Reorganisation of Desire

Cultural Lives of Young Women in Globalising India

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Discussions about violence and safety dominate public discourse about women in 21st century India. In urban spaces, this discourse appears to have specific characteristics—such as the focus on young women's occupation of globalised workplaces, their clothing, and their movements in the city. Drawing on recent research conducted in Bengaluru, this paper argues that the links between women and social transformation are being obscured by the intensified concern with safety, and suggests that redescribing women's experience may throw up a new set of issues with which feminist scholarship might productively engage.

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A heightened awareness about the violence of both rural and urban spaces and the need for "safety" is a key feature of discussions about women in 21st century India. The discourse of harassment is central to a renewed sense of victimhood which leads feminist groups and policymakers alike to propose ever more elaborate modes of protection for women. The opening up of opportunities in urban spaces for women and men in the post-liberalisation period cut across the class–caste spectrum, but this also seems to expand the opportunities for violent gendered interaction prompted by the idea of the "new woman" unfettered by restrictions on her mobility or her clothing. The concern with violence and safety appears to have become the dominant response to neoliberal globalisation, even as the commodity fantasies of late capitalism fuel women's experimentation with how they look and behave. However, in the clamour for safety heard in public discourse, suggests this paper, we might lose sight of how women and social transformation are being linked together, and how desire is being reorganised.

We attempt to articulate some of these questions through our recent research done in Bengaluru city in which women drawn from the worlds of higher education, work (information technology (IT), information technology-enabled services (ITES), garment factories, municipal cleaners/*poura karmikas*) and public involvement (non-governmental organisations—NGOs, political parties, trade unions)—were interviewed.[1] The sectors were decided on given the specific nature of "women in public" in Bengaluru city. Our aim was not to collect new enumerable information but to offer an interpretation of what the women were saying. By redescribing the experience of young women in urban space, we attempt to track cultural transformation in the last two decades. We want to see how the relationship between gender and culture is changing, and to speculate on how working against conventional descriptions of that change might produce a new set of issues for us to examine. Our study focused on young women because of the conjunctural relationship of gender and culture in India, and in South Asia more generally, and because—following on this conjunctural relationship—they are positioned at the cusp of the transformations that are underway (Niranjana 2010). The study was taken up at a time when figures for demographic change in India suggest that 65% of the population is 35 years old or under, and the average age of an Indian in 2020 is expected to be 29. Thus every third person in an Indian city today is a youth (Acharya et al 2008; D'Souza et al 2010; UNFPA 2014).

In the prevalent discourse of globality, economic liberalisation is equated with "freedom" from earlier affiliations and normative structures (Mani 2008). The "new woman" featuring in the media is characterised by "choice"—she is someone who has chosen a particular line of work, and a particular mode of having relationships. We see the unbearable sameness of desire in the discourse of globality, with the injunction to young women being to throw off the veil, pour on the lycra, splash on the lipstick. In this new democracy of glamour (Mulvey 2003) which girdles the globe, the structure of aspiration for young women—tied as it is to various forms of consumption—seems all too familiar. The discourse of globality also appears to tie young women across caste and class to the democracy of glamour on the one hand, and to the safety/violence concern on the other. Both these questions, we suggest, are in turn intimately connected to the culture question.

The Culture Question

As we have argued elsewhere, women occupy a central position in debates about culture in Asia as well as much of the non-Western world (Niranjana 2007). Culture as a mark of difference as well as superiority, as evidenced in certain kinds of nationalist arguments; the association of gender, or more specifically the category "women," with culture rather than nature as in the West (John 1998); the normativisation of "woman" in representations of Indian culture (Sangari and Vaid 1989; Chakravarti 1989)—all this helps us understand the prehistory of who, and what, women are in our contemporary globalising moment (Niranjana 2015).[2]

What makes it harder to understand the eruptions around women is the fact that the language of feminism has entered mainstream discussions, providing ready-made reference points for state initiatives as well as for the media. The mainstreaming has certain powerful effects: the culture question is removed once again from the ambit of our modernity, this time via gender. So the intersection culture-gender that causes what we have called eruptions then takes on predictable shapes, revealing caste and religion in particular as the obstacles to development. Unable or unwilling to tackle the culture question head on, feminism may well shrink into a singular response to sexual violence, a phenomenon which remains unexplained in common sense in a rapidly transforming world, unexplained also because it is often framed within older forms of orientalism (Pidd 2012).

Sexual violence is clearly one phenomenon that presents itself as translatable across contexts, thus inviting the singular and universal response which is now becoming familiar. As feminists, we have been taken aback in the last few years by how the task of social transformation was being assigned in popular discourse to the forces of globalisation. The key targets of such transformation are young urban women, and as such they are also attracting the anger of right-wing groups who present themselves as the custodians of Indian culture. So we framed our research project to inquire into the factors that placed young women in the city "at risk" in relation to the effects of globalisation, and into how exactly young women get positioned within the complex relationship between the liberalisation discourse and the invocation of culture.

Does the discourse of globality interpellate all women in the same way across class-caste-religion? Does the space of the city, which is supposed to underplay these distinctions, stimulate this process of flattening desire in the name of new opportunities? What is the promise of the 21st century Indian city for the recent migrant, and how is it played out/realised across class–caste? How does the young woman whose family is "from the city" relate differently to it? These are some of the questions we took to the framing of our interviews. Although "culture" is not always named as such in all our conversations, the "culture wars"—framed through issues of caste, community, gender identity, sexuality, risk/consent/agency—are never far from the surface, and their significance for thinking about gender cannot be overlooked.

Why Bengaluru

We looked at women in Bengaluru for this study because of the different ways in which they are a prominent feature of the urban landscape: (a) high employment of women in two key sectors—in the IT (close to 4,00,000 out of a total of 9,00,000 in IT) and garment industries (also close to 4,00,000) since 1991, and the consequent concerns that emerged around these practices. Although only 20% of eligible females, the visibility of working women in Bengaluru is striking;[3] (b) the liminal location of Bengaluru, neither a metropolis nor a small town—although some people may call it a metro-in-waiting (Nair 2005)—but drawing in migrants from outskirts and from afar, its urbanising process enmeshed in the vast networks of globalisation; (c) the long history of women's activism that Bengaluru has witnessed since the 1970s, whether in the form of autonomous women's groups or NGOs, that has ensured the prominence of women's issues in the public sphere; (d) forms of activism in the last few years around young women and culture, such as the Pink Chaddi internet campaign after the Mangalore pub attack in 2009, and the Fearless Karnataka campaign started after the 2009 attacks on half a dozen young women in Bengaluru ostensibly for speaking English, wearing Western clothes and smoking on the street.

While the majority of our interviewees were those who identified as women, we also spoke to three people who identify themselves as transgender, and one person who identifies as inter-gender/gender queer.[4] These latter conversations helped us denaturalise the common sense of gender difference and gender relations, and made us question some of our assumptions about the gendering of childhood, family, urban life, education and work.[5] We retain the term "woman" as a general description, though, both because of the feminist histories it belongs to, and because in this project, *difference* emerges strongly and in a striated fashion (not just as gender difference) through the narratives and articulations of our interlocutors, who speak from varied locations. This paper will first look at three aspects of female lives—girlhood, work, and

self-identification, and end with a section on how our research challenges the public–private binary currently so prevalent in discussions about women.

Becoming-woman

What does it mean to become a woman at this historical juncture in the Indian city? We spoke to young women who had grown up in the 1980s and 1990s, to see how they understand their own histories of gendering. While we are appreciative of the painstaking work that has gone into a policy document like the *Status of Women Report* of 2015 which tried to address the many contemporary forms of discrimination against girls and women (High Level Committee on the Status of Women 2015), we realise that the very nature of the report's format and the structure of its address tend to displace the girl child as the subject of the experience of gendering. By reconstructing that experience through the memory of the adult interviewee, we hope to contribute to the re-centring of her experience as a way of understanding and dealing with how the processes of differentiation and discrimination work.

Are families still the central site at which gendering occurs? Does gender preference still operate in the same way within families? How do young women today remember growing up as girls? How have they experienced their gendering in an age in which the status of the girl child is a governmental marker of the country's development, and a signifier of its readiness for globalisation? Often the first response of those we asked about their experience of growing up—whether college students, ITES employees or NGO activists—was to refer to the idea of discrimination, clearly indicative of the fact that the discourse of gender difference is central to the prevailing understanding of what it means to be female in India. As Deepti, an IT employee said: "Compared to anyone else, I had a very good childhood. No problems with girl child education…" Surya, an 18-year-old student doing her BA, says: "I didn't face the problems that many women faced growing up….In my case gender hasn't been an issue."[6] When we asked about how she dressed while going out or whether she thought about safety in public spaces, she said, "These things just happened, no one ever came to me and told me this is what you have to do. Automatically I started being careful about wearing really short dresses out. It's not about morals. You just generally learn that it's not safe to wear this and this." She did not hear this from her parents but "generally learned" it.

In Surya's liberal childhood there is no heightened consciousness of gender difference, and no memory of an authority that shaped her practices as a girl and a young woman. She appears to distinguish a "personal" understanding of herself as a woman from a "social" understanding of what women experience. We are compelled to ask: what is it about the moment of history that we're living in that allows a young woman of a particular class to grow up without a heightened alertness to her gender? Does the transition from school to college (university) change the girl's awareness of and engagement with public space? How does the nature of gendering change as a result of this engagement?[7]

A key aspect of consciousness of gender had to do with caste position, as we found in our interviews. This was not always explicitly discussed, although some, like Ramakka, an activist and NGO employee, did foreground it. Speaking about puberty, she says: "In my community we don't have the system of segregating women who have menses. When I first got it my mother cried and there was a puja, but apart from that one time there was no separate eating, separate vessels, nothing, and my house didn't have puja room and all, just three pictures. There were no such restrictions like that in our houses. But now with development more of our people are imitating upper castes. We [used to be] free."

Unlike in dominant-caste households, menstruation is not imagined here as polluting, so the growing girl is not confined to a separate space during her period. However, she was very aware of growing up as a Dalit girl: "When you're small your experience of caste is different as a girl; second, my name, Ramakka, is different and odd; then my dark colour. These three things have always made me vulnerable, and people took it for granted that they could abuse me." Her father loved girl children and her brother was the one who got the beatings. Her being a girl did nothing to hinder her education, she was sent to a private school and her father made every effort to ensure that she did well and moved on to college. Although Ramakka went to a private school, being the only Dalit in her class meant that she was constantly humiliated by the other children, who did not want to sit next to her or play with her. But being a brilliant student eased her path somewhat. She was the first girl in her family to complete 12th grade and the first person in her family to get a college degree. Thus it was not her family but her caste position that made life as a girl difficult for her. All her narratives of discrimination (she names that experience as a *bhayankara avamaana*, a fierce and terrible humiliation) feature the world outside the family: upper caste neighbours who would not let her watch TV from an open window, and beat and pushed her when she continued to watch, schoolmates who made fun of her for eating *ragi mudde*, temples that did not allow her entry. Her memories of being a girl are tied to this distinction between her family life and life in the outside world.

Nutan, a trans-woman who spoke to us about her struggle to define and defend her identity, mentioned the disconnect between feeling like a woman and what she was made to perform in public—forced to wear men's clothing and behave like a man. "I was not able to maintain myself," she says. This inability forced her to leave her childhood home, where her parents had accepted her desire to change her gender, and inhabit the difficult public world as a *hijra* in Bengaluru, the constant subject of persecution by the police. Nutan's acts of migration, change of clothing, negotiation with classmates, and her family relationships bring to light the techniques and daily negotiations involved in the process of gendering. The standard narrative of "women" who grow up shackled by the norms of girlhood into which they are socialised, and the employment of this linear narrative to explain gender

discrimination and violence against women, are disturbed considerably by these accounts of trans-people's "experience."

Work

Bengaluru's main industry before the 1950s was textile production, but after independence in 1947 the city housed several large public sector industries and their ancillaries, employing more than 1,10,000 workers in the 1960s and more than 3,00,000 by the 1980s (Nair 2005). Today, the public sector units are gradually being dismantled. From the 1990s, coinciding with economic reforms, Bengaluru became home to a still-growing IT industry. Although the textile mills are now gone, with only a few powerlooms remaining in the Chikpet/Cottonpet area (Nair 2015), the ready-made garment industry has emerged as the biggest employer of female labour.[8]

As an activist puts it, "Typically between 18–25 years old, Karnataka's women garment workers are minimally skilled and belong to socio-economically disadvantaged families in villages and small towns, who share overcrowded accommodation in Bengaluru. They stitch while standing or sitting upright for around nine hours a day with poor lighting and ventilation, and minimal breaks for using the bathroom and meals; they often suffer from backaches, respiratory ailments and itching." They sew "nearly 150 pieces an hour, and make up for any shortfall in daily targets without overtime pay, even if pregnant or unwell. If they don't meet their quotas, they face deductions from their wages and, sometimes, lose their jobs. Wages are currently around 252 rupees" (Achanta 2015).

Here we focus on two of our interviews which locate women's labour in the space of the garment factory and the space of the call centre. We juxtapose these two spaces in relation to how they are experienced by the women who occupy them, pointing out the strong similarities that are covered over by differing vocabulary. In this our study departs from the preoccupations of recent ethnographies of middle-class working women. While these contribute to the understanding of women's labour in the 21st century, their focus does not often take into account the trajectories of different kinds of female labour that coexist along with white collar work, or the parallel nature of working conditions. The invisibility of non-middle class female labour in conditions of globalisation skews the argument in accordance with the flattening of desire that we mentioned earlier.

Placed side by side, our two interviews bring out the stark differences between the positions of the garment factory worker and the IT worker under globalisation. While the factory worker, Priya, discusses sexual harassment and the dangers of night travel as aspects of factory work that the industry disregards, Sheela—the techie—insists that the night shift is not inherently dangerous for the call centre worker and that the responsibility is largely of the employee's, to ensure she stays alert while commuting and takes all the steps necessary to ensure her safety. The factory worker, although in the new globalised economy, demands that her employer and the state provide the necessary safeguards; the techie believes the individual worker should take care of herself, albeit within the ambit of the facilities provided by the employer.

Sheela uses the phrase "work culture" to describe her office environment, whereas Priya never refers to the garment factory as possessing a "work culture" (Vasavi 2008).[9] While both women bring up the idea of culture, they place it in very different contexts. For Priya, culture is something related to the worker's family, which assigns her a role as wife and mother. Even if she wanted to work a night shift, the husband and mother-in-law would raise objections. Sheela, on the other hand, does not refer to "culture" in relation to the family at all but only in the context of the workplace. For her, the BPO itself, and the conditions of work in it, produce a "culture" that shapes people's lives: "Your work culture, your surroundings, make you do things." It seems to be otherwise in the garment factory. Priya, who is a union worker, talks about how in the union they "knew the workers' culture in the factory" because of having worked there themselves, and this was how they gained their confidence. "Workers' culture" refers to what the garment workers bring with them into the workplace, whereas "work culture" in the IT sector is created by the conditions of work.

The question of time also features in a strangely mirrored form in the two narratives. Priya mentions how the women who stay back to meet their "production targets" are not paid overtime, while Sheela speaks of the flexibility of timings and how only "deliverables" matter, not the hours that you put in. Notice the uncanny closeness of these two terms, "production targets" and "deliverables," and at the same time their distance from each other in how they are described: one as the forced requirement of time spent in the factory, the other in terms of choice, flexibility and freedom from the constraints of time. For Sheela, the tyranny of time exists only in hard-core BPO/call centre work, in relation to which she describes in detail the time given for breaks and how she cannot leave her desk for even a few minutes outside of these (Mukherjee 2008).[10]

The terms "culture" and "work culture" also feature in what the interviewees say about sexuality. While factory workers are seen as either sexually oppressed, or acting according to the characteristics of the "social strata" they belong to (involving lack of education or a rural origin—"they have come straight from the fields into the factory") when they engage in sex for favours, call centre workers are seen as having left behind the social circumstances they belonged to, and "exposed" to a world of freedom and opposite-sex relationships, where because of their low level of knowledge about sexual health they engage in "risky behaviour." Many ITES companies now include HIV testing and counselling at the hiring stage, as their response to the public perception that the call centre is a "high risk" space. Garment workers, on the other hand, lead lives that are not part of the field of visibility of globalised work that includes the techie, and thus there are no workplace practices that pay attention to their sexual health. So while the techie has a work culture, a lifestyle and a personality extending into the life of the city, the garment worker is usually a number to be counted in productivity projections. The garment worker is

invisible, for example, in all the anxious discussions about public safety for women that have taken place in Bengaluru in the last few years.

The figures of our two women reveal a specific set of enmeshings of culture and economy at the present moment. Both workplaces come into being through the transactions between the transnational and the national. The call centre worker seems to embody this transaction with the transnational, and is seen therefore as simultaneously "Indian" yet foreign; while the factory worker is part of the underbelly of globalisation, that part of the transnational transaction that is never seen unless there is the kind of disaster like the one that occurred in 2013 in a Bangladesh garment factory, killing over a thousand people (Department of International Development, United Kingdom 2014).[11]

The enormous amount of public attention paid to the "privatized" world of the call centre and to the "private" lives and acts of its employees (their sex lives, their marriages, their consumption practices and leisure activities) contributes to the generation of a "private" sphere that becomes a "public" concern. With the factory worker, however, we see a public interest situated almost entirely within the framework of labour laws and referring mostly to work conditions within the factory. Any kind of "cultural" concern for the factory worker is either relegated to the realm of the private where it is dealt with by family, or the realm of the state, where it is dealt with through legal-governmental measures. The frenzy around the "techie," on the other hand, cannot be relegated to the domain of the state, and thus has to be staged over and over again as part of the *cultural* conditions of our contemporary.

Self-identification

Does globalisation change the routes by which young women engage in processes of self-identification? Our focus was on the intersections of gender, sexuality, caste and religion (in our study, class was strongly correlated with caste). Earlier work from the 1990s has pointed out the ways in which "gender" (understood as pertaining to women) had become absorbed into the vocabulary of Indian modernity while caste and religious identity had been relegated to the sphere of the non-modern, the realm of "tradition," representing obstacles to the modernisation of the nation (Tharu and Niranjana 1996). Today, under 21st century globalisation, gender as well as sexuality—and sexual violence as we pointed out above—have become "global" terms through the same process that "localises" caste and religion. Needless to say, the latter have been at the heart of severe conflicts in the public domain over the many decades since independence in 1947, and continue to feature prominently in recast ways in the early 21st century. Progressive institutions like the National Law School in Bengaluru have institutional policies that enshrine gender equality and sensitivity to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) issues, but disavow caste-class-religion even as discussion topics. As one law student, Ratna, told us:

> Why talking about LGBT rights is easier than talking about caste is because the way the Dalit movement or anti-caste movement is structured, you have to call out your upper caste background, you can't talk about it without acknowledging that. Whereas if you're talking about LGBT rights, no one is going to say 'Why're you heterosexual?' so it's really much easier.

Here she was referring to the obligatory acknowledgement of privilege, background and economic status of the speaker in discussions of caste and religion in India. The claims that are being made in the name of minority castes and religions are being made vis-à-vis this privilege. And while being a man or being a heterosexual is naturalised as a biological aspect of the self, caste and religion are read as purely social aspects of the same self and hence treated as potentially divisive. We see a distinction operating between caste and religion as systems in operation outside the institution and as systems informing daily practices within it. That is, what can be easily spoken about as "discrimination" in the outside world creates discomfort when brought too close to home, whether in relation to the institution or the students.

In the new economy, exemplified by the IT companies in our study, we learn that although caste identities or religious difference do not seem to matter in the workplace, "diversity" is dealt with at the company level by having celebrations for Diwali, Ramzan and Christmas. However, employees routinely get memos about gender and sexual orientation and are made to attend training programmes that sensitise them to these questions. In an interesting shift, though, language and region are beginning to matter more in terms of workplace identities. In the global workplace, recruitment and promotion, and even interpersonal relationships seem to hinge on linguistic and regional identity. How language and region intersect with caste and religion is something that bears further exploration.

Those interviewees who were themselves "lower caste" were obviously more sensitive to everyday practices of caste discrimination and how they were changing in globalising Bengaluru. In the early 1990s, the area where Ramakka lived began to change due to "development" (Ramakka's term), and she identifies a practice she calls *modern untouchability* which took shape while she was growing up.

> What I mean by modern untouchability is that we have such a sense of inferiority that our body behaves in a certain way when they come near, we bend slightly, we make space for them [dominant caste people] and put them first as if they're something great. Our people might be speaking on the phone, holding a more expensive phone than those upper caste people, but when one of them comes near, without our knowledge our body language changes, and we surrender (*sharanaagodu*). These practices are not visible to our eyes but they happen. Body language is filled with untouchability … it doesn't appear like direct casteism when you look at it.
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> In public certain practices and rituals, like fetching water… when I was in 8th or 9th, in my area they installed a Sintex tank with sweet water and even upper caste people had to come there to fetch water. They couldn't tell us not to draw water because we could then throw them out of the area, so what they did is something that was not visible as untouchability. They did purification rituals. Whether with the temple or with the water tank, when we left the precincts they purified that place. The more and more our lives changed, the more rituals and practices they came up with.
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> When I go to their house they bring out a chair, and they will also sit outside, so you can't call it discrimination. When they give me coffee

> or tea they give it to me in a plastic glass and they also drink from a plastic glass. (Laughs) Nothing is given in a proper glass. Isn't this untouchability? How clever they are. How criminal. For those people who don't observe this and are not sensitive about this they'll say 'ok they gave us a chair and tea, come let's go.' Interesting thing is that we are more economically well off and educated and we are helping them out, so they can't object, they're obliged to me. I sometimes find happiness in giving them the trouble of cringing inside. But this is plastic globalisation! (Laughs).

Instead of caste practices fading away under globalisation, the processes of globalisation are precisely those through which caste prejudice changes form, becomes plastic. Denial of temple entry turns into the purification of temple premises, bodily untouchability turns into changes in body language, separate utensils for different castes becomes plastic disposable glasses for all castes. To those not at the receiving end of everyday casteism, these changes in casteist practice are barely noticeable.

The municipal workers also referred to these *material* practices of caste, and how they played out differently in the city as opposed to their villages:

> Caste is there whether it is in Bangalore or in our native places. The only difference is that when you're earning in Bangalore you're earning more than them [the higher castes in the village], so there is definitely that respect that when we go back to our native place they will talk to us properly, ask 'how are you.' Not that they will invite us to come sit in their house. In our village caste is inside their minds. In Bangalore also if we ask for water at some houses, some give us in a (plastic) bottle, some of them ask us to drink out of our hands, but we don't drink that, we say, 'We are humans like you, we also need to eat like you, give it to us in a tumbler.' We fight with them and walk away.

Although caste is not mentioned explicitly, not giving them a glass and asking them to drink the water out of their hands is definitely a practice that labels the municipal workers as polluters. The women of course recognise it as a caste-based practice, since they have experienced the same in their villages. But just as Ramakka points out the shifts in power that have taken place, with the Dalits in her area being better-off and more educated than the others, the municipal workers point to a similar shift, but vis-à-vis their villages. In the city they struggle to make minimum wage and feed their families but when they return home, the same money helps ease some of the casteism, since they now have city incomes. For all kinds of reasons, the complexity of the changes in caste practices under globalisation and the effects it produces in daily lives, especially those of women, has not been well-researched, and future work is likely to produce even more startling results than our preliminary explorations.

Public and Private: Complicating Categories

Since even before the 2012 Delhi rape case, international coverage of incidents concerning women in India began to increase exponentially (Pidd 2012; Tilak 2013). Public discussions online and participation in offline campaigns around issues of violence against women are at unprecedented levels. "Public" sexual violence, in other words, has eclipsed all other gender concerns (dowry, female foeticide, domestic violence, child marriage and forced marriage, legal equality, equal access to schooling and employment opportunities, political participation, and so on) in terms of policymaking, urgent legislation and police action.

There is a long history of legal intervention in India relating to crimes against women. Rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, acid attacks, stalking, are all seen as specific forms of sexual violence that target mostly women, and the aftermath of the Delhi rape witnessed a further entrenchment of questions of violence in the domain of the law. Because of the significant place occupied by the Delhi rape in the public imagination, and the national–global scale of the discussions that followed it, we were interested in finding out what the event meant for the women we interviewed. Did it change the way they understood sexual violence? Did it alter the way they behaved in public space? The way they related to men, or the way men related to them? Did they participate in the protests? Was this for them the originary moment of an entry into political activism?

Because of the intense mediatisation of the event made possible by the presence of 24/7 news channels in more than 20 Indian languages, and the elaborate detailing of the violence, middle-class interviewees—especially college students—told us how they were deeply affected by the incident. Personalised stories about the victim and her family, and eyewitness accounts, created an unprecedented level of identification with her. The students were disappointed that once the media attention passed, the issue was lost sight of. Although the rape was seen as a national concern, they felt it did not change the way in which women were talked about by Members of Parliament or even the police. The 18-year-old women we spoke to, as well as older interviewees, say they did not change their behaviour in public as a consequence of this case. While they did not see the rape as an isolated incident, they did not feel any more afraid on the streets. They experienced the aftermath of the Delhi rape as a time of intense emotion and disturbance, not necessarily an awakening to the phenomenon of rape.

Among our activist interviewees, there was a strong perception that the Delhi rape changed the language in which rape was described, that the protests definitely foregrounded a concern with victim-blaming. But they also felt that patriarchy does not manifest itself only in acts like rape, since the violence is not a random act or only seen in extreme incidents. It is related to the gendered division of labour within the family, the ways in which children grow up with specific ideas about how women can be treated, and economic conditions which compel women to stay on in abusive situations, both domestic and in employment. "A lot of research isn't done because data is not easy to produce," they said. The movement against sexual violence, they felt, must address issues of caste–class and religion: with the critique of patriarchy extending into a critique of the developmental discourse, neo-liberalism and late capitalism, militarisation, the discourse of national security, the caste system, and religious majoritarianism. Nutan from the Karnataka Sex Workers' Union raised the question of the kinds of women who can be imagined as victims of sexual

violence. She called them "official women," those whose experiences actually register in the public domain and are shown on TV. Police often refuse to file a sexual violence case brought by a female or transgendered sex worker, saying they had no right to complain.

Sex workers even other than transgender ones are among those whose concerns are not foregrounded in discussions about sexual violence. But in Bengaluru at least, there seems to have been some change in the way they are able to handle violence. One of our sex worker interviewees said:

> … Sex workers at least have the courage, if something happens, to go and complain in the police station, or to go to a women's organisation and seek help. 'House women' don't have this courage, they are scared of the men in their houses and what will happen to their families. They get raped in their own houses but they can't even complain. There's a lot of freedom to complain against sexual harassment and we enjoy this freedom, because we have come through this whole process.

According to her, the process of negotiating with the police, of fighting each case of arrest and abuse, has given them the confidence to file complaints against harassment and expect action to be taken. She argues that in contrast "house women," as opposed to "street women," still live in fear of the stigma attached to sexual assault and rape. Issues of family honour and public shame keep them trapped in domestic situations which are violent and lack dignity, and marital rape continues to be ignored and kept "private."

Nalini Jameela, in her *Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, also offers an alternative standpoint from which to view sexual violence. At the launch of her book in Bengaluru in March 2009, Jameela reacted to the mainstream feminist response to sexual harassment, saying that outrage is not the only way of handling something that happens to you on the road. She talked about the sex worker, for whom mere sexualisation by men is not an exceptional circumstance to find themselves in, so they cannot feel that outrage at being sexualised. Instead they negotiate situations through humour, by saying things like, "As if you could ever afford me!," questioning the man's ability instead of only feeling shame or rage.

The debate on safety which has been prominent in feminist discussions in India and elsewhere comes out of the concern with sexual violence, and we wondered what private–public would look like mapped onto the safety axis. The Delhi rape led to a national outcry about public spaces needing to be made safer for women, and state governments took measures such as increasing police patrols in deserted areas and installing CCTV cameras on most major streets and inside public places like malls and commercial complexes. The irony of heightened surveillance which constrains public behaviour even more acutely is hopefully not lost on the young women who demand public safety even as they want to be "free" to express themselves.

After a certain time at night, public space in India is largely populated by men, and women who are seen on the streets at night are usually there for work (sex workers, night shift workers). There is a good deal of harassment in public spaces, of women, *hijras*, *kothis* and transmen, and clearly this needs addressing by urban planners. But in the imagining of "public space" lurks the idea of "private space" to which everyone is expected to have access. For some women, like sex workers or the homeless, the option of thinking of a private space as distinct from the public space does not even exist, and consequently neither does the slotting of safety as a quality of one or the other space. And for women in urban slums, the lines between inside and outside, public and private, are constantly blurred, since much of the everyday life of the slum is conducted in the open. So while the question of *access* to public space is not in itself irrelevant, the way in which it has been framed largely addresses the middle or upper class woman in metropolitan centres. What happens to those in the globalising city for whom public space is all the space there is?

We found in our interviews that the idea of public safety was important for many young women in Bengaluru and they see it as worth fighting for. But when asked whether private spaces are then necessarily the safer option, we got a range of mixed responses. For Gowri, who had experienced violence within the household, the "outside" world was more liberating, and she argued that at least she could face the outside world on her own, for inside the house she did not know how much support she had, and how much they believed what she was saying. Both streets and houses were unsafe, she argued based on her work as an activist. Violence that is visible can become a matter of public concern more easily than violence that remains behind doors, where women have to contend with the reluctance of the courts and the police to interfere in family matters.[12]

Talking to women in the globalising city made us realise that the problematising of the "private" sphere of home, family and domestic life that was taken up by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s is now part of urban common sense, and women across class are aware of the precariousness of private space. With the increasing number of women in certain sectors that the globalisation of the economy has opened up, there is a heightened level of intensity and fear surrounding the idea of violence against women in public space even as more women seem to have withdrawn from the workforce and returned to the precarious "private." It is here that we try to complicate perceptions of safety and violence as assigned to public and private space, so that we can help shift discussions from the sole focus on violence, its perpetrators and victims, to the conditions of neo-liberal globalisation that render such violence inevitable.

Under such conditions, what might it mean to speak about the reorganisation of desire? Buzzwords such as connectivity, lifestyle, and mobility dot the idea-map of the discourse of globalisation, invoking notions of freedom, progress, agency. We have tried to pay attention to how these terms circulate and what they signify for the young women to whom we talked. We tried to elicit stories that did not in any obvious way exemplify these notions, but instead suggest other routes by which to understand the globalising urbanity of Bengaluru. Through these stories, we will perhaps learn to

look differently at what the city promises—not specific lifestyles and specific choices, but the opening up of a number of possibilities, such as developing the potential to deal with one's gendering differently, or a critical reflex cultivated through the ability to compare the city with spaces left behind. In our interviews you will find these minor narratives, minor not in the sense of unimportant or abject but disruptive in different ways of the narratives of globality.[13] These disruptions, we suggest, contain the potential of helping us rethink the very concepts (for example, private and public) that frame existing approaches to urban space and how women occupy it.

NOTES

1 Across these sectors, we spoke to a random sample of 70 women over a period of one and a half years. Each interview was 1 to 2 hours long. Except for discussions with the college students and the *poura karmikas* the interviews were individually conducted. Women were interviewed at their college, workplace, union or party office, and a few at their homes, with the languages used being Kannada, Tamil, and English. There was no fixed questionnaire but each interview covered issues of growing up/gendering, marriage and relationships, employment, self-identification, and perceptions of themselves.

For lack of time and resources, we did not interview physically challenged working women in Bengaluru on how they negotiate the city and its changes. They would certainly provide an invaluable standpoint on access, mobility, and the cultures of globalisation. Also, we did not interview young women who had chosen to become homemakers, since we were interested in women who engaged with public space through employment and education. We are aware that this latter category is small indeed. The percentage of working women in the country is declining at least among middle class women whose choice not to work outside the home is likely to be made possible by rising incomes of their spouses under globalisation. Overall participation of women in the workforce has drastically declined in the 21st century, falling from 33.7% in 1991 to 27% in 2012 (NSS 68th round). As Neethi M and Indrani Mazumdar point out in their study of women workers in Delhi, the statistical picture contrasts strangely with the hyper-visibility of women in the streets, but they agree that even with under-enumeration and invisibility of certain kinds of work, there has been a distinct fall in the number of working women (Neethi and Mazumdar 2010).

Given the scope of our study, we did not interview women *in* rural areas, but we did speak to women who have migrated to the city from small towns and villages in search of work. Pioneering micro-studies of rural migrants in cities are to be found in Mazumdar (1990) (ed), which includes research on Delhi, Pune and Ahmedabad by Leela Kasturi, Sulabha Brahme and Renana Jhabvala. Female migration as a strategy of social mobility has been dealt with in a number of studies (Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002; Nair 2012). Another gap in our study thus far is the relatively low visibility of Muslim women, although Muslims form 12.97% of Bengaluru's population according to the 2011 Census. This does suggest that the presence of Muslim women at least in higher education, the IT sector and the worlds of activism and politics may not be substantial. We are trying to address this issue more concretely in the next phase of our research.

2 We have suggested elsewhere that "The possibility of a comprehensive critique of social arrangements has foundered on the easy association of women and culture, whether in India or elsewhere in Asia. In debates over rape, domestic violence, sex work, or caste and community identity, issues of culture in relation to normative femininity have been foundational. Feminist interventions in India—from the anti-sati campaign to the Uniform Civil Code debate, from the Miss World beauty contest to the bar dancers' case to the Pink Chaddi campaign to Kiss of Love—can be seen as contestations over the meaning and provenance of "culture." Whether it gets configured as that which is holding back women from attaining gender equality, or is seen as the domain in which feminist interventions need to be fashioned (and a new cultural vocabulary forged); whether the cultural is seen as separate from the economic or whether the two are understood as deeply intertwined, the discussions around women and culture have become part of an uneasy common sense where we hear the same formulations over and over again, and the key issues stay unresolved, only to erupt from time to time" (Niranjana 2015).

3 According to recent statistics available with National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom), there are 1.2 million women IT employees in the country, of which, 9.4 to 9.6 lakh are in Karnataka. Among these, it is estimated that 34% to 36% are working in Bengaluru (about 3.45 lakh) (Shruthi 2015). Disaggregated figures for female garment workers were not available for accessing from official sources, but see the figure of 3.6 lakh in the judgment of the Bangalore Tribunal 2012 of the Asia Floor Wages Alliance (AFWA 2012).

4 The study covered about 70 people as we have already mentioned. However, we do not want to suggest that it is the numbers that validate our observations, which are couched in a qualitative and interpretive language.

5 Although we are aware this process plays out differently in each of these sectors, it was not possible to address the significance of these differences given the limited time on hand. We hope to explore the differences in the next phase of our research.

6 Names of some interviewees have been changed on request.

7 While lack of gender discrimination in family space has been a feature of middle-class life in the post-independence period, it now appears to be far more widespread, cutting across class–caste. We cannot offer hard statistics to support this claim, but do want to insist on the importance of recognising, and paying attention to, the structures of feeling that can be seen in the quotations from our interviews.

8 There is a surprising lack of well-documented studies on this sector (but see Pani and Singh (2010)). Detailed information about working conditions is to be found in activist NGO writings such as those from the Bengaluru NGO Cividep. U Kalpagam has discussed garment factory workers in Chennai in an earlier period of globalisation (Kalpagam 1994); Indrani Mazumdar provides a picture of garment and electronics factory workers and ITES workers along with home-based workers in the early 2000s in Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon (Mazumdar 2007). Reena Patel's study of female ITES employees in urban India provides detailed accounts of women's conflicted aspirations in that sector (Patel 2010).

9 An important study of the features of the IT work culture is by Vasavi (2008).

10 The concept of "flexibility" in relation to IT work and female employees is discussed in Mukherjee (2008).

11 The Asia Floor Wage Alliance has been conducting campaigns across Asia and beyond around issues concerning garment workers since it was formed in 2005. See http://asia.floorwage.org/. The India tribunal was held in 2012 in Bengaluru. See also the 2009 documentary "Labels from a Global City," directed by Surabhi Sharma for the Garment and Textile Workers' Union: http://cividep.org/labels-from-a-global-city-part-1/

12 Significant feminist scholarship and campaigning on the issue of domestic violence notwithstanding, the public perception of "family matters" still prevails. See here, for example, the legal work of Majlis in Mumbai and the detailed studies across states published by the International Centre for Research on Women (Jaswal et al 2000). The discussion of women and violence today would not be complete without a mention of the gender neutrality debate. Some women's groups have felt that making the laws gender neutral would ignore the fact that the history of rape was intimately tied to the history of gender inequality, and neglect the gendered nature of the crime. Some LGBT groups argue that *hijras* would be booked and thus victimised under these laws because they were seen by the state as men. This view advocated gender-specific listing within the law, rather than blanket gender neutrality. Sex workers and legal activists in Bengaluru, on the other hand, have wanted gender neutrality, seeing it as a question of inclusion, as being perhaps the only way that those not female-born could get justice for violence done to them.

13 Our use of the term "minor" is inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari (1986). Here we use it to refer to narratives that are not pulled down by the need to fit into older genres of enunciation but become a model for how to talk about that which cannot be easily spoken.

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