

New Meanings of Respectability

It has been argued in the earlier studies that the fear of stigma induced many women to endure their perpetrator in silence (Gupta, 2001). Moreover, most of the sexual abuse used to go unreported due to anxiety about devastating trials; cross-examination and humiliation are few of the reasons which used to discourage the victims to take recourse of available redressal mechanisms (Singh, 1998). However, the present study indicates that women in the private sector welcome

this Act as it represents a new meaning of respectability to them. One of the BPO employees from Gurgaon said:

At least it has come as a law that we should not be looked at as sexual beings. Earlier such things were nonexistent. This law at least made awareness and redressal mechanism mandatory. The MNCs are very conscious about any negative publicity and since this act has made it mandatory to highlight in the annual report about the activities to prevent Sexual Harassment at workplace, at least something would come in place to tackle this problem, which used to be non-existent earlier.

The analysis of the study shows that the new meaning of respectability for women is not in hushing up the matter of sexual harassment but rather in reporting the same. The Statutory definition of sexual harassment has lent sanctity of sorts to the whole idea of reporting any incidence amounting to sexual harassment. The study found that the broad based statutory definition of the acts, behaviour and circumstances, which would tantamount to sexual harassment, was seen as a big relief as far as the difficulty of reporting 'what was felt as wrong' was concerned. The respondents further indicated that as per the definition of sexual harassment, some forms of sexual harassment actually existed on a frequently recurring basis. That they often went without proper reporting because the communication of such instances was seen as more bothersome than their incidence itself. At least in most cases, if not all. This in-turn resulted in silent sufferings, where the victim was forced to put up with it with a plastic smile on her face, lest she would invite further embarrassment. The cost of raising an issue was, at times, seen as higher than the benefit which can be expected out of it; given the difficulty of explaining it to unwilling ears who's key responsibility area was anyways not to redress such grievances. Since the act has made it mandatory that it is the employer's duty to have the awareness programs and the Internal Complaints Committee, consequently the issue of sexual harassment has become a part of common parlance at the workplace. The statutory need of an Internal Complaints Committee not only provided a certainty of redressal destination within the company, but it also designated people who were under statutory obligation to lend their ears to complaints of sexual harassment.

Earlier, if a woman would dare to bring the incidence of sexual harassment in public, she ran the risk of being stigmatised or being alleged of having a loose moral character. Moreover, counter attempts are made to further malign her character, as women in most societies are trained to put up with manipulative sexual relations as normal and even had to accept sexual harassment as an expression of men's sexual desires (Gupta, 2013). However, the present study indicates that through this Act, the awareness programs and discussions will make men realise that women should be looked at as beyond sexual beings. While these awareness programs and discussions cannot eliminate sexual harassment, they would certainly contribute to a buildup of a supportive and enabling environment around prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment at workplaces.

Last month we had a training session and one part was about education on sexual harassment, which used to be missing earlier. People come from different backgrounds to work here and everybody has different notion of women around them. It is important to make them understand the notion of the company about its women employee, which is to treat them with dignity and respect. If any male employee forgets it, then it is important to tell him that we have the mechanism to remind him about it. The good part about this act is that it has made it mandatory and structured. Now, in all the training sessions, we have included a component about awareness on sexual harassment (Woman HR manager in an IT firm in NOIDA).

The Internal Complaint Committee (ICC)

The Government of India constituted Justice J.S Verma Committee¹⁰ to look into the possible amendments of the Criminal Law to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishments for criminals committing sexual assaults of extreme nature against women. This Committee was constituted with promptitude within few days of the brutal gang rape in Delhi on December 16th, 2012. Chapter Four of this Report dealt with the subject of Sexual Harassment of Women at

¹⁰ <http://nldr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/121798698-Justice-Verma-Committee-report.pdf>

Workplace. Herein, the Report expressed the following with regards to the Internal Complaints Committee.

It is our apprehension that the in-house dealing of all grievances would dissuade the women from filing the complaints and may promote a culture of suppression... to avoid the concerned establishment falling into disrepute (J S Verma Committee, 2013).¹¹

The in-house complaint committee was discussed in detail with the respondents, on which mixed responses were indicated. When asked about the practicality of the Complaints Committee when the sexual harassment done by the senior, then the respondents indicated that the hierarchical structure of the private sector is such that there are many managers at one level and all the manager are competing with each other, so there are less possibilities for the Complaints Ccommittee to be biased as there would be fellow seniors to point out the injustice and favouritism, which is not appreciated in the corporate sector. Moreover, it was also indicated that in the MNCs there is a possibility of contacting the counterpart who may be sitting in some other country. With these counterparts, the employees have frequent virtual meetings and discussions about the work. This also provides space to women to bring any grave issue to the notice of people stationed abroad, who are at higher levels in official hierarchy belonging to the head office, for example a manager who is a foreign national and is stationed abroad.

On the other hand some of the women did indicate about the possibility of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) being biased towards the men belonging to higher level in the organization. This limitation can be understood in the backdrop of the alternative proposed by the Verma Committee as it realized that ICC might not work where the complainant is against an influential person within the organization. The alternative proposed by the Verma Committee was to have an external employment tribunal comprising two retired

¹¹ <http://nlrd.org/resources-womens-rights/sexual-harassment-at-work-place/sexual-harassment-at-work-place-latest-judgements-of-supreme-courthigh-courts/justice-verma-committee-report-on-sexual-harassment-at-work-place>

judges, two sociologist and a social activist. Apart from ICC being biased, another reason for preferring the external tribunal was the vesting of Civil Court powers to ICC, as it was apprehended that many organizations might not have any legally trained person to cope with the responsibility that would come with the vesting of Civil Court powers of recording the proceedings, evidence, summoning people or calling for documents.

In the present study as well, it was feared by the women that the organizations might come up with an ICC without any legal training to the members of the ICC and it would function on its whims and wishes as the annual report does not make the organizations accountable for the question of the extent and propriety of procedure being followed in each complaint. However, another argument in favour of the ICC as against an external tribunal was that, in general, a women worker might feel inhibited to go to an external body for justice than to an internal body, as it will involve a lawyer, money, extra efforts and enterprise.

The Provision for Conciliation

Though the Verma Committee had reservations regarding the provision of conciliation in the Act, but it has been disregarded. The Verma Committee suggested that the complaint should not be allowed to be withdrawn so as to ensure that all the cases of sexual harassment are properly dealt with under the law of the land. It further added that the option of conciliation might put a pressure on the woman to give up legal remedies.

The women respondents highlighted possibilities from their personal experiences and experiences of their friends where they perceived a particular objectionable attitude or behaviour as being a product of a colleague's cultural conditioning rather than bad intention.

My friend belonged to a particular State and his language and tone was rugged and he spoke in a manner which many times ended up making the female colleagues uncomfortable...However, he was not bad at heart. Once our Boss, who also happened to be a lady, took a separate meeting with him

on the issue, where he was surprised to realize that he had hurt so many of his colleagues. Thereafter, he changed considerably.

This take on unwitting or unintentional sexual harassment points out towards the socio-cultural underpinnings to the formation of masculinities. It highlights how an essentially migration fuelled workplace witnesses acts which are a manifestation of less mens rea and less actus rea. The section on conciliation was seen in a positive light by the women respondents in reference to such instances.

This can be understood in the backdrop of the concept of mobilizing masculinity. This also brings us to the concept of practicing gender at work (Martin, 2003); how men and women see/interpret each other and themselves as gendered. Men's collective practicing of masculinities that affect women negatively, even when men believe that they intend no harm, has been termed as 'mobilizing masculinities'. This term is used for practices wherein two or more men jointly bring into play masculinities (Martin, 2003). The respondents indicated that men sometimes say something derogatory or with sexual connotations to their women colleague without feeling apologetic about it as in their masculine schema it does not construe up to an act of harassment. However, if the complaint is made about it and in the counselling session they are made feel to guilty and apologetic, then the matter can not only be resolved, but at the same time it will also set examples for others that such remarks are equivalent to sexual harassment. This kind of resolution was welcomed by women respondents, in the mild cases of sexual harassment where men never realised of being a harasser, where the problem was perceived as more of cultural conditioning rather than wrongful intention

However, the conciliation has been looked at as a pacifier by the Verma Committee, but the women employees find it necessary as they indicated that all the acts of sexual harassment are not of similar nature and intensity and some of the issues could be dealt with the conciliation including strict warning and apology. However, the respondents also acknowledged that in the serious incidence of Sexual Harassment the counselling can be humiliating and traumatizing as well.

The Grey Areas

The study also found some of the gray areas indicated by the employees and which were echoed by the Verma Committee's Suggestions. As earlier in the section 354 and 509 of IPC, women's modesty was not defined, in the same way the present Act has the ambiguity in the definitions of the term such as sexually coloured remarks, physical contact and advances and showing pornography. The women respondents claimed that these terms can always be contested during the trials because the experiences of the same are subjective in nature.

If any of my colleague shows me a picture of Khajuraho Temples and later says that I was sharing the information about art of the temple, but only I would know what was his intention behind it, whether it was a healthy discussion on the temple art and culture, or it was an act of harassment (a respondent).

Even the Verma Committee recognized that in the state of ambiguity it is needed to empathize with the vulnerability of the victim, and the subjective perception of the complainant should be given due weight.

Secondly, the *red rag provision* of the act has been considered as challenging as it proposes to penalize a woman for filing a false or malicious case. However, where the employer or a senior is opposed to complainant, the evidence might be manipulated by him to falsify the allegations of the aggrieved woman. In this regard the Verma Committee has suggested an action of reprimand in case false complaint rather than penalizing the complainant.

Thirdly, Justice J.S Verma Committee Report's reservation on the provision of conciliation cannot be totally dismissed on the basis of the fact that some acts which cause sexual harassment might not be a product of *mens rea* as much as they would be a product of *actus rea*,¹² emanating out of the cup of cultural conditioning but still not over brimming to the saucer of criminality. Such cases shall always be few out of many and for some cases, at least, out of the residual basket,

¹² mens rea- guilty mind and actus rea- guilty act in legal language.

the apprehensions expressed by Justice Verma Committee Report regarding the provisions of conciliation would hold the potential of being misused to the detriment of the complainant.

Conclusion

The study found that the Act has triggered a positive perception amongst middle class women, they stand more aware and affirmed by the act, especially when compared to the awareness and affirmation quotient which has hitherto been produced by the Vishaka case. The concrete and comprehensible terminologies and procedure of the Act has ensured that this law has percolated down to popular imaginations of women employees. Media has played a very positive role in heralding, announcing and educating people on the Act and its subject matter. It also carried forward instances of compliance to the Act, which contributed to a positive build up around the working of this new Act. A large number of respondents of the study alluded to having read about small newspaper articles relating to the Act and the promises which it holds for them. The study further found that the Act has had the effect of the proverbial siren of the police van which plays the twin purpose of affirming the presence of the protection afforded by law to a law abiding citizen, while simultaneously deterring the potential and actual perpetrators.

The issues, such as, the composition of the ICC, the conciliation by the employer and the *red rag provision* of the Act has brought about some of the concerns in the struggle of women's negotiation with the legalities of the sexual harassment cases. Women's agency has been expanded at workplace through this Act as she can bring the issue of the sexual harassment to the notice of the authority, which used to be absent earlier. However, the gray areas discussed above indicate that the employment opportunities for the middle class women in the globalized India might have given them agency in their personal life, but at workplace their agency is still contested when it comes to the instances of sexual harassment. In addition to this, the study found that if the language and procedure of a statute is kept simple and comprehensible so as to afford an easy understanding for its beneficiaries, whom it intends to protect and the legislation itself

is accorded ample media attention, the statute begins to lend a sense of security irrespective of the fact whether a remedy in law under the said statute is actually sought by any potential complainant or not.

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SECTION V

NEOLIBERAL PARADIGM:
GENDERING THE POLITICAL?

Rumblings in the Middle: The Quest for *Aazadi* in Delhi

Albeena Shakil

Two major protest movements erupted in the national capital city of Delhi in 2011 and 2012. The *India Against Corruption* movement that gathered momentum in 2011 and then the anti-rape protests after the gruesome gang-rape of a 23-year-old paramedic student on 16th December 2012. The former was focussed on the demand for the promulgation of the *Jan Lokpal Bill* in the aftermath of successive corruption scandals in the country, while the latter with its slogan of ‘*aazadi*’ [freedom], paved way for voicing wider democratic concerns on the safety and dignity of women. Both drew unexpectedly large crowds and also found resonance across other cities of the country. The dynamics of the anti-corruption movement resulted in the formation of a new political party that registered massive gains in the Delhi Assembly elections of 2013. The anti-rape movement reinforced discontent but could not find any direct electoral-political agency to champion the rights of women and youth. Both the movements were widely characterized as middle class by observers as well as critics.

This paper seeks to explore what is making the city of Delhi this centre of urban middle class discontent? How can this new middle class activism be viewed? Can it make credible contributions to deepening democracy in India? What is the character and spread of this new middle class? And indeed, which processes in recent times have given rise to such high levels of discontent within a largely upwardly mobile new middle class? I seek to propose that greater attention needs to be paid to the contradictions unfolding in the Delhi due to its unique character entailing the presence of over 357

revenue villages criss-crossing across the length and breadth of the city. The fault lines created by this, I argue, may be an important factor to understand why its law and order machinery has repeatedly failed and the city is notorious as the ‘rape capital of India’; as well as why the desire for political stakes is being felt so acutely by the middle classes of the city today. The argument will be made in five parts: 1) recounting theoretical debates over the characterization of the middle classes; 2) the city-village contradictions in Delhi; 3) tracing the roots of middle class activism in the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi; 4) the trigger and dynamics of the anti-rape movement; and 5) concluding remarks about the potentialities, limitations and challenges of the present juncture, especially vis-à-vis the quest for *aazadi*.

Middle Class or Middle Classes?

The middle class has always been difficult to define and there is very little consensus over the criterion for deciding the membership of this class—education, profession, income, culture or political/ideological moorings? Examining the colonial Indian middle class, Sanjay Joshi (2010) concluded that the quest for identifying an “authentic” middle class was an elusive one. He proposed the use of “middle-class-ness” in lieu of the middle class. Partha Chatterjee (1991), too, demarcated the colonial Indian middle class by drawing a distinction between its private and public negotiations of modernity. He concluded that the social world of middle class India was neither peopled by “individuals” in the strict sense, nor was it necessarily about “modernity” since the private domain of the middle class was constituted in resistance to Western modernity. In another book, Sanjay Joshi (2001) differed with Chatterjee to argue that irrespective of the private and the public, middle class modernity itself was essentially “fractured” involving contradictory impulses of reason and sentiment, tradition and radical change, liberty and authoritarianism, equality and hierarchy, simultaneously. Instead of occupation or education, he attributed the consolidation of the middle class to its enterprises in the field of culture and the project of “self-fashioning.”

This does not mean that education has not been viewed as an important indicator of this class. With his bird eye view of European history, Eric Hobsbawm (1997) concluded that "...the chief indicator of social membership [of the middle class] increasingly became, and has remained, formal education" (p.174). One cannot but agree that formal education is the lowest common denominator of the middle class. But the moment we seek to go into further details, some problems arise. Exactly how much formal education is required to qualify for the membership of the middle class? The numbers vary drastically between those who are graduates and others who have varying levels of school education.¹ Additionally, even agreeing upon the level of education is not enough as many with education are also capitalists, and many more, still working class or peasants.

Enumeration on the basis of profession is also difficult. There are overlaps between professions that are based on education and those that require physical labour or skills. For instance, scores of youth who work in the services sector today like in shopping malls, at food joints, in home collection or delivery services, etc. are required to have some minimum education but their professions are hardly based on their educational qualification. Many among them, however, would choose to qualify themselves as middle class today. Additionally, others who acquire degrees from universities often return to family occupations of petty trade and industry, which are largely unrelated to their education. Some also become millionaires and billionaires based on jobs in the corporate sector or investments in the stock market. The one distinction that can be drawn between the pre- and post-liberalization eras is that earlier the state was the chief employer of educated people but by now the private sector has emerged as the major employer.

Consumption and income criterion also pose problems. India is a country where even the basic distinction between 'poor' and 'non-

¹ As per the National Sample Survey, 68th Round (2014) only 1.6% of India's population aged 7 years and above were postgraduates, another 4.9% were graduates, 1% held diploma or certificates, 7.1% were educated up to higher secondary level and another 11.3% up to secondary/matriculation level.

poor' remains controversial. Each new poverty line has generated its own sets of fierce debates. A minor tweaking of the poverty criteria sends millions plunging above or below poverty and has always not been accepted as a reliable basis.² In such a context, statistical estimations about the size of the middle class have been rare. In 2010, the NCAER came up with a report titled—*How India Earns, Spends and Saves*. It estimated that the size of the middle class in India in 2009-10 was 12.8 percent of the total households, i.e., approximately 153 million. This was based on annual household incomes ranging between Rs. 200,000—Rs. 10,000,000. The study took into account the possession of credit cards, ACs, TV sets and cars, as also saving patterns. It drew several distinctions between the urban and rural members of this class, including that the former were primarily wage-earners and the latter self-employed.

This liberal number was much below previous estimates by international market driven researches that put the size of the Indian middle class anywhere between 200 to 600 million. However, the findings of another NCAER study, *India Human Development Survey – II*, based on the survey of 42000 households, devised five income quintiles to conclude that those earning anything above Rs. 150000 per annum were among the richest 20 percent of the country. This study found that only 40 percent of middle income group households had access to piped water and only half had flushed toilets. “12 per cent of adult men in 2011-12 had a degree or diploma, only 8 per cent could speak fluent English and 14 per cent had some computer skills. Women had fewer skills than men in each of these categories”

² In 2008, the Prime Minister appointed *National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector* (NCEUS) estimated that 77% of India's population had a spending capacity of less than Rs. 20 per day. In 2009, the Ministry of Rural Development appointed N. C. Saxena Committee estimated that over 50% of India's population lived below the poverty line. In the same year, the Planning Commission appointed Tendulkar Committee revised the criteria to estimate that the percentage of population living below the poverty line was 37.2 rather than 27.5 as estimated earlier. Public outrage was generated again in 2013 when the Planning Commission declared that anyone spending above Rs. 32 per day in urban areas and Rs. 27 per day in rural areas was above the poverty line.

(Rukmini, 2014). In essence, this study provided a gloomier view of the realities of contemporary middle class existence in India. The architect of the survey Dr. Sonal Desai opined, “I think it’s more useful to go beyond the income data, and look at what we really mean when we talk about a global middle class” (Rukmini, 2014).

In recent times, another interesting attempt to demarcate contemporary classes was made in Britain in 2011 through a combination of an online survey of 161458 respondents (over 90 percent of who were ‘whites’) and a more representative field survey. The *Great British Class Survey* was based on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of social distinctions involving varying levels of economic, social and cultural capital. The survey proposed a model for the classification of seven new classes based on various permutations-combinations of these capitals—elite (6 percent), established middle class (25 percent), technical middle class (6 percent), new affluent workers (15 percent), emergent social workers (19 percent), traditional working class (14 percent) and the precariat (15 percent). The survey concluded that the traditional middle and working classes comprised only 39 percent of the British population, and that there was a need to go beyond twentieth century stereotypes of class (Savage *et al*, 2013).

In the post-liberalization era, the bourgeoning middle class of developing countries has been characterized as the ‘new’ middle class, but again there are some debates over what exactly is ‘new’ in the middle class. Nandu Ram in *The Mobile Scheduled Castes: Rise of a New Middle Class* (1998) argued that the rise of a professional middle class among the Scheduled Castes was the most notable development in comparison to previous times. Leela Fernandes (2006) cautioned against drawing very sharp distinctions between the politics of the Nehruvian middle class and its market orientation under neoliberalism. Both, she argued, practiced politics based on social exclusions and hierarchies of gender, caste, class, language and religion. She made a case against the homogenization of this class, as the English educated white-collared middle class had created a new standard of a “consumer-citizen,” but they were different from other urban, small town and rural middle classes. She noted that the middle class wanted the market, but did not wish away its claims on the

state either. The new political assertiveness of the middle class, in her view, was "...an important force in shaping the consent and conflict over liberalization..."(p.213), but the class was inherently fragile and confused about its political role and socio-economic status.

There have been other attempts to delineate the post-liberalization ideological moorings of the middle class. In his essay, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies,' Sumit Sarkar (1997) noted that the intelligentsia was only one constituent of the wider middle class formation in which "a binary combination of 'material' advancement and 'spiritual' autonomy through surrogate forms of cultural or religious nationalism" (pp. 82-108) was increasingly becoming common. In *The Great Indian Middle Class*, Pavan Varma (1998) traced a gradual shift away from social concerns and idealism among the middle classes in post-independence India to a self-serving insensitivity towards the underclasses under liberalization. Earlier this year, he also wrote another book in the aftermath of the anti-corruption and anti-rape movements titled, *The New Indian Middle Class*, and identified the newfound activism of the middle class under neoliberalism as something new and potent.

Attempts to delineate more enduring characteristics of the middle class have also been made. Literary historian Terry Eagleton (2005), with his expertise on the favourite genre of the middle class, the novel, concluded that the ideology of the middle class "centred on a dream of total freedom from restraint" (p.1). However, this too, is arguable as the middle class in history has often proven to be adept at negotiating both the freedoms and unfreedoms of its times. The conservative turn taken by the middle class across Europe after successful bourgeois democratic revolutions during the nineteenth century is well recorded, or the turn away from the underclasses in the neoliberal era. In our own country the nascent middle class barely tolerated the 1857 uprising. Many such examples can be enumerated where the linkages between the middle classes and freedom are suspect. The classical Marxist view, of course, is that the 'lower middle class' comprising of small manufacturers, shopkeepers, artisans, peasants as well as the 'petty bourgeoisie' or small capitalists and small proprietors are essentially wavering classes that can gravitate either towards the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

Notwithstanding the complexities offered by the above views, I would like to argue that there are elements of continuity as well as change involved in the evolution of the middle classes in India. The continuities lie with the historical roots of the middle classes in India. The emergence of modern classes like the bourgeoisie, middle class or working class during the nineteenth century did not happen in any great opposition to feudalism or religious establishments like in Europe. Rather, they emerged in a primarily anti-colonial milieu. Contradictory ideological impulses were, therefore, evident within these classes ranging from conservative, communal, revivalist views to the most modern, scientific, secular and radical views. The middle classes often exhibited and negotiated divergent value systems in their daily life. This legacy perhaps explains some of the most glaring bundle of contradictions evident within the middle classes today—that the most educated practice sex-selective abortions, dowry or caste based marriages, etc.

The element of change in the era of globalization lies in the fact that the middle class has witnessed greater stratification under neoliberalism. Post-liberalization, it is difficult to talk about the middle class in singular terms. The middle classes have stratified to such an extent that by now they encompass a wide variety and diversity ranging from sections that are linked to the most advanced outposts of global capitalism in terms of their livelihood, lifestyle, aspiration and cultural/intellectual milieu, to others who are still joining middle class ranks as first generation entrants and experiencing the pangs of this transition. This also includes the entry of dalits, other backward classes, and nascent entrants from among the tribals into the class, as well as the accompanying accommodation and resistance to this change.

However, for the study of the recent middle class movements in Delhi, it is important to take into account two important concepts—‘individualism’ and ‘citizenship rights’—that evolved alongside the evolution of the middle classes and the modern state across Europe. In the context of India, the middle classes in some senses have lacked both. For individualism, two of the most important components, especially while locating gender, are choice of profession and choice in marriage. But the two have hardly been personal choices,

and often decided more by family, caste, kinship and community considerations. Today the younger generation is increasingly inclined towards own choice marriages, more so with migration. But Khap Panchayat dictates for 'honour' crimes or customary practices like dowry/son preference etc. often prevail over constitutional laws. As far as citizenship rights are concerned, the state itself often displays brazen caste, gender, class, religious and other prejudices while administering justice or implementing policies. Even the state carries several contradictory ideological impulses in its functioning. Thus, while it temporarily considered decriminalizing same-sex relationships in the capital city of Delhi, in the neighbouring state of Haryana heterosexual couples like Manoj-Babli were brazenly killed while under court ordered police protection. Numerous court rulings can be cited which range from offering a strong defense of young people's right to marry by their own choice, to those expressing sympathy and empathy for the perpetrators of killings in the name of honour, popularly known as 'honour killings'.

The Case of Delhi: An Urban Village?

The eruption of two major protest movements in Delhi during 2011 and 2012 can be understood in view of some of the city's most unique features. Three, especially, stand out— 1) unlike any other metropolitan city in India, Delhi has over 357 revenue villages criss-crossing across the length and breadth of the city, which exercise considerable political and administrative influence in the city; 2) the female labour participation rate in Delhi is 40 percent lower than the average urban female participation rate of India as a whole, although it has witnessed a steady increase and is higher in high income quintiles contrary to the scenario in the rest of India; and 3) Delhi is notorious for being the 'rape capital' of India recording higher number of rapes than the next five major cities combined. Let us examine these aspects in some detail.

In the neoliberal era, major cities of India have undergone similar experiences—financialization of their economies, burgeoning services sector, decline of manufacturing, influx of migrant

populations both across the middle and working classes,³ expansion of unorganized sector workers, changing urban landscape, rising inequalities, etc. Delhi, too, has experienced all of this while having over 357 revenue villages criss-crossing across the entire length and breadth of the city. The existence of these villages, not on the outskirts, but across the entire city has had some very serious implications for the life, culture and politics of the state. It's not as if the villages have not undergone any changes, as I will discuss later, but that they are still dominated by strong notions of kinship, community ties and customary practices.

To see the sharp visibility of these contradictions, one needs to just go to the Hauz Khas Village to see elderly men occupying traditional village *chaupals* and *pardah* clad women engaged in household work, living right amidst one of the most elite destinations of the city with its designer boutiques and expensive restaurants. People with widely different value systems and lifestyles do manage to cohabit in the same space, but the mutual disdain and disconnect are obvious. Or, one could see small village houses amidst the most posh farmhouses of Delhi in localities like Sainik Farms, Johri Farms, Assola-Bhatti, Chattarpur etc. which are built on erstwhile farm and forest land. The unease manifests itself in various ways. For instance, earlier this year, there were newspaper reports that in the aftermath of the rape of a 14-year-old Manipuri girl in Munirka Village, its Panchayat decided to evict all tenants in the locality from the north-eastern states. These reports were subsequently denied after widespread outrage. Racial discrimination and stereotyping of people hailing from the north-eastern states of India has emerged as a major issue in recent times. A few years ago in 2007, even the Delhi Police issued special guidelines to students and visitors from the north-east not to wear 'revealing clothes' etc. The city sits uneasy on such bundles of contradictions in its daily life.

³ According to the *Delhi Human Development Report – 2006*, migration to Delhi is higher than to Mumbai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad combined. The *Delhi Human Development Report – 2013* notes some fall in this migration rate. It also observes that more migrants are better educated than before

Many villages exist in Delhi and their roots can be traced to pre-partition village settlements, as also post-partition settlements that emerged around clan and village clusters.⁴ Entire stretches of localities in Delhi are known in local parlance as Jat belts, Gujjar belts, Dalit belts, Punjabi belts, Muslim pockets and so on. The present demography of these localities may not entirely justify such a nomenclature, but the names indicate the village or clan clusters around which the modern city of Delhi got built. Some of the major villages are—Shakarapur, Gazipur, Mandavali, Shahadra, Wazirabad, Baadli, Bawana, Narela, Mangolpuri, Munirka, Aazadpur, Rithala, Pitam Pura, Kotla Mubarakpur, Adhchini, ChiragDilli, Katwaria Sarai, Lado Sarai, Badarpur, Tuglakabad, Naraina, Palam, etc. Their distribution across the eleven districts of Delhi is as follows: Central – 15, East Delhi – 16, New Delhi – 19, North Delhi – 69, North East – 22, North West – 37, Shahdara – 10, South – 42, South East – 26, South West – 69, West – 31.

The economy of these villages has developed in interesting ways after liberalization. In the pre-liberalization period farming and pastoral activities were more prevalent. But agriculture and allied activities witnessed a sharp decline from contributing 4 percent to the GSDP of the state in 1993-94 to 1.48 percent in 1997-98 to less than 0.5 percent by 2012-13. (*Delhi Statistical Handbook – 1998* and *Delhi Statistical Handbook – 2013*). The landed elites of these villages initially shifted to small time property dealing, construction and real estate. Massive slum clusters, middle class enclaves, markets, and commercial buildings came up on their lands, some legally and some illegally, that are now in the process of being regularised. Till a few years back, the villages in Delhi were classified into ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ villages, with restrictions on the commercial use of agricultural and ‘lal dora’ areas (land for habitation and livestock) within villages. In 2006 a demolition drive was undertaken by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi against unauthorized commercial structure in villages. In response the massive *Lal Dora* agitation took place against these demolitions involving over 350 villages of Delhi. Subsequently,

⁴ For reference to post partition settlements in Delhi see Anis Kidwai’s *In Freedom’s Shade*, Trans. by Ayesha Kidwai (2011).

the government progressively agreed to remove the restrictions over constructions on the few remaining stretches of cultivable and *lal dora* land and legalized these commercial constructions. As a fall out, recently a total of 410 villages were notified as ‘urbanized villages’ of Delhi.⁵

Over time, with stagnation in real estate activities, the village elites initially shifted to the transport sector, operating *Blue-line* buses, and catering to other major aspects of the public transport system. But after policy changes in the run-up to the Delhi Commonwealth Games in 2010, this activity suffered setbacks. Subsequently, battery operated buses and other forms of smaller road transport have resurfaced in Delhi. They are called ‘Grameen Seva’ or ‘rural services’ that transport lakhs of commuters to and fro from Metro Stations and on other routes every day. These are owned largely by villagers. By now the cash-rich village elites are also visible in the area of informal money lending and petty finance, lending money on short notices to traders and lakhs of urban poor who are unable to obtain bank loans for expenses on marriages, funerals, health, consumables, construction, etc. The money lenders also have their own informal methods of recovery in event of defaults.

Some of these villages are very small with a population of less than 100 while others house over 10000 people. Their total share in the population of Delhi is merely 2.5 percent. Yet, if we were to examine the extent of political and state power exercised by the villages of Delhi, it is disproportionate to either their population size or contribution to the state’s economy. Delhi, a young state, has had five assembly elections so far. In its 4th Assembly between 2008 and 2013, the number of MLAs who identified ‘farming/agriculture’ as their primary profession was 18, i.e., over one-fourth of the entire assembly of 70. If one also adds MLAs who are rooted in the same village backgrounds and now identify ‘business’ as their primary profession, the numbers would go up significantly. It is notable that the share of professionals among elected MLAs has witnessed a steady

⁵ For complete list of villages see: Department of Land and Building, Govt. of NCT of Delhi web page doi: http://delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/doit_land_building/Land/Home/List+of+Urbanized+Village

decline since 1993 (Mathur, 2013). This political power of the rural elite also finds reflection in all aspects of state function, particularly in the police, water, electricity, PDS and other departments of the government where kinship based favours and patronage have continued to predominate, causing much hardship to all others, particularly the migrant poor.

The second unique feature of Delhi is its overall low but interesting female labour participation rate. As per the *Human Development Report of Delhi – 2013*, the rate in Delhi during 2011-12 was just 11.1 percent which was five times lower than that of males and also 40 percent lower than the average urban rate for females in India as a whole. Therefore, the situation in Delhi is quite adverse for working women. However, unlike males, the female labour force participation rate in Delhi varies substantially across educational levels, being the highest among 'graduates-and-above'. This is contrary to the national trend where 'not-literate-females' generally display the highest participation rates and educated women lag far behind. In Delhi, the labour participation rate for educated women, who also comprise the highest expenditure quintiles, is almost double the second highest category of 'not-literate-females'. The same trend is not visible among males. Additionally, while the male labour participation rate in Delhi has remained more-or-less the same over the last one decade, female labour participation has witnessed a steady increase. This changing trend, wherein better educated and relatively well-off women are coming out to work within a general environment of low labour participation of women, has serious implications for understanding the growing violence against women in the city, as will be discussed later.

The third most significant aspect of Delhi is that it has consistently had very high rates of crimes against women. As per the National Crime Records Bureau's *Crime in India – 2012* report, a total of 706 incidents of rapes were recorded in Delhi in 2012. These were more than the combined total of the next five most violent cities in India, i.e., Mumbai, Jaipur, Indore, Bhopal and Chennai. Not just rape, but 14.18 percent of all crimes against women in the 52 major cities of India occurred in Delhi. These crimes include rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry deaths, cruelty by husband or relatives, assault

on woman with intent to outrage her modesty, insult to the modesty of women, immoral trafficking, etc. The apathy of the Delhi Police towards all types of crimes is reflected in its sorry response to Police complaints. As per NCRB data, a total of 2425188 complaints were received by the Delhi Police in the year 2012. Of these only 60367 were converted into F.I.R.s, that is, below 2.5 percent. This is much below the national average of 33.66 percent for the same year.

Thus, both in terms of the incidents of crime as well as its response to crime, Delhi offers a very hostile terrain for its residents. Many reasons can be attributed for the same including the location of Delhi within the larger north-western region of the country which has generally had very poor indicators for the status of women like low sex ratio, prevalence of the purdah system, honour crimes etc.; or the legacy of high tolerance towards sexual crimes due to the unaddressed history of partition violence. But, another relevant factor here is also the sheer fact that the identity of the complainant and the accused often has to withstand the test of kinship and community based ties before a case can be pursued in the right earnest or its fate sealed.

Roots of Middle-Class Activism in Delhi

In the neo-liberal era, middle class activism has generally witnessed a decline. The aspiration for upward mobility has generally made the middle classes turn their backs on the poor and working classes. The little activism that remained tended to move towards people's movements, civil society endeavours and NGO's i.e., non-political movements. However, over the past few years there has seen some churning within this sector. Three broad trends can now be outlined—working with the state in terms of lobbying for changes or implementing state policies or being part of government committees and bodies; working against the state through mobilizations and protests; and working against the state by turning political and entering the electoral fray in order to be able to influence policy change. All these contradictions played themselves out in the genesis and development of the anti-corruption movement in Delhi, be it in the initial decision to launch the movement on a staunch anti-government platform or the subsequent split that led to the

formation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that contested the Delhi Assembly elections and won a remarkable 28 out of 70 seats, and even managed to form the Delhi government for a few days.

However, the roots of middle class involvement in activism in Delhi can be traced a little back to the year 2000 when a PPP model scheme of *Bhagidari* was launched by the Delhi government seeking to involve Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and Merchant Trader Associations (MTAs) in shouldering civic and administrative responsibilities. The scheme was essentially designed to reduce government expenditure by outsourcing civic responsibilities like switching on/off of street lights, meter reading in colonies, traffic control, water bill collection and payment, door to door garbage collection, maintenance of community parks and halls, prevention of encroachment, neighbourhood watch and security, coordinating load shedding and power breakdown, etc. to these associations. It was only a matter of time before the initial excitement over what ostensibly seemed like partnership started waning off. The RWAs and MTAs were not empowered to take policy level decisions. In event of complaints and grievances, they were not expected to hold the government alone responsible, but also share part of the blame.

Outsourcing of government services is not a policy pioneered by the Delhi government. During the neo-liberal era, governments around the world have increasingly turned to outsourcing government functions to private bodies, private organizations and NGOs. The argument being that subsidies tend to go waste and do not reach the people and that outsourcing would somehow improve efficiency through the involvement of private players and voluntary organizations. Inefficiency, rather than faulty policies are generally blamed for endemic problems. Over time across the world, “the share of World Bank projects with some degree of ‘civil society’ involvement (encompassing NGO participation) [has] increased from 6 percent in the late 1980s to over 70 percent in 2006” (Werker and Ahmed, 2008).

However, an interesting off-shoot of the implementation of this scheme was that RWAs and MTAs across Delhi were compelled to hold annual elections and start taking interest in governance and

administration. Over time they also became familiar with other RWAs during district or state-level gatherings. By now, over 3500 RWAs and MTAs in Delhi hold annual elections, organize regular meetings with government functionaries, and network among themselves and with NGOs. The first significant protest movement in Delhi under the aegis of RWAs and NGOs was in the year 2005 to resist water privatization moves by the Delhi government. The relatively small but effective movement tasted success and was a new phenomenon in Delhi. Arvind Kejriwal and his NGO, *Parivartan*, played a significant role in this agitation.

In 2008, another project called *Mission Convergence*, aimed at working class localities, was started in Delhi. It was envisaged as a single window delivery mechanism for all social welfare schemes. It was designed to operate through Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) run by NGOs and registered societies in residential areas like slums, J.J. Clusters and resettlement colonies of F, G and H categories. A door-to-door survey was conducted by the GRCs to identify and enumerate the targeted 'vulnerable households' of Delhi. However, two factors ensured that the programme, despite winning many international awards, never really took off. First, the number of vulnerable households turned out to be so high that the government started withdrawing rather than investing in its implementation. Second, the elected representatives resisted this programme that sought to curtail their control over the implementation of welfare schemes.

The massive mobilization of people witnessed during the *India Against Corruption* movement in Delhi at the Ramlila Maidan or Jantar Mantar was not just an outcome of some spontaneous outpouring of people's discontent, but also involved some degree of organized mobilization based on these networks, contacts, familiarities and through know-how of the demography and spread of Delhi. Subsequently, the remarkable electoral result registered by the debutant AAP in Delhi also built upon the grip of the network of NGOs, RWAs, slum cluster pradhans, and MTAs that had evolved over a period of more than a decade in the city. Many of the NGO's that were located in slums on the basis of the *Mission Convergence*

programme and knew every household of the concerned localities also turned anti-government and collaborated with the AAP during elections.

Needless to say, many of these developments were not directly linked to the villages of Delhi. Yet indirect effects on the changing status quo were visible in the assembly election results. The numbers of elected MLAs who identified farming/agriculture as their profession were reduced to 7 in the 5th assembly compared to 18 in the 4th Assembly. Detailed analysis of the Delhi election results by Srinivasan Ramani (2013) also revealed the following: "It is clear that in the relatively rural and more far flung (from the urban agglomeration) areas in west and north-west Delhi predominantly, the AAP's vote share was lower than in the urban concentrations of south, central, east and even some places in northern Delhi....which invariably have high densities of population."

However, it needs to be underscored that despite these latent and unsustainable rural-urban contradictions unfolding in the city of Delhi and its politics, this aspect has not been a part of the overt content of AAP's politics. While making inroads into middle and working class localities of Delhi, AAP's experiments with democratic reforms through 'mohalla sabhas' ran into quick problems in the Khirki Village, where the newly elected Law Minister got into a skirmish with the Police after deciding to ensure the extra-judicial arrest of Ugandan women in late hours of the night. Apart from revealing deep rooted racial biases and elements of vigilantism, this episode was indicative of the AAP succumbing to the same contradictions that have been plaguing the city of Delhi for long, whether the city would run on the basis of democratic, citizenship and individual rights, or kinship based clannish rules and prejudices. These contradictions have occasionally also come to the fore in other political parties. For instance, during her 2008 Cabinet formation, Delhi's Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, initially made an attempt to do away with MLAs from the rural areas of Delhi, but had to subsequently withdraw from the move (Singh, 2008 and Ghosh, 2008).

While it cannot be suggested that the middle or the working classes of Delhi are bereft of conservative tendencies, prejudices, clannish,

communal, casteist or patriarchal behaviour, but their claims over Delhi's politics and the state, made through support to the AAP, certainly represented an urge for furthering the democratic rights of migrant citizens in Delhi over the stranglehold of village elites. Such assertions are bound to happen again in the days to come, but much would depend on the clarity, focus and deftness of the political forces that seek to champion their cause.

The Trigger for the Anti-rape Movement

The roots of the anti-rape movement of Delhi are considerably different from those of the anti-corruption movement. The agitation was launched by the left-led Jawaharlal Nehru University Student's Union through a series of demonstrations and chakka-jams. The slogan of 'aazadi' reverberating on the lips of young students soon resonated with other students and youth of Delhi and the agitation slowly acquired a life of its own.

The trigger for these protests is not hard to locate. This was the umpteenth gang rape of a young woman inside a moving vehicle in Delhi. The ordeal of the young woman and her male companion started at Munirka and continued through the same old notorious stretch of Dhaula Kuan on the ring road. The sheer impunity of the crime was deeply disturbing. The assault was so brutal that even the otherwise insensitive Delhi Police characterized the assailants as 'sadists'. The joy riders preyed upon a young dating couple who were just returning from the movies. However, this time, even before the routine prescriptions and proscriptions for the need for greater restraint on part of women could begin to unfold, the student community came out on the roads of Delhi with a cry for freedom, for who else could stand up for their young counterparts in their hour of adversity. Subsequently it was revealed that the couple was planning an inter-caste marriage within the next two months. Both their families denied knowledge of any such plans. The two could or were allowed to meet each other only once for a brief five minutes. The young woman finally succumbed to her injuries after thirteen days of valiant struggle.

The protests were remarkable for several reasons: (1) this was the

largest mass and collective action of students and youth in the country on violence against women to demand freedom of movement, dress, choice of company, and virtually the whole sky; (2) after a few decades of drought in the participation of men on issues of women's rights, men equalled if not out-numbered women in the protests; (3) the protestors emphasized the state's responsibility in preventing crimes against women by repeatedly attempting to congregate at the Raisina Hills that houses the Home Ministry; (4) the protests led to widespread democratic discussions on a gamut of gender issues in the country; and (5) the participants laid strong claims on public spaces for women.

The extreme anger and hostility that erupted against the Delhi Police and the entire law and order machinery during these protests was an outcome of the cumulative experiences of sharp rise in crimes against women in the city and continued Police apathy. Apart from survey based studies⁶, every resident of Delhi can vouch for the high occurrence of sexual harassment and molestation of women in public spaces, where women are often treated as 'public sexual properties.' The city, with its low labour participation rates for females, is yet to get used to accepting women in the public realm with dignity. With a relatively higher number of working women coming from educated middle class backgrounds compared to the other classes of Delhi, it is understandable why the middle classes turned up in such large numbers for the protests. Additionally, in times of high inflation, when male counterparts are increasingly being compelled by circumstances to accept the need for women's education and work in order to sustain their households, it is not surprising why young men also matched the numbers of women on the streets.

However, it would be naïve to assume that there is some grand consensus in the city on the need for women to step out of their homes. In fact, if anything, the agitation represented the deep fissures that exist in the city over perceptions about the rightful place

⁶ See *Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls Initiative: Report of the Baseline Survey Delhi 2010* by Jagori, doi: http://jagori.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Baseline-Survey_layout_for-Print_12_03_2011.pdf

of women. The alarming rise in crimes against women in Delhi is but a reflection of a strong patriarchal backlash against more and more women stepping out of their homes for education and employment. The backlash is only becoming more violent and brutal by the day. Each incident of sexual assault ends up making the public realm a more hostile place for women. The increasing brutality and sadism accompanying these crimes is reflective of the extreme violence entailed in trying to turn the tide. The rise in gang-rapes and mob-molestations which have become a regular feature of public gatherings on new year's eve etc. show that the message is being conveyed on behalf of a 'masculine-collective'. In this backdrop, the anti-rape movement represented a strong assertion by a new generation that it was not willing for women to be intimidated out of the public realm.

This does not mean that the middle classes today represent some great leap forward in terms of gender sensitivity. In fact, based on evidence from the field it is possible to say that domestic violence in middle class households is on the rise because a new generation of working women is demanding more shared household responsibilities from their enraged male counterparts. Caste-community considerations also continue to hold roost. Fissures were also evident within the agitation. If on the one hand, slogans like 'meri skirt se uunchi meri awaaz hai' [my voice is higher than my skirt] represented the new values of the new middle class, on the other slogans like 'phansi do' [hang them] represented the old values. The anti-rape movement did not focus its attention on the fact that over 90 percent of all crimes against women are committed by known people. Despite occasional voices, the mass protests steered clear of 'contentious' issues like the intersections of gender violence with caste, communalism, race, state violence, alternative sexuality, etc. However, for the time being, the consensus seemed to be on the need for more women to be able to move in public spaces with safety and dignity. Even this in contemporary Delhi is easier said than done. In essence, the anti-rape movement represented an outrage against the existing milieu and social order in Delhi that is still unwilling to accept women outside domestic spaces.

The cry for freedom by students and young professionals, encapsulated the emancipatory moorings of the agitation including

the right to choose their partner for life, dress in any way, rebellion against moral policing and restrictions, etc. It is through the young that the agitation found its voice. We all know that the far-reaching recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee were ignored by the government while making changes in law. The new law is aimed at no more than improving the response of the criminal justice system 'after' the occurrence of crime, rather than establishing any parameters for prevention. The state is yet to accept its full responsibility and put its weight behind women's quest to become equal citizens with dignity. The battle will have to be fought harder and longer to produce enduring results. However, if students and youth coming from multi-class backgrounds are to be viewed as the middle class in-the-making, the protests were certainly middle class. But the force of the desire for a more gender-just order, despite its wider resonance, can be understood only if it is also located within the concrete milieu of Delhi, its changing demography and its evolving middle classes.

Conclusion

The discontent brewing within the largely upwardly mobile middle classes of Delhi is rooted in the fact that they hold very little say in conducting the affairs of the city. While this may also be the case in many other cities, in Delhi there is a more serious disjunction between the rural kinship and clan based ideas that rule the roost and the more urbane sensibilities based on individual and citizenship rights. The contradictions involved in the city-village dynamics of Delhi have created almost a schizophrenic city that negotiates a contradictory range of value systems in its daily life. The strong and long-standing influence of the villages has impacted many aspects including the access to entitlements, law and order as well as public spaces for women. More often than not, citizens feel denied of their citizenship rights, especially migrant populations, both of the middle as well as the working classes.

Though the urban villages of Delhi have undergone many changes in the process of integrating with the neoliberal economy, the associated impact on culture, values and kinship based considerations

are minimal. With the overall demography of the city changing with increasing migrant populations, the tussle over its levers of powers is beginning to unfold. The anti-corruption movement ironically drew upon the discontent generated by a government sponsored *Bhagidari* scheme that sought to draw the middle classes into governance without offering them any real 'partnership.' However, the prolonged exposure of middle class settlements of Delhi to issues of governance has created some interest, basis and possibilities for politics as was evident in the nature of the 2013 assembly election results which *de facto* reduced the influence of the villages in the city's politics, and displayed a demographic polarization in voting patterns. Through the anti-corruption movement, the middle classes made claims on the state by demanding fairness, transparency and greater democracy. But in the subsequent Lok Sabha elections, the same middle classes of Delhi were divided between making claims on the state and endorsing the market. The preference for Narendra Modi was an evidence of the latter. The ideological contours of the AAP were also exposed as fuzzy during the Khirki village episode or its advocacy for 'commando' forces in its election manifesto to ensure the safety for women etc. The movement, with its ups and downs, has so far been an articulation of bourgeois individualistic urges.

On the other hand, the ideological component of the anti-rape movement that confronted traditional views on women was relatively clearer and sharper. But the movement also exposed the fissures between the old and new values of the middle classes of Delhi. The middle classes appear to share a consensus over the right of women to move into the public realm, but they agree on very little else. The divisions within the middle classes of Delhi were evident in rival ideas of retributive justice through the demands for 'death penalty' and preventive justice through the demands for heralding a gamut of far reaching measures like gender-sensitive education reforms etc.

Both these protest movements in Delhi's recent history represent the aspiration of the new middle classes for securing individual and citizenship rights in a city where kinship based rural elites and their codes have long held the levers of power. On broad issues like corruption and women's safety and dignity, various sections of the middle classes have sought to find common grounds through

political and social assertions. However, the recent agitations also expose the lack of consensus among the middle classes between the Modi-model which holds the promise of upward mobility without batting an eyelid for stark social realities, and an angst that seems to remain alive within the middle classes for wider engagements and concerns. The general din of development during the Lok Sabha polls managed to largely side-line gender issues during the election campaign. But the quest for 'aazadi' is a powerful one and cannot be easily wished away. It will certainly involve the confrontation of many latent contradictions in Delhi as well as the country before it can be realized. The stakes are very high for the youth and it is up to them to determine the future of the contradictory life in Delhi.

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Gender, Politics and the Middle Class: Some Questions from India

Indu Agnihotri

A discussion on the different segments inherent in the title of this conference requires exploration of the interconnections, linkages and tensions contained therein. The concept note circulated to identify the issues for this discussion reads as follows:

One of the consequences of globalization in the South Asian countries has been the rise of the “New Middle Class”. Most analysts agree that the emergence of a new middle class in Asian countries was the inevitable result of economic reforms. In India the New Middle class is seen as a departure in many ways from the old middle class of the pre-globalized India. In the context of economic liberalization the middle class has been reinvented as the ‘*new middle class*’ due to a discursive production of its new cultural image that rests on the socio-symbolic practices of consumption and new aspirations of education, employment and leisure. Along with the commodity consumption the urban middle class has also been studied as the recipient of material benefits of jobs in the new economy under globalization.

Clearly, there is an inherent link being established in this statement, between economic policies and change, the processes of class formation and the salient features of class behavior and location, within a larger matrix of social structures and historical change. Somewhere there is a hint at / of (self) identity and linkages established through the market, even as there is a silence in terms of issues of ideology and politics.

This paper is itself an attempt at trying to make sense of a seemingly incomprehensible and fast changing social reality; of

the co-existence of extreme want and greed; of obscene wealth and brutalizing poverty; of aspirations reaching to the skies in the midst of infant children and unborn girls' struggle to stay alive. It should be noted that the on-going discussion on the middle class has not foregrounded gender concerns in any significant way. The women's movement is itself enmeshed in tackling these processes which lay out the context for the experiences of the vast multitudes of women whose lives are both, directly and indirectly, influenced by the turn that on-going discussions and frames of analysis take. It is this enmeshing of the lives of the women in the middle class, as well as the diverse locations in which the mass of women are spread across the castes, class, regional, religious, linguistic and ethnic groups that adds complexity and poses a challenge to our apparently innocuous gathering and discussions here, both with respect to class and gender. In all humility, we need to accept and acknowledge that often it is people from locations similar to ours who provide the frameworks and justifications for analysis which informs policy and decision making. Recognition of the fact that such an exercise is neither neutral nor objective has been the starting point of Women's Studies in India. This has provided the backdrop for the intense debates and responses to policy level initiatives from the women's movement in India in its contemporary phase. Hence, it would be appropriate to take on board some of the questions that arise from these, while attempting to arrive at a conceptual framework within which the subject of Gender, Politics and the Middle Class in India can be approached.

Some Contextual and Conceptual Issues

Firstly, it may be pertinent to raise a question regarding the underlying assumption with reference to the middle class and ask whether there is *a* Middle Class which can be singularly constructed, conceptualized and analyzed in the context of India? If yes, then how has this contributed to shaping perspectives in the women's movement, or in what manner has the women's movement in India framed the women's question vis a vis this middle class? Alternatively, it may be argued that given that the title focuses on a New Middle

Class, there is a delineation already being attempted with respect to this amorphous formation, to assert that in fact, there is a segment that is distinct or different from the middle class and, perhaps this is so with reference to consumption patterns and aspirations as mentioned in the concept note for this Seminar. A further question may be posed as to whether there can be *a* singularly constructed middle class view on /of gender, or on Gender and Politics? A key point of enquiry could be to explore whether there is and can there be *a* singularly constructed view on/of gender, gender relations and gender ideology from the standpoint of the (new) middle class? Perhaps a more fundamental question would be to start by asking why does the ascendancy of the middle class merit analysis at this particular juncture.

The discussion in the Shimla seminar was held in the precincts of what was once the summer capital, from which the diktats of a colonial government which ruled India for over two centuries were issued. This drove home the fact that there is a need to recognize that the colonial experience, based on the exploitation of the labour of both men and women, shaped the debate on women's rights in several different ways, not the least being the continued adherence to Orientalist perceptions while viewing women's status and lives in India. Equally important is the fact that this often determines public responses in India by the media, sections of the political establishment and society in general till today.

These random thoughts were first shared on the eve of the 2014 General Elections in India, which appeared set to establish closer linkages between corporate power and politics, even as it also saw the enhancing of processes to influence visible forms of governance from apparently urban middle class perspectives. This posited the need for explorations with regard to the location of women's and gender issues in the vast spectrum of the politico- ideological terrain. The paper thus attempts to interpret and revisit issues regarding gender and class in the context of the winds of change blowing in Indian politics, even as it contends with the loss of the search for visions of an alternate future.

These together continue to influence the orientation, ideology and consciousness of the newly educated sections of Indian society

and their relations with others. While the social reform movements of the 19th century initiated a process of confronting these challenges in the realm of ideas, a task carried forward in more overtly political forms by the anti imperialist and anti feudal struggles in the first half of the twentieth century, these were not adequate to erase the colonial legacy. This is reflected in the continuation of laws from the colonial period in several spheres, including the more recently amended Criminal Assault Amendment Act 2013, or even the Land Acquisition Act which still looms large on the political firmament. A more critical domain in which this is reflected is in the inadmissible gap that exists between the experience of the vast masses and sections of the political class which controls and determines decision making. Perhaps the least understood aspect remains the impact of the rupture with the intellectual traditions emerging from Indian society's historical experiences due to the well known Macaulay led intervention in education. The failure of the Indian state to provide universal compulsory and quality education to the vast masses and, to evolve a balanced response to the challenge of a medium of education, all put a serious question mark on the critical process of democratization of society. The political establishment, particularly on the Right, has exploited this to its own advantage by drawing a wedge—between the so called 'westernized' elite which has clearly reaped some benefits due to its access to English medium education—and the rest.

The flip side of this is that the educated sections of society even when progressive by inclined have been slow to forge organic links with those who have lost out in this process of modernization. The nature of the academia and intelligentsia reflects this huge gap, with many of our top academics floundering when it comes to communicating in a language and medium that would build bridges and pave the way for a dialogue between the different social classes, groups and communities in their regional locations. Thus, sixty years after independence, we seem to have not only failed to build a strong ground for a dialogue between the diverse communities, but are also unable to arrive at a conceptual framework or devise analytical tools which would help to take forward the interaction required between diverse social groups and communities in constructive ways. As a

result we often remain dependent on the structures and policies of the Indian state to facilitate a dialogue amongst the diverse segments of the Indian people. Given the limitations of the federal structure, this has increasingly been on more authoritarian, retrogressive and undemocratic terms.

The women's movement in India, like other social movements, continues to function within these broad parameters and the limitations imposed thereby. However, the reason why it has succeeded in building a visible presence for itself despite these visible drawbacks is, that it has consciously sought to reach out to the vast mass of women to transcend these limitations, to reflect their needs and aspirations in the articulation of its demands. It has, undoubtedly, spoken in multiple voices and from a range of platforms. The critical and timely policy-focused interventions, particularly by mass organizations of women with a broad left orientation, jointly with those engaged in building Women's Studies in India, ensured that the movement broadly stayed on course and articulated the voices of those at the bottom rung of the ladder, even as its face may have been urban and more middle class. It is this which has enabled it to strike roots across the country, including the more remote parts of the north east. Its spread- often seen as fragmentation- actually points to its strong roots and the potential for drawing upon new energies, going beyond prevalent middle class perceptions of 'feminism.' It is this which has provided it with the strength to withstand the onslaught of the hydra-headed retrogressive organizations which have mushroomed under various names in different parts of the country during these years, whose agenda is inherently hostile and inimical to the struggle to advance women's rights. This tension is often voiced in politico-cultural formulations through portrayal of the movement as representing the westernized elite -such as India versus Bharat- sometimes invoked to assert that rape happens in the former, thereby putting a purdah over the intensity of violence faced by women in rural India, which, not surprisingly, was the starting point of the discussion on violence against women in the movement in India in the 1970s.

The resurgence of the women's movement happened in the climate of the 1970s, which in Indian politics marked a radical phase,

particularly symbolized at the struggle against the Emergency and denial of fundamental rights during 1975-77. The women activists of this generation were broadly schooled in the politics of socialism, mostly of the Communists and splinter groups on the left and, also the Lohiaites. In the southern and western region these established linkages with anti-caste struggles. In Maharashtra in particular, this prepared the ground for dalit women to more specifically raise the issue of gender based violence both in the women's movement and in the dalit movement. Organizations have responded positively to the inputs and impetus from below, showing sensitivity to women's diverse social locations and experiences emanating from these. The 73rd and 74th amendments with regard to 33% reservations for women in local bodies in urban and rural India emerged in the context of these positive pressures mounted by the movement on the larger polity. However, as the stalemate on the matter of reservations at the assembly and parliament level indicates, to win a political battle on gender terms alone in India still remains a challenge, given the pervasive patriarchal resistance across the bourgeois political formations.

While it is true that the movement, to an extent, pitched its demands within the given context of the state as perceived within the Nehruvian framework, it did not always replicate the Nehruvian paradigm, beyond the broad notion of a formal notion of a secular egalitarian citizenship. There was no easy fit as became clear in the pre- Emergency period itself, as capitalism went into crisis and the egalitarian goals came to be visibly under pressure. Further, with the abandonment of the Nehruvian paradigm and the giving up of the objectives of socialist planning, symbolized in the shift to the LPG model since the early 1990s, the context in which the struggle for women's rights and social justice were being waged came to be re-configured. As opposed to the earlier commitment to a universal rights framework on the ground, the recourse to targeting meant that rights, such as that to food security, had now to be re-negotiated. The women's movement began by rejecting the division of women and of citizens as poor/ non poor in terms of basic entitlements, making its ideological standpoint clear with regard to its commitment to universal entitlements understanding.

To an extent the failure of crisis ridden capitalism which dictated the abandonment of this principle along with the Nehruvian paradigm and a shift to 'targetting' in government schemes. This overlapped with movements advancing identity based politics in the 1990s, signaling that people were no longer willing to wait for attaining rights and representation in a possible but distant future. Interestingly, as the discussion on entitlements crawled forward, notions of rights themselves came to be re-defined, given the shift in the human rights discourse which moved from its origins in the socialist-egalitarian debates of the earlier period to frameworks embedded in the post cold war era. Further, women's rights came to be framed within a 'gender' lens, to allow for international funding agencies to push for a focus on 'intra- household/ community based discriminations,' rather than the discourse of citizenship and equality, which had provided the backdrop to critiques of structures within which rights and entitlements were determined.

The shift of focus to the middle class has to be seen within these larger contexts, while also noting that the experiences of women in the middle class vary as also their reflection in the movement. This is due to the complexities and challenges involved in understanding both the notion and composition of the middle class, a fact that the conceptual discussions around the category have not fully captured. That the post structural, postcolonial and post national framework does not help to take this analysis forward is also to be reckoned with along with the fact that these provide the background for evolving theoretical frameworks being developed under the rubric of Women's Studies, given the present juncture in the academic discourse. If Women's Studies is to address issues of identity, social location and ideological orientation, it needs to critically engage with these larger academic frameworks, going beyond a narrow 'feminist' framework. Keeping in mind the rupture affected in colonial India whereby language and class coalesced with the categories of caste and identity to make India a much more deeply divided society, a conscious effort is required to overcome the limitations imposed by our own middle class locations. There is need for deeper analysis of macro data sets as well as the annual indicators put out by official and non-official agencies to read between the lines, if concrete interventions are to be

planned to address the underlying issues. These reflect the fissures and tensions inherent in society and are reflected in the processes of decision making, which largely aim at addressing the needs of those at the top. In India this poses the greatest challenge to democratic governance, but we seem to be inured to interpretation of evidence based methods, given the lure of interpretation in present day academic analysis.

The women's movement, from its multiple and multifarious locations and standpoints, has consistently stepped up pressure for a discussion on women's rights and gender relations in the public domain. In the interface with the state with regard to its policies over the last several decades, the patriarchal roots of these have featured persistently (Agnihotri, I., Mazumdar, V. July 22, 1995). There were ideological underpinnings to these debates which are sought to be brushed aside by a more homogenized notion of feminism and feminist politics. The decades since the 1970s, saw a two way engagement with the intersections of women's differential location which was reflected in debates within the movement. These resulted in an interrogation of perspectives emanating from the dominant political class and its responses on gender centric issues from multiple locations, highlighting the intersections of caste and class locations. A deeper enquiry to see how the Indian state has responded to these pressures, does not lie within the scope of this paper. However, it is important to see that the slogan of the Personal is Political, which held out some possibilities in times of intense ideological debates within the movement, when translated from 'third wave' middle class feminist locations, can lead to a narrowing down of focus to representing a politics around the personal through voices and experiences based on a select segment of social classes.

Clearly, the changing status of women and their location within the broad canvas of social relations in India has emerged as a significant focus at certain critical moments. Women have often, if not always, been in the eye of the storm, through these years. The anti dowry struggles, the campaign against glorification of sati, the questioning of framing of women's rights solely within religious/ identity based laws, violence against women including that arising out of competitive mobilizations around caste, religious

and conflicting regional identities, have all underlined the need to understand women's issues within the larger context, including Article 14 of the Constitution. The need is often felt to recall the Constituent Assembly debates on individual and community based rights to move forward with respect for pluralist traditions, while also advancing the rights of women as citizens in their own right.

The issues raised by the women's movement have often had their roots in evolving critiques of the policies pursued by the state and the governments of the day and their direct as well as indirect fallout in shaping gender relations in a changing India. However, even as a coalition of national level women's organizations consistently responded to policy measures and pronouncements while also participating in debates on institution building with regard to addressing the subject of structural aspects of discrimination against women, engagement with official policy has drawn both uneven responses and critiques from within the movement. This has been supplemented by efforts by other groups to address gender concerns arising from the changing socio-economic context. In a country as diverse and socially divided as India, the articulation of political concerns, perhaps especially so when approached from a gender perspective, requires diverse platforms. These have to keep in focus the constitutional guarantees of equality with regard to caste, class, creed or sex and secularism. Equally, it requires recognition of the multiple locations from which pro women perspectives need to emerge to overcome narrow definitions which prevalent notions of feminist political practice may seek to impose.

Representation and images of gender roles/ portrayals and relations are outlined in different ways by the different social classes as well as those who claim or seek to represent them. It also needs to be recognized that in Parliamentary politics, where women are approached as part of the broader social classes, the ways in which connections between women and politics are played out during election time is a complex process which on the one hand determines how gender is framed, and simultaneously remains predicated on the contextual terrain within which vote bank politics is played out. While it would be a mistake to confine the larger interrogation of the links between women, politics and the state to the election fray,

the significance of the electoral process and parliamentary domain can by no means be undermined, since it remains one of the most significant platforms for the mass of people, men and women, to relate to the democratic process.

In this context, it may be worth noting that the 2014 elections showcased more women in election battles: as voters, candidates and as spokespersons in the media on behalf of the contending politico-ideological formations. This highlights the fact that despite the inequalities women suffer from, they are not always merely bystanders, watching from the side. While this paper was being finalized for publication, Delhi, the capital city, was again in the midst of a state election, where the contending rivals once again, claimed to provide good governance, with a special focus on the safety/ security of women in the capital city of Delhi. Of the two major contending political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party actually projected 'an empowered woman' as its Chief Ministerial candidate, to also claim that this would enable it to adopt policies which would empower other women under her leadership! These were statements being made with an eye on women's votes. While the assertion of the urban middle class was quite visible in this run-up, the crisis of rural India remained largely unaddressed, even as the corporate backing to the major political contender remained a point of discussion on the periphery. The media highlighted visible images of the urban middle class seeking to influence urban governance, based on a notion of minimal civic rights and 'clean' politics skirting issues of social conflict and contradictions, including within a highly differentiated middle class, especially in urban India. There is clearly a need to understand the primacy given to the middle class in this evolving discourse and its implications, both for the women's movement and for politics in general.

The Context of the Emergence of the New Middle Class

Of late discussion on the middle class has become animated and involved the media, political spokespersons and representatives of political parties. It needs to be recognized that till recently, this was not such a topical subject of historical research (B.B Misra, 1961).

Therefore before proceeding further, there is a need to understand the composition, nature and orientation of the middle class in India. It may be worth exploring both the nature of formation of the middle class in the present context as well as the analysis accompanying this process.

In a study titled *Tracking Growth of India's Middle Class*, conducted for the McKinsey Global Institute, Eric D. Beinhocker, Diana Farrell, and Adil S. Zainulbhai argued that 'over the next two decades, the country's middle class will grow from about 5 percent of the population to more than 40 percent and create the world's fifth-largest consumer market.' The focus of this study was on how the growth of the middle class in India offered a potential for 'high priority for most consumer goods businesses.' The McKinsey survey drew attention to 'the birth of a new middle class' due to growth patterns which had pulled millions of people out of poverty, especially in India's urban areas. Its observations also made clear the purpose of the interest in this new middle class: affluent India's share of national private consumption, it estimated, would 'increase from 7 percent today to 20 percent in 2025, which helps to explain the recent rush into the Indian market of luxury goods such as Louis Vuitton bags and Jimmy Choo shoes.'

India's rapid economic growth, they maintained, had set the stage for a fundamental change among the country's consumers. They projected that 'if India continues its recent growth, average household incomes will triple over the next two decades and it will become the world's fifth-largest consumer economy by 2025, up from twelfth now.' Pitching for the neo-liberal growth paradigm, the report argued that the 'same energy that has lifted hundreds of millions of Indians out of desperate poverty is creating a massive middle class, centered in the cities.' While observing that urbanization had not proceeded as quickly as it had in other Asian economies, it was estimated that given the rapid population growth this meant that in absolute terms the country's urban population would expand significantly, from 318 million today to 523 million in 2025. In the current growth paradigm this gave market watchers the confidence that 'along the way, spending patterns will shift significantly as discretionary purchases capture a majority of consumer spending.'

bringing it more close to developed economies. Clearly, the nearly 400 million Indian city dwellers—nearly 100 million people larger than the current population of the United States—were likely to belong to households with a comfortable standard of living. From the perspective of the companies, the sheer scale of this new urban middle class merited significant attention and to government investment in infrastructure and development—a claim contested by many, yet it recognized that for subsistence farmers in the north and east and for others with little education, the struggle would continue. Clearly, for India's educated urbanites, the future looks promising. Many of these households will make the jump not only out of poverty but also into the new and aspiring middle class.

Multi-nationals, it was emphasized, must innovate to deliver aspirational middle-class lifestyle to families on an Indian budget. The report ended by observing that 'for the world's businesses, India represents one of the largest consumer market opportunities of the next two decades. During the first millennium, merchants referred to India's glittering and dynamic market as the "bird of gold." That bird is preparing to take flight again.' (Beinhocker, E. Farrell, D and Zainulbhai, A., 2007).

These lengthy quotes and paraphrasing make clear the thrust of growth priorities, as identified by the World Bank, and should help us to contextualize discussions on the New Middle Class, which are being conducted in the backdrop of an increasingly marketized economy.

It is, of course, being argued that the given the size, diversity and uneven nature of the country's development, the situation in India is far more complex and challenging than what the McKinsey report argues. While this is also due to the persistence of historically perpetuated inequalities and social hierarchies, note should be taken of the following observations from an ILO report:

A political project which preaches economic liberalization combined with moral virtue is certain to create a climate of insecurity. 'There is an inherent tension between what some describe as 'middle class' virtue—prudence, abstinence, thrift, frugality, fidelity and self-discipline—and the praxis of economic liberalism—risk-taking, opportunism, selfishness and egotism. The result is

organized hypocrisy, with the poor and the near-poor being urged to behave 'responsibly, while entrepreneurs and those around them are urged to behave as risk-takers, able to hire and fire according to their risk-taking skills and 'brute luck', insured against personal 'downside risks'. ...Globalisation advances a process of privatization and individualization of opportunity and choice while the public sphere shrinks, thereby shrinking space and structural support for providing an enabling environment to make those choices for a mass of people.¹

The Middle Class in India: A Discursive Terrain

Clearly the era of globalization India has seen the emergence of a burgeoning middle class, with varying estimates on its size. This has led several scholars to engage with issues arising from these developments at the academic level. This scholarship has focused on the different levels and layers of the middle class, with regard to both conceptual analysis and engagement as well as more specifically its role, ideology and social composition.

Going beyond the economic, social and political definitions, Deshpande has tried to conceptualize the category of the middle class which continues to be constituted by and in mediation with existing structures and identities based on caste, language, religion and gender. Taking note of the middle class as a consumer class in the Indian context, he argues that 'if there is one class for whom the benefits of globalization seem to clearly outweigh the costs, it is the middle class, particularly its upper (managerial-professional) segment (Deshpande, S. 2003, p.150).' Referring to their 'disproportionate influence in ideological matters, he draws attention to the 'attractiveness of this class as a social location' and that 'the intermediate or middle classes have arguably been the most important non-polar classes (Deshpande, S. 2003, p. 127, Chapter VI).' There is a clear hint at the potential role the class can play.

It has, similarly been observed that, 'there is, in fact, a substantial

¹ Economic Security: For a Better World, ILO-Social Economic Security Programme, Geneva, 2004, p. xvii.

part of the Indian population—a minority, but still very large in absolute numbers—for whom India’s economic growth is working well, along with those who were already comparatively privileged.’ However, an exaggerated concentration on their lives, gives an unreal picture of the rosiness of what is happening to Indians in general. While there tends to be ‘fulsome coverage in the news media of the lifestyles of the fortunate and little notice of the concerns of the less fortunate.... the political support for tolerating—and defending—the present profligacy in catering to the relatively better off contrasts sharply with the fiscal alarm bells that are sounded whenever proposals for helping the poor, the hungry, the chronically unemployed come up’ (Sen, A, 7 January, 2012).

Meanwhile, others have pointed to the fact that the category of the middle-class is much broader than what is being generally seen since ‘the lens of consumption as the defining feature of the middle-class tends to reduce it to a flat income-group category ...’ (Jodhka, S., Prakash, A. December 2011).’ Jodhka and Prakash point to the need to understand the class analytically, in terms of its role in relation to the state, market and the civil society; the role it continues to play in articulating socio-economic and political interests of diverse communities. They argue that the middle-income groups ‘are located in all sectors of the economy—primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary (intellectual activities) and the quinary (highest levels of decision making in a society or economy). Within these segments, they are overwhelmingly located in the private, unorganized sector, albeit significant proportions are also located in the formal public and private sector. The formal sector employment, both public and private is merely estimated to be seven per cent of the total employment available in the economy (Jodhka, S., Prakash, A. December 2011, p. 53).’ Thus present day India, they argue, is ‘shaped by the contradictions emanating from an ideological commitment to market-led development on the one hand, which is inevitably biased against the asset-less and capability-less, and to the institutions of democracy, with the promise of equitable inclusion, on the other. In other words, the tension is between the economics of markets and the politics of democracy.’ Referring to economic policies directed towards a market-friendly regime, supported by

international and national capital, urban-based middle and upper middle classes and neo-liberal mandarins, they point out that the politics of democracy, is represented by the 'ever increasing assertion of the historically deprived social categories in the electoral and social domain due to their perceived as well as real marginalization from the development processes. The Indian middle class is placed quite centrally in this emerging contradictory scenario and it carries the burden of balancing them in the 'new India' (Jodhka, S., Prakash, A. December 2011, p. 53).' Observing that while an important feature of this class is 'its internal diversities of income, occupation, caste, community and region,' notwithstanding this diversity; the Indian middle-class has a "dominant section", which represents dominant communities of India, i.e. the upper-caste, urban and invariably Hindu. Thus while Indian middle classes are globally mobile, inhabit modern spaces and use the language of modernity, they also actively participate in articulations of identity politics of both the dominant "majorities" and of the "minorities". Further, unlike the Western context, 'the Indian middle class lacks autonomy. It remains dependent on patronage and perpetuates the patronage culture...' (Jodhka, S., Prakash, A. December 2011, p. 56).

Pointing to the differentiation within the middle class, Scrase & Scrase similarly note that 'in rapidly changing societies it may be useful to think about these groups as class fractions rather than as a single, unified class.' They maintain that the upper and lower ends of the middle classes cannot be conflated and themselves refer to their study as being based on people classified as the lower middle class, to further argue for the need to uncover 'the social and cultural impact of neoliberal reforms on the lives of the Indian middle classes in a particular time and place.' They disagree with Dipankar Gupta on his 'opinion of the middle class as 'shallow consumers' and 'misplaced modernizers'² Drawing attention to the need for caution in terms of overgeneralization and estimation of the middle class, they argue 'for the importance, indeed centrality, of a micro level analysis of the impact of neoliberal globalization as it affects ordinary, working people's lives—how it shapes their opinions, structures their actions,

² Gupta, D., 2011; Chapter 1, pp. 11-17.

and ultimately determines their nuanced, class based cultural and social reproduction. In other words, it is through understanding the multifarious impacts of neoliberal reforms on people's daily lives that we are better able to comprehend the macro, global neoliberal reform agenda itself—both its causes and consequences' (Scrase, R. Scrase, T. 2009 pp. 174-176 and Saavala, M. 2012).

Other studies have also pointed to how this most recent radical expansion of the urban process has brought with it incredible transformations of lifestyle. The 'quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. Urbanization, we may conclude, has played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses, at ever increasing geographical scales, but at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that have dispossessed the masses of any right to the city whatsoever'³

A similar argument in some ways is put forward by Fernandes who asserts, that the estimation of numbers 'rests on a slippage between a particular segment of the urban (metropolitan) middle class and the middle class in general, which is a much wider group that includes the rural middle class and urban middle class in small towns'. (Fernandes, L. 2006. P. xvii). To her the rise of the new middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization. This middle class is not 'new' in terms of its structural or social basis. Rather its newness refers to a process of production of a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalization. At the structural level, this group largely encompasses English speaking urban white collar segments of the middle class who are benefitting from new employment opportunities, particularly in private sector

³ Harvey, D. Volume 53, *New Left Review*, Sep-Oct., 2008.

employment. This emerging liberalizing or 'New' middle class, to Fernandes, is not identical with a generalized sociological description of the middle class. She argues for an in depth interpretative approach which marks a shift from an analysis of political to socioeconomic elites and for an examination of the political processes involved in the creation of new groups and identities that mediate consent to reform. Based on her observations with reference to her study in Mumbai and Maharashtra, she points to a much greater degree of differentiation both within and across various national contexts within the middle class in India, due to which the identity of the middle class continues to compete with other national political forces such as caste based movements and politics, and the middle class' sense of alienation which resulted in support to the BJP and Shiv Sena etc., Fernandes points to the consequence of intersections of caste and gender identity in a manner that 'the political significance of the new middle class lies in the tension between the emerging hegemonic identity of this group and the differentiation and disparities that characterize the social composition of the middle class (Fernandes, L. 2006. p. xxxviii).' She observes that the 'new middle class rests on a complex and often contradictory set of processes that began unfolding with India's push toward economic liberalization,' to move beyond a static conception of the class as a 'consumer group' to focus on the policies and politics of the group and pushes for a conceptual space to avoid a conflation between the hegemonic identity and the middle class in general. Fernandes argues for a more complex understanding of the relationship between the middle class and the state since 'the rising new middle class represents an important social force in contemporary India, one that has been shaping conflict and consent over economic policies of liberalization and processes of globalization. (Fernandes, L. 2006. p.224).' Her argument needs to be seen in comparison with other contentions with regard to the 'plebianization of the political field,' and Chatterjee's differentiating between civil society and political society (Chatterjee, P. , 1993). Fernandes concludes that the tension between the 'emerging middle class and the internal differentiation within the middle class will be an important force shaping politics in contemporary India. ... there is a sense of fragility inherent in the middle class that marks its

political role and socioeconomic position with a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability.’ Also, that ‘while the future of the new Indian middle class remains unpredictable, its imprint on contemporary Indian and its significance for an understanding of the dynamics of contemporary globalization have already been forged in enduring ways... (Fernandes L., 2006, p. xxix).’ The forging influence of the English language, especially in the years after liberalization, has been a central force in shaping politics at the top which has led to contra-assertions based on linguistic assertion as reflected in the marketized version of cultural articulation in regional television channels. But are these to be seen as ideological battles or do we need to develop another layer to understand the battle for diversity within the era of liberalization?

Clearly there is a need to also address some of these key questions: such as can we afford to assume a commitment to a democratic orientation in politics with regard to the new middle class. In the Indian context, there has been analysis of frameworks of governance emerging in this context and their implications for the politics of the women’s movement (Agnihotri, I., 2008). But the present is another moment. It requires analysis of specific interventions, movements and struggles.

This question also may have no one answer since differences abound within the middle class. These would be reflected in their experience, more than aspirations, which may be shared even as fortunes differ. There is a need to keep in mind Scrase and Scrase’s point that while support for reforms may stem from the belief that future benefits can accrue, this can also lead to frustration. This could be seen both in sequential terms with regard to time frames, as well as segments within the middle class.

A similar word of caution comes from another recent study focusing on the layers in a globalised society, which points to the fact that ‘the term middle class is slippery because it is relational: the middle is relative to what lies above and below. When the top or bottom layers move higher or lower, the bounds of the middle class will also change. This variability makes definitions of the middle class both time- and context-dependent...there cannot, therefore, be any

universal definition of the middle class.’ Krishna and Bajpai advance an asset based model to understand the formation of the middle class and the changes it undergo, with warning signals:

‘the former rapid increase of the urban middle class has slowed down. There are worrying indications that the share of the middle class in the rural population has become static. We also find evidence of fluidity and flux: many people who were in the rural middle class in 1993 were no longer in this class by 2005-not moving above but instead falling below, even as the economy was growing. Other indications added to these concerns,.....these data show that below the middle classes there is a sheer precipice. Lower status groups loom far below in each of these respects: education is at a far lower level; knowledge of English is minimal; media exposure is very limited; social capital is impoverished; and diverse health indicators are also much poorer for lower status groups. Their chances of climbing higher and becoming middle class must be assessed against these facts of their current existence. That is the place from where new entrants to the middle class will have to be raised. The means for effecting such a transformation are far from obvious⁴

The nature, formation and scale of the middle class, or the articulation of its aspirations may differ in a country as vast and diverse as India. These may also show varied patterns in terms of regional/ spatial location; eg., while studying its behavior in Delhi, which is closer to the seat of power, political considerations may be different, and yet circumscribed by their very location. Clearly, in much of this analysis, the category of class is not being developed to advance or undertake social analysis from a Marxist perspective. Rather it is being used as a sociological category, indicative of status, aspiration, lifestyle, and behavioral aspects, as is the effort on Deshpande’s part.

The interesting question then would be to see how far have gender concerns shaped or been shaped by these mobilizations, responses and articulations?

⁴ Krishna.A, Bajpai, D. EPW, Jan. 31, 2015 vol. 1, no. 5, pp. 69-77.

Focus on the Middle Class in the Absence of Class

The most striking question that comes to the mind from a Women's Studies location is, why at all are we having a discussion on class today— even if with reference to the middle class with respect to women— especially since when it has largely been missing as a conceptual tool in much of the writing and teaching in Women's Studies? Further, to explore why this is happening at a time when the notion of class and/ or its use as a category of social science analysis has been sought to be marginalized? In the broader academic setting, apart from a small group of labour historians, it would be passé to hold a discussion on the working class. The media in fact, has been quite taken up by the penchant for 'labour reforms' from a standpoint where the red carpet is being rolled out for FDI in even previously prohibited sectors. To focus on the capitalist class/ bourgeoisie would be seen to be reminiscent of some bygone Soviet era, unless the discussions were to be framed within concerns regarding obstacles to corporate growth, though it is commonplace for Chambers of Commerce and entrepreneurs, corporate business houses and industrial associations to showcase their concerns. Labour and the working class have been singled out for adverse publicity and their legitimate union activities reported with hostility, bordering on a 'criminalized' depiction.

Interestingly, even gender-based aspirations for equality have come to be largely framed with representation on boards and talk of the Glass Ceiling dominating discussions, circumscribed within very clear class determined categories. Similarly, discussions on the body and sexuality- which are fast becoming the predominant face of gender based women's activism in the era of a burgeoning market- seem to be largely caught up within specific class groupings. Working women, leave alone working class women, are low priority, as was obvious at the time of the now only too well known Indo-US diplomatic spat involving Devyani Khobragade and her spat with 'her' domestic help, where the issue of wages for domestic work and the need for legislative did not feature in the debate in any significant way.

There are close parallels with the trend to de-legitimize class as a

concept, as argued by Vivek Chibber with reference to the academic discourse where the post-structuralists/post-colonialists (PSPC) dominate (Chibber, V., 2008). Where the working people figure in the analysis, the discussion is within the current framework of 'social protection,' which actively desists from exploration of the structural roots of prevalent inequalities. In the era of identity politics, there is a privileging of categories of identity-often based on birth such as caste and gender- which are seen as legitimate in terms of modes of analysis, pushing into the background the objectives of egalitarianism and structural inequalities, very much on the lines of mainstream politics.

Without projecting these as polarities, it may be pointed out that writing from within the established domain of Women's Studies, in India, has paid scant attention to women as members of a class in recent years. Categories based on identities have, in the meantime, been developed to provide a stimulating context for social enquiry into age-old hierarchies, inequalities and prevalent exclusions and the 'intersectionality' of these with gender, to advance rigorous critiques of dominant as well as latent forms of social prejudice and linkages between power, privilege and norms that define both cultural frameworks. Discussions on contemporary Indian society foregrounding caste have been invigorating, providing a lens to understand everyday forms of oppression based on historically perpetuated divisions and the specific combination of identity and gendered based forms of oppression. Nevertheless, the overlap between caste and class as well as the points of non convergence have not been a major thrust of our analytical frames. While discussions on unpaid work/ housework and care economy have offered insights, only a few focused on these issues going beyond middle class locations.

Clearly, class is sought to be consigned to the dustbin of history with many choosing to obfuscate class distinctions and veer the discussion away from the fundamentals of political economy, development policies and the trajectory of growth. There is an attempt to develop 'critical perspectives' without addressing the structural roots of oppression and exploitation and the continuance of relations which inherently provide the context for various forms

of social discrimination and exclusion. These contexts also define the public domains within which multitudinous forms of gender oppression are entrenched and reconfigured with changing forms of social relations.

This absence is significant because it provides the basis for a shift of gaze from the structural roots of unequal social relations. Further, it also lays the ground for discussions on globalization—the latest *avatar* of imperialistic domination—in a way so as to present it as a merely descriptive term for the ‘present’ that we live in. The blurring of the links with pathways to capitalist development in a crisis ridden phase is used to conjure images of the collapse of borders of a global village, and the crossing of spatial boundaries along with an expansive notion of trans-nationality. Interestingly, this is accompanied by more entrenched forms of racializing, growing inequalities between nations and their people, more intrusive ways of monitoring / espionage across borders, leave alone the endless wars which are today being fought in ‘localized’ forms and locations, to deny people—especially those in West Asia—their right to live in peace within their homelands. The academic take on globalization, especially within Women’s Studies, frequently desists from any reference to imperialism (colonial now only refers to a bygone past!). This provides a benign face to it and offers a framework which is eminently suitable for the elite to project the public sphere as delinked to debates on political economy which also provides the context for right wing, sectarian politics. At best, globalization is referred to in Women’s Studies as being representative of immense technological possibilities that have opened up new information gateways. This is in contrast to the experience of the women’s movement which has identified the consequences of globalization on the lives of women in very explicit ways. This recognition in the 1990s opened up possibilities for joint activities between the mass organizations of women and sections of the ‘autonomous’ groups, including under the aegis of the World Social Forum.

Exploring the interconnections between the New Middle class and globalization, Rajgopal has drawn attention to the apparently modern forms of culture and consumerism and the links forged between production and power relations, including right wing

politics. He points to the presence of women and religious rituals within which women had a 'significant presence in the newly public and militarized religious right...' and the breaking down of 'barriers that had existed to market forces, making available a till then relatively restricted household and petty trade economy in religion open to national and global forces, with all the chaos and violence of such a momentous process.' The use of signs of religion and community have become far more noticeable in the public sphere than earlier and these have to be understood within the 'shadow of communalism and communalization that the uses of religious symbols have to be understood, with specific reference to the Hindu majority, as Rajgopal rightly observes (Rajgopal, A., 1999, p. 64). He argues that the high segmentation of the market covers up for an illusion of homogeneity, with the relationship between income and affordability being disrupted, hinting at developing fissures and tensions, as 'consumers in low income segments reach out for products advertised for higher income groups (Chibber, V., 2008, p. 78-79).' The middle class, he asserts, is both a form of 'self-identification' and hierarchically structured. The internal space of the middle class he argues, is an aspirational space straddling different classes, to include a vast spectrum of 'superhaves, have-somes, near-haves, and have-nots, where the have-somes are defined as India's "genuine" middle class in terms of values, aspirations and lifestyles...' (Chibber, V., 2008, p.92).' One is reminded of the marketization/commercialization that Sangari and Vaid had traced with respect to the subject of identity and the glorification of 'sati', hereby 'tradition' was being recast to allow for modern methods of accumulation and commodification.⁵

In the present context, women's work is increasingly being seen outside of class perspectives in a reified cultural context and as forms of cultural production. The discussion on sex work and surrogacy as work to an extent resonates this larger context, where structures on which relations of production are predicated are pushed into the background and highly gendered forms of labour are singled out for study as the emerging new forms and areas of women's work in role

⁵ Sangari, K. and Vaid, S., *EPW*, vol. xxvi, no. 17, 1997.

in production. The patriarchal underpinnings of women's work are clearly foregrounded. However, devoid of the earlier contextual frame of a critique of capital(ism), the evolving discussion on women's work has moved far away from the concerns which were highlighted in earlier socialist feminist debates with reference to the Sexual Division of Labour (SDL) and the social reproduction of capital. As in other spheres, the critique of patriarchy becomes central to the discourse and is often circumscribed by perceptions drawn from middle class locations, with no concern for the agenda of social transformation, except along the axis of gender. In view of this, it may be useful to ponder on whether, how far, and in what manner do these offer scope for interventions on behalf of working class women? Can studies on sex work and surrogacy—critical as they may be—provide perspectives for working class women to emerge as the critical axis for organizing women from strategic locations to confront globalization at the present juncture?

Middle Class, Gender and the Political Dilemma

It is also not surprising that from middle class locations, the discussion on women's rights is increasingly seen as being based on a gender divide, with an increased focus on violence, particularly sexual violence. The body, masculinity and mindsets, are beginning to occupy centrality in our analysis, outside of the larger context of mainstream development processes. This is contrary to the understanding arrived at by the authors of *Towards Equality*⁶ in 1974, who clearly stated that women's status and lives were intrinsically linked to development processes rather than be seen as vestiges of some form of inherent backwardness.

While the most iconic images of December 2012 immortalized both, the memory of the horrific death of Nirbhaya and the equally energizing protests against it, did it change the situation on the ground, be it with regard to the state, the politics, the judiciary, the police or, the society at large? The sensational responses to crime and violence have failed to broaden the frames of analysis and the

⁶ *Towards Equality*, Dept. of Social Welfare, GOI, 1975, Delhi.

singular focus on sexual violence, borders on voyeurism allowing for a glassing over the brutal force of oppression that a marketized & economy imposes on women. Consider for example a media release by AIDWA, the largest women's organization in India, in January 2014 titled: Who Killed Yuma Sherpa? Yuma Sherpa, incidentally died in January 2014, while undergoing treatment for egg donation. The statement highlighted an issue long skirted which encapsulates new forms of patriarchy inflicted on women in the name of new technologies working in tandem with an international market. From our location in March 2014, it may be pertinent to pose another image, equally entrenched in gender roles and stereotypes, which poses sharp questions to us with regard to development processes and policies and ask why it fails to catch the public eye in discussions with regard to safety, dignity and equality?

Should we not ask why Nirbhaya's death attracts the response it did, while Yuma Sherpa's family grieves alone in her death? Why is it that Nirbhaya's death in 2012 becomes etched in public memory, compelling the Government to announce a scheme for rehabilitation of victims of rape and sexual assault at the central level in the name of the Nirbhaya Fund, while the loss of life in the case of Sherpa remains unrecognized? The concern here is not with individual issues/experiences or responses to these. Nor should we be posing the death of one over the other as one of competing claims with respect to public memory. But it is important to note that Yuma Sherpa's death comes in the context of high growth, combined with low employment/growing unemployment for women, where apparently 'better off' middle class families are forced to rely on more than one incomes to meet the rising cost of living. First to come were the adverse circumstances in which women took to night work, going beyond the earlier workforce in telephone exchanges etc. The BPOs changed much of that. Night work became 'legitimate' even as young women staying out remained socially unacceptable and safety on the streets remains an issue⁷. Further, in a discourse where globalization rides high on the promise of greater choice, women hardly have the

⁷ Open Letter to the Delhi Chief Minister, People's Democracy, January 21, 2008.

right to 'choose' the conditions, location or terms of their work.⁸ In this context, the retrogressive views within which women continue to be seen has emerged as a critical axis of tension faced by women in the middle class. This has been highlighted in recent years by the visual media in India with regard to the misogynist comments being made by eminent political personalities cutting across a wide spectrum of the political canvas.

'Doing Gender' in the Present Context

It may be premature to pose the question whether women in and from the middle class have acquired the capacity and skill to negotiate rights within the processes of decision making, which continue to be dominated by power brokers acting on behalf of the corporates and the elite at this stage. In the past, when middle class women have hit the streets outside the aegis of the organized women's movement in India, the issues that have galvanized them have fallen strictly within the framework of the conservative Rightist Hindu majoritarian perspectives: Gorakhsa Andolan in the mid 1960s; the identity centred debates of the 1980s; the anti Mandal agitation in the 1990s; the Babri Masjid –Ramjanmabhoomi dispute; and the post -Godhra violence perpetrated in Gujarat in 2002. More recently, such agency on the part of select women has also been seen on behalf of khap-diktats. While these are all examples from the majority community, there is enough evidence of attempts at mobilization of women from the Islamic community, be it under the banner of the Dukhtaran e Millat or other lesser known platforms. Given the context of identity politics examples may be located for other minorities, even if these may not have featured prominently in the public domain.

In other words, there is a critical need to examine mobilizations of middle class women outside women's movement platforms. There is a need to interrogate the politics underlying these mobilizations going beyond the 'gender' lens, to look at what kind of political action would the middle classes call their own? This is not an entirely

⁸ Report on Conditions of Work, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) 2007, New Delhi.

new proposition. The work of Sangari and Vaid, Dalmia, Sarkar and Butalia and numerous others has focused on the linkages between gender and identity to analyse the contingent politics (Sangari and Vaid, 1989 and T. Sarkar and U. Butalia, 1996). But, as stated earlier, often in this analysis the categories foregrounded are those of identity based politics and class centred analysis has often been muted.

The fact is that these categories emerge from the linkages and the enunciation of frames within which gender is being seen in the larger domain of politics. This also shapes mainstream responses to the gender question as it is unfolding. It is interesting that while the first set of 'feminists' in the 1970s in India emerged from what can be seen as the most creative phase of tension between Marxist/left perceptions and feminist politics, the generation born in the era of globalization has inherited the critique of the left without imbibing the same concerns. It is important to note this at a time when the globalization paradigm is calling the shots. In this context emerging critiques of the Nehruvian paradigm, combined with an ambivalent approach to globalization in an apparently timeless seam, may feed into more trenchant critiques of the socialist aspirations which were inherent to women's activism since the 1970s. The answers to the challenges posed by the shifting contours on the ground cannot be sought in isolation from the search for building alternative modes of action. The search for critical theoretical perspectives has to be predicated on critiques of the dominant frameworks of development.

In fact the question of gender and the middle class remains intrinsically linked to the relationship between globalization, the possibilities of democratic politics and the middle class. Further, it is today deeply embedded within responses to questions of communalism and fundamentalism, as also the politics of competitive claims based on identities, which in a sense determine responses to what may be seen as 'women's issues.'

There is a need to study the linkages between the politics of gender, caste, religion and other identities to see how these are shaped by the larger discourse of contending classes vis a vis the State, within the given contours of monopoly capitalism. It is these tensions inherent in Indian politics, which also determine the formation and responses of the middle class, which remains largely Hindu and upper caste,

a point made in a recent study. In an on-going study, an attempt has been made to explore the links between the middle class and the politics underlying the shaping of the Indian capitalist class through the lens of personal laws, with specific reference to the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) and how it has effectively served to provide a basis for the formation of a middle class which remains largely upper caste and Hindu in its origins. (Dasgupta, C. Oct., 2013, pp. 73-75.)

The emergence of Hindutva as a dominant political ideology, the collapse of the Congress, the consensus around globalization and the competitive fundamentalisms have to be understood within these larger shifts in the frames within which politics in India is sought to be played out today. This includes the platform of the AAP which hit the political stands in Delhi in 2013 and the national electoral platform in 2014. To isolate gender from these larger political frames would disarm the women's movement and its capacity to face the challenges in its objective of advancing the rights of women from their multiple locations, embedded within the larger structures of social inequalities.

Even as the numerical strength of middle class women may be rising, within their own class they would still represent a distinctly dwindling lot given the predilection of the middle and upper segments of Indian society to adopt sex selective pre-birth elimination (John, M., UN Women, 2014). Similarly just as there is no one marker of the orientation of the middle class(es), there is no one identifiable response from the middle class on gender, unless we wish to use the visual images of the post December 2012 incident of the rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi as being symbolic of a commitment to women's equality. This may well be an unsustainable assumption. In fact, if at all, it may suffice to proclaim a desire and commitment for safety on the streets for both women and men, at a time when all matter of crimes abound in the fast growing urban spaces.

The Politics of the Possible

In other words while a focus on the middle class is necessary, not to interrogate the politics of the middle class would represent a

foreclosure in terms of the possibilities and the obstacles to these. Clearly, the class is itself exploring options in the present context. The assertions visible in cities like Delhi between 2012 and 2015 have pointed to the potential of middle class political engagement and dispelled the pall of gloom that engulfed the urban middle class and the cynicism around politics over the last decade and more. It is important that we, coming from the very same class, engage with these emerging perspectives, even as we may differ on concrete responses. There is a need to bring into focus the issues that are sought to be brought centre stage, even as we examine what it refrains from drawing attention to. Clearly, there are several complexities with regard to social inequalities, but social analysis has to go beyond political rhetoric to ask relevant questions. This is also equally necessary from the perspective of the women's movement, which has seen long years of tension between mass based left oriented perspectives and bourgeois feminist perspectives, which sometimes coalesced with notions of autonomy, to draw upon 'new left' imaginings of another kind of free world. It is the experience of fighting the combined strength of fundamentalism and neo-liberal onslaughts which exacerbated poverty and violence, which made many—on different sides—seek common ground to enhance joint struggles to advance women's rights. For this to have a continued place in the politics of the movement, Women's Studies analysis has to learn to read more between the lines, both in political manifestos and in slogans emerging from women's activism. It has to explore linkages between different domains and ideological influences and interrogate the obfuscation and ambivalences on critical issues. In the absence of this political engagement, Women's Studies and the women's movement may well lose the edge they have shown through interventions over the last several decades. As Chibber notes, in the past it has taken deep and enduring mass upheavals for a significant stratum of middle class intellectuals to turn towards anti-capitalist ideas and class theorizing (Chibber, V., 2008, p. 49).⁷ Marx himself observed that historically, the petite bourgeoisie loses out in the course of economic development and growth of monopoly capitalism. Subsequently it has been illustrated that the frustrations of the class act as a breeding ground for fascist tendencies (Reich, W., 2013).

The real issue here is that on almost all issues facing women in India there have been contending perspectives and frameworks to approach gender within policy. The antecedents of these can be traced back to ideological debates of earlier times. Today, on the one hand the conservative forces leaning on the Right wish to resist the changes coming as well as sought to be brought in. Further, women's organizations linked to the right have become more active over the last two decades. These forces have also launched many new women faces from their political platform in these years, after the implementation of the 73rd-74th amendments. The Left, while standing up for advancing the struggle for women's rights, has shown gaps in implementation of policies as well as envisioning concrete measures on the ground beyond a point. Despite the fact that the large mass based women's organizations on the left were in the forefront of the struggle during the last three decades, the scenario has changed considerably post 2012. The visible section of the autonomous women's movement too stands dispersed and NGOised. Many in the movement today steer away from ideological issues, often articulating a stance of being equiv-distance in political terms to claim a re-defined 'autonomy.'

Today there is a struggle to erase the liberal middle ground that would be required for successful opening up of space for a bolder articulation of the women's rights' agenda. The new players on the political scene are still to crystallize their views. This election and the political scenario as it has taken shape in the summer of 2014, in effect signals the dawn of the most challenging times for the women's movement in India in terms of rising aspirations and unmet expectations.

As the state and government led platforms seek to edge out the liberal discourse, several issues stare us in the face in the movement. Can a more corporate-led growth model deliver India from the shackles of colonialism to break out of its feudal monopolistic pattern towards more democratic governance and development? What is the prescribed format for women's participation in the public sphere in this model of growth? Will it be driven by the market –driven paradigm as spelt out in the vision of international capital waiting to capture the consumer market? How will the governments of the day

reconcile the changing aspirations of the middle class woman with the retrogressive views that politicians across the broad spectrum of bourgeois politics have displayed?

The strength of the women's movement has come from its ability to be multi-centric, even as it has spelt out its demands from pan Indian platforms, and also the capacity to throw up a leadership at the local, state and regional levels which is able to negotiate with other social movements in the evolving dialogue on issues within the broad framework of a secular democratic programmatic alliance. If the challenge of immense hostility to the movement has to be met, it has to strengthen this process of the search for space within the emerging political formations along with developing its ability to articulate the voices of the most marginalized sections of women in India. To this end, it has to take head on the challenge of bridging the deepening gulf between people, classes and communities in Indian society. This is a political challenge and the women's movement's ability to surmount obstacles on the way will lie in its ability to negotiate women's rights along the axis of a broad philosophy of egalitarianism, if not socialism. This alone will enable it to challenge processes of decision making, so as to improve the real life conditions of the women at large, be they residing in rural or urban India. Further, it will have to find its moorings and draw upon intellectual traditions from within Indian contexts, rather than locate its arguments solely in theories and frameworks emerging largely from other locations whose socio-economic contexts have vastly differed from ours. Above all, it will have to speak in the language and vocabulary of the people to make its objectives comprehensible to the vast masses of Indian women, who have often stood up in its defense on the basis of a primary identification with a gender based agenda. At the same time our academic analysis has to inculcate greater sensitivity to the experiences and aspirations of the vast majority of the Indian people, a fact often not sufficiently emphasized by those leaning towards the objectives prioritized by 'third wave feminism.' It is this broad social matrix which holds out both potential and pitfalls with regard to the politics of the middle class and the immense possibilities that it throws up in the present context.

The point being made here is that just as the middle class is

increasingly becoming more differentiated, the response of the society reflects the contradictory socio-political locations from which rights are being negotiated. This poses major challenges for the women's movement, to deal with which it needs to move beyond the complacency of applying the lens of gender to advance the rights for women on the ground. There is an urgent need to negotiate greater leverage for democratic politics to ensure that the political space remains open to emancipatory agendas. It is in this background that there is a need to understand the significance of the interventions made by the organized women's movement in contemporary India, to continuously shift the balance in favour of democratic politics, while also aligning itself with forces intervening on behalf of a secular democratic envisioning of Indian polity. That the 'New' Middle Class will always stand up on behalf of women cannot, however, be taken for granted.

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