



MASCULINITY AND ITS ROLE IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES - *Sanjay Srivastava**

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper reflects the position that in order to comprehend the nature of gender inequalities we must closely interrogate the *relationship* between gender identities in their various social, cultural, economic and political contexts. For, as Rosalind O’Hanlon points out:

A proper understanding of the field of power in which women have lived their lives demands that we look at men as gendered beings too: at what psychic and social investments sustain their sense of themselves as men, at what networks and commonalities bring men together on the basis of shared gender identity, and what hierarchies and exclusions set them apart. (O’Hanlon 1997: 1)

Hence, the study of feminine, masculine and trans-gender identities concerns the exploration of *power relationships* within the contemporary gender landscape, where certain dominant ideals of manhood impact on women, different ways of being men, as well those identities that may not fit either gender category. This way of engaging with ‘gender’ is an exploration into the naturalisation of the category ‘man’ through which men have come to be regarded as un-gendered and as the ‘universal subject of human history’ (O’Hanlon 1997: 1).

Masculinity refers to the *socially produced but embodied ways of being male*. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks ‘proper’ to men and women (‘men work in offices, women do housework’), and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived antithesis, femininity. The discourse of masculinity as a dominant and ‘superior’ gender position is produced at a number of sites and has specific consequences for women as well as those men who may not fit into the dominant and valourised models of masculinity. These sites include: customary laws and regulations, the state and its mechanisms, the family, religious norms and sanctions, popular culture, and, the media.

In order to stand in a relationship of superiority to feminine identity, masculinity must be represented as possessing characteristics that are the binary opposite of (actual or imagined) feminine identity. However, this is not all. Dominant masculinity stands in a relationship not just to femininity but *also to those ways of being male* that are seen to deviate from the ideal. It is in this sense that masculinity possesses both external (relating to women) as well as an internal (relating to ‘other’ men) characteristics. Both these contexts assist in bolstering what scholars have referred to as ‘hegemonic’ masculine identity (Connell 2005). So, the heterosexual, white-collar married male who is the ‘breadwinner’ is a useful (if somewhat caricatured) type to think about hegemonic masculinity. For, embedded in this representation is an entire inventory of the behaviours and roles that have been historically valourised as becoming of ideal masculinity. Hence, the dominant modes of being men could be said to be manufactured out of discourses on sexual orientation (heteronormativity), class, race, conjugality, the ‘protective’ function of males and women as recipients of protection, and the place of emotions in the lives of men and women.

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What, however, is the difference between the linked concepts of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’? Patriarchy refers to a *system* of social organisation which is fundamentally organised around the idea of men’s superiority to women. Within this system, even those who may not approximate to the male ideal (such as homosexual men) still stand to benefit from the privileges attached to being a man. So, as a parallel, we might think of the situation on apartheid era South Africa where all whites—those who supported apartheid and those who opposed it—were potential beneficiaries of the institutionalised privileges of being white. Though it is difficult to posit simple definitions of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘masculinity’, we might say that patriarchy refers to the systemic relationship of power between men and women, whereas masculinity concerns both inter- and intra-gender relationships. And, while it can not be argued that under patriarchy *all* forms of masculinity are equally valourised, there is nevertheless an overwhelming consensus regarding the superiority of men over women. Patriarchy ‘makes’ men superior, whereas masculinity is the process of producing superior men.

The ideas of ‘making’ and ‘producing’ are crucial to the study of gender identities, for they point to their historical and social nature. The various discourses of ‘proper’ masculine behaviour—in novels, films, advertisements and folk-advice—would clearly be unnecessary if it was a naturally endowed characteristic. The very fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced—‘if you buy this motor-cycle you’ll be a real man’—says something about the tenuous and fragile nature of gender identities; they *must* continually be reinforced. Following from this, we might also say that masculinity is *enacted* rather than expressed. For, when we say that something is ‘expressed’, we subscribe to the idea that it ‘already exists’, and gender identities in particular do not *already* exist (say, biologically). They involve an entire task of building and rebuilding, consolidation, representation and enforcement; in other words we must think of gender identities as works in progress. ‘Deep masculinity’ is the realm of uncritical ‘men’s studies’ that proceeds from the assumptions of essential masculine identity that needs to be either maintained or recovered. In any case, it can not be part of a project that seeks to critically analyse the contours of the gendered power and its effect of proscribing a diversity of male and female identities. This does not of course imply that existing formations of masculinity do not also contain instances of men’s deviation from the dominant mode (see, for example, Chopra 2003), rather that we still need to be attuned to whether such deviations disrupt existing frameworks or, in fact, find ways of operating within them.

As should be clear, a crucial task is to foreground the *social* nature of gender identities. This approach moves away from the biologism that has historically afflicted the study of gender and sexual identities. More importantly, to imagine identities and behaviours as socially and historically constituted is also to imagine the possibility of effecting change in a desired direction. For, if masculine identities vary across time and space—appear in different forms at different times and are different across societies—therein lies the possibility of formulating appropriate policy measures to influence the contexts within which gender inequalities persist.

It is important, then, to be clear about what is meant by ‘biologism’, for it continues—through naturalizing social categories and processes—to be a significant context through which gendered operations of power unfold. A significant part of the modern history of the study of gender and sexual cultures is the history of biologism. So, in the accounts of European sexologists such as Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902) and Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), and others such as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), even the defence of ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviour and gender identities was couched through the reasoning that these are ‘natural’ identities and hence should be tolerated. Biologism is the idea that identities derive from a ‘deep source’ within the self. Hence, the notion that we ‘express’ our gendered and sexual selves, rather than *enact* it. Enactment contains within it the idea of learning and performing, whereas ‘expressing’ embodies the notion of an essence that, no matter what, will come tumbling out.

Biologism, then, is the thinking that suggests that gender and sexual identities:

- are biologically derived;
- have been historically stable (i.e., the same since the ‘dawn of time’);
- are ‘essentially’ about our ‘private’ lives; and,

- are ‘basically’ the same across different cultures;
- are normative.

The view that gender identities are fixed is—as scholars who work in cross-cultural contexts know—a highly suspect one. The social and contextual nature of gender is nowhere better explained than in the case of ‘women marriages’ in many African societies where:

...an infertile woman or a woman who had no sons herself married a younger woman who would then bear sons for her husband in the name of the female-husband. The female-husband could then be wife to her husband and mother to their children, and husband to her wife and father to the children of that wife. (Morgan and Wieringa 2005: 300)

Notwithstanding the abundant nature of evidence of the malleability of human identity, it is often suggested—as a clinching argument to demonstrate the significance of biology—that one can not bring up sons to be daughters and daughters to be sons. This confuses biological attributes with social learning. Indeed, it is possible for *biological* male children to be brought up as *culturally* female. Consider the case of a family in Samoa where ‘a mother has no young daughters and can not adopt a young girl to help with the housework’:

In such a case, a son may be recruited by the mother to fill the role of a young girl in helping the mother manage the household. In such cases, when the boy continues to adopt the female gender role into adolescence and perhaps adulthood, the name *fa’afafine* is applied. A *fa’afafine* may marry and have children but continues to play a female role in the family and the village. (Bindon 2003: 935)

Male-ness and female-ness are, then, social attributes which we learn, and are taught. Further, and as already mentioned, if these were natural attributes then we would surely not need all the advertising that tells us what the appropriate behaviour is for men and women; we would simply know. The view that men-are-the-way-they-are-because-they-are-‘hardwired’-that way is corollary to the positioning of men as ‘universal subject’. That is, categories such as ‘citizen’, ‘worker’, ‘intellectual’ and ‘the active agent of history’ come implicitly to be understood as those occupied by men.

The above paragraph leads two specific perspectives on ‘culture’. First, our attempts to understand the ideologies and norms of gender that affect the lives of men and women in different ways should be premised on an understanding of broader cultural, social and political contexts—the family, educational systems, religious beliefs, ideas regarding human biology, sexuality, etc.—that produce and maintain these ideologies and norms. And, second, we must comprehend that cultures are always in flux and have a hybrid character (that is, made up of a number of different cultures).

II. HISTORY, GENDER IDENTITIES AND NORMS

Gender norms and categories are directly related to the distribution of power among genders, and hence to issues of social justice, equity and human rights. ‘Power’, in turn, relates to the control over both symbolic as well as material goods. That is, the *ideas* we hold about men and women—their ‘appropriate’ roles, capacities and characteristics—along with the access they enjoy to *material resources* go towards determining their positions with respect to each other. Hence, both symbolic and material processes are of crucial importance when we plan upon affecting changes in oppressive social structures and conditions. *All* social contexts are gendered, and the gendered nature of social contexts ‘means that neither male nor female power can be examined entirely in isolation’ (Malhotra and Mather 1997: 603). ‘Gender’ is, therefore, a *relationship*, and in this paper even when the discussion is solely focussed upon one gender, it is the relationship between genders—their relative location in structures of hierarchy—that is implicitly under investigation.

In all cultures, including the European, a wide variety of conceptions of gender and sexuality existed before the advent of the modern era. Many forms of expression—body appearance, gestures, voice, and so on—were seen to be part of maleness and femaleness. In fact, some theorists now argue for a strong connection between modernity and the currently dominant form of masculinity. It has been suggested that the modern era ushered a way of thinking which *rigidly* defined how men and women should behave. That, there emerged ways of thinking which implied that *a*) gender identity could be divided into two categories, that is, male and female, and that *b*) each of these two categories could be understood in terms of their ‘essential’ being. Hence, the *binarism* and essentialism of modern thought that colonised diverse fields of activity also had a strong influence upon ideas of gender identity. This was manifested in a ‘separation of reason from nature [which] works to divide men from their emotions and feelings which become threatening to [their] identities as men.... [men were exhorted to] disdain emotions and feelings a signs of weakness and so as potentially compromising [their] sense of male identity’ (Seidler 1994: x–xi).

The colonial era was particularly important in the historical development in the career of modern masculinity. Hence, as Edward Said (1979) has famously suggested, an entire corpus of writing and other material—literature, poetry, philosophical tracts, government reports, picture postcards, travelogues, ‘scientific’ reports, religious commentary, etc.—represented the Orient in specific ways. ‘Orientalism’ refers to the processes and sites of ‘producing’ a space called the Orient for western consumption, such that the ‘West’ and the ‘Orient’ come to be in a relation of superiority-inferiority. Western religious, aesthetic, philosophical, kinship, literary, scientific and ontological traditions come to be established as superior to their Oriental counterparts. And, hence, colonialism becomes justifiable as the ‘civilizing mission’ of a superior ‘race’. Most significantly for our purposes, Orientalism also established the dominant meanings of masculinity through ‘feminizing’ entire populations who came to be represented as unfit for self-rule. So, the ‘cunning Arab’, the ‘inscrutable Chinese’, and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ were simultaneously stereotypes of gendered behaviour: they were, compared to western men, ‘womanly’. This way of thinking proceeds, of course, from the premise that women are inferior to men. Hence, the idea that western men were superior to non-western men was based on the notion that ‘masculine traits’ were superior to ‘feminine’ ones. The career of Orientalism is, then, inseparable from that of gender stereotypes.

It can be argued that Orientalist and colonial discourses consolidated specific images and discourses of being a man to the exclusion of others. They combined the valourisation of science, the ‘feminization’ of non-European people and biologism to produce specific images of ideal masculine types. These, in turn, were internalised by the colonial intelligentsia to ‘produce a self-image of effeteness’ (Rosselli 1980) and led to attempts by the latter to ‘overcome’ such ‘shortcomings’. In many ways, then, colonialism becomes an expression of the masculine ideal which had been developing in Europe through the 17th and 18th centuries.

The impact of colonialism can not simply be understood to imply that colonial powers single-handedly ‘invented’ certain types of masculine cultures and introduced them into the culture of the colonies; and that certain ideas that came to be associated with masculinity—such as being ‘war-like’—simply did not exist before colonialism. As one historian has argued, ‘martial masculinity’ (O’Hanlon 1997: 17) was an important aspect of pre-colonial life in India, one which the colonisers might, in fact, have built upon and incorporated into the discourses of colonial masculinity.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand the *intensification* of certain forms of discourses around masculinity that occurred during colonialism in different parts of the Asia-Pacific and continue to circulate during our own time. When we think of the present, it is important to reflect upon the ways in which ‘the boundaries of race and gender were negotiated, policed, and reinforced in an age of colonial modernity... [an aspect that points to the] processes that increasingly undermined the flexibility and fluidity that characterised many earlier social formations’ (Ballantyne and Burton 2005: 6). Further in this context, while ‘women and colonialism’ form an important topic of research, not nearly as much attention has been paid to the making of colonial masculine cultures. So, ‘colonial projects and their processes were frequently believed to throw white

male bodies into crisis... and the supposed “femininity” of colonized men was frequently used as a political tool to justify their exclusion from positions of power and as a means of justifying their colonization in the first place’ (ibid.: 7). Within the discourse of ‘colonial masculinity’ (Sinha 1997), non-European men were represented as incapable of self-government due to their ‘effeminacy’ (this discourse already incorporates, of course, the inferiority of women in general). Hence kingdoms were annexed (for the sake of ‘better’ governance), and natives were denied positions in local bureaucracies. Much more generally, non-European cultures were also ‘effeminised’, being represented as ‘otherworldly’, ‘un-focused’, ‘unscientific’, etc. A connected process was the emergence of colonial stereotypes such as the inscrutable Oriental, the mysterious Oriental, etc. Various descriptive terms also came to be attached to ‘womanhood’ as mysterious, and, threatening (to malehood: hence the importance of an all-male school atmosphere for ‘real’ men to be nurtured in [Mangan and Walvin 1987]). However, whilst some natives were feminised, others were represented as ‘martial’ races (the Gurkhas of Nepal) (Omissi 1991) and hence worthy of some respect, though not the equals of the colonisers since they did not possess sufficient intellectual prowess. Most frequently, the ‘martial races’ were infantilised, that is, treated on par with children.

III. MASCULINITIES, PUBLIC SPACES AND THEIR CULTURES

A significant manner of understanding social relationships—class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.—is through exploring the relationship between social identity and space. For, our everyday lives—played out through a variety of freedoms and constraints—unfold upon and through specific spaces. Further, spaces have a dual identity: they are both sites upon which different social identities play out in different ways, as well as sites for the formation and consolidation of identities. That is to say, spaces are both objects as well as processes. So, for example, the home is commonly understood to be the domain of women, but it is also the space that defines the kinds of activities women may take part in. Similar arguments can be made for other spaces such as streets, parks, offices, bazaars, shopping malls, schools and university campuses.

It is in this context that we need to focus upon the significance of two relatively recent ideas in human history, viz., the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. Whether or not the public/private categorisation has existed in all societies across time, it is certainly true that the idea that each gender has a separate sphere to which it ‘naturally’ adapts has become part of modern ‘common sense’. Increasingly, through a number of processes of modernity, there has come to be a convergence between the different-spheres-for-different-genders perspective, and the public/private distinction.

Scholarship on the topic has approached the issue in different ways. However, given the historical specificity of the Indian situation—our systems of distinction and hierarchies, the colonial experience and the interplay between the two, for example—it is unlikely that writings that address the European experience (Arendt 1951, Habermas 1989, Sennett 1976) can capture local complexities. Also, in ‘classical’ discussions on the topic, the role of gender has tended to be sidestepped (Fraser 1992, Pateman 1989). So, both in terms of the dimensions of historical and contemporary specificity and gender, we should formulate our understanding of the Indian situation in terms other than those that might have been true of the European case, while nevertheless borrowing from scholarship on these contexts.

Let us begin with the idea that the categories of public and private play an important role in the beliefs we hold about how society ‘works’, and *should* work. So, it is commonplace to understand certain spaces (say, the street) as public, and others (say, the home) as private. There is also the belief that spaces thus categorised have their own characteristics in terms of behaviours expected of those located in those spaces, as well as the ‘natural’ claims of certain groups to them (say, men against women). The idea of ‘publicness’ clearly invokes its putative opposite, that is, ‘privateness’. However, are the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ simple opposites of each other? Here, it will be suggested that the two should *not* be understood as mere opposites, each with its own

independent set of characteristics. And that it is only if we understand the public and the private as *complementary*—rather than oppositional—spheres that we will be able to understand the ways in which masculine and patriarchal power operates in society.

Following the discussion in the sections above, if we remember that the public sphere has historically been defined as that of men and the private as that of women, then it becomes easier to understand why the two operate as complements to bolster gendered power. So, if the public is presented as the domain of action, ‘rationality’, ‘educated opinion’, and a realm where important matters of social life can be discussed among the rightful claims to the public sphere—men—then the private is imagined as that sphere where men can find relief from the ‘difficult’ tasks of engaging and forming the public sphere. The private is represented as the ‘soft’ sphere where other kinds of—‘feminine’—sensibilities come into play. Here, women rule as they are supposedly endowed with those qualities that are best suited to the domestic sphere: capacity for maternal care and emotional response, lack of ability for ‘rational’ and ‘scientific’ thinking and capacity for thinking about concrete matters such as the state, and abstract matters such as philosophy. However, according to this line of thought, the private sphere is a necessary complement to the public as it provides relief from the pressures of the public: the private is then in a *binary* relation to the public in as much as it demonstrates why the public is a superior realm. Without the notion of the private, the public would not carry the connotations of a superior realm that it does. It is in this sense that the two are complementary. It is also here that we can understand the hostility that women face should they choose to place themselves in the imagined public sphere: masculine anxiety and hostility guards the public as a realm of men. What we have, in effect, are masculinised public spheres.

Another significant point relating to the public/private distinction has to do with the fact that we need to make a further distinction between ‘private’ and ‘domestic’. For, a woman may well have autonomy over a private space (say, a single woman who can afford to rent her own flat), but not over the domestic (in as much as this is the space shared with the husband and, possibly, an extended family). While these terms will be used interchangeably in this paper, the distinction is important to remember.

Notwithstanding the above perspective on the public and the private, it is also important to remember that the distinction has itself been questioned by feminists. An important ground for the feminist objection pertains to the fact that, in addition to its ‘women’s sphere’ connotations, the ‘private’ has come to denote the sphere that is immune to ‘outside’ intervention. An important corollary of this is the belief that domestic violence is an ‘internal’ matter and the state, or other non-state bodies, should stay out of the matters of private (family) life. These notions of the inner and the outer aspects of social life are significant contributors to the overall debate that relates to masculinities and public and private spaces. Finally, in this context, we should also remember that while we may come across greater instances of violence against women—both actual and symbolic—in public spaces, it is not as if the incidence was lower in the past. The relative lack of attention to the topic in past years may be due to a situation where men had a more undisputed relationship to so-called public spaces. And that in the present time, there are more women who seek to occupy—or find themselves—in public spaces as a result of a number of social, cultural and economic changes.

The historic division of social life as ‘public’ and ‘private’ has simultaneously entailed a division of *institutions* as public and private. And, along with this, there has developed a logic of the gender of such institutions. According to this logic, public institutions have been understood to be the ‘natural’ preserve of men and hence have tended to operate according to a variety of masculinist ideologies. One example of this is the manner in which the media quite often provides accounts of public women (say parliamentarians) by describing what they wear or how many children they have; women’s primary identity continues to be defined through an implicit understanding that public institutions possess (and should possess) a masculine identity. Beyond this, there are even more serious issues, such as the denial of equal opportunities to women through masculinity notions of what men can do and what women are capable of. It becomes important, therefore, to explore the gender of our institutions in order to devise strategies for change.

Hence, there are a number of other issues we need to keep in mind as a background to any discussion on the relationship between the public and private spheres, gender relations and the unfolding of gendered power. These include: How is gender power consolidated through civic associations such as clubs and societies that, either implicitly or explicitly, base themselves upon masculinist ideologies? And, how are the conjoined contexts of patriarchal privilege and masculinist ideals normalised through institutions such as state bureaucracies, schools, the legal system and the police? That is to say, there are significant linkages between discourses and ideologies formulated at institutional sites (whether public or private) and behaviours and expectations at non-institutional spaces such as streets and parks. Hence, if we are to address violence against women in specific instances (say, at a bus stop or in a park), then a proper understanding of the issues that underpin such violence requires a focus on those other *institutional* sites where ideas on the nature of the public/private dichotomy are formulated, discussed and promulgated.

Following from the above, the idea that the public sphere is a ‘masculinised’ one is the starting point for exploring the relationship between gender and publicness. The kinds of issues we need to explore within this context have already been alluded to above. These throw light upon the causes and nature of gender-based violence in public spaces, and the new emerging issues in urban and semi-urban contexts that are leading to gender-based violence in public spaces.

One of the first things we might say about violence against women in public spaces—and other groups, such as non-heterosexual people—is that it relates to ideas of ‘natural’ claims to such spaces. That is to say that once the ‘private’ is defined as the (inferior) complement to the ‘public’, some people are seen to more ‘properly’ belong to public spaces than others. The most straightforward way of elaborating upon this is to say that heterosexual men are seen to have a greater (if not exclusive) claim upon public space. But, of course, it is not as simple as that and a more nuanced understanding is required. So, in order to introduce a level of complexity into our understanding, we might say, for example, that upper caste middle-class heterosexual men are likely to have greater sway over public spaces as compared to women, lower caste non-middle class men and non-heterosexual men (in as much as the latter category is easier to ‘identify’). Linked to this is 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’ (that is, carrying out specific tasks), the idea of women loitering in such spaces becomes both incomprehensible and condemnable. A recent study carried out in Mumbai that asked respondents to indicate how men and women use space summarises its findings as follows:

...it is always men who are found occupying public space at rest.... Women, on the other hand are rarely found standing or waiting in public spaces—they 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. (Ranade 2007: 1521)

The idea of the necessity of purposeful activity by women is one that emanates from many sites of which the domestic is one of the most powerful. It is, perhaps, also the most stringent in its enforcement of the rule of ‘purpose’. And, just as significantly, we should be mindful of how—in addition to gender—different kinds of social attributes come into play in restricting or permitting physical mobility. A recent study by the School of Women’s Study at Jadhavpur University (SWSJU) points out that while there exist different restrictions on women’s mobility outside the home among various caste and class groups, ‘restrictions over time are completely absent in case of upper-caste men. The only condition for men is that they should inform a family member in case of delay, indicating a gendered ideology at play’ (SWSJU 2010: 30). Further, the discourse of women and purpose is reinforced by a complimentary formulation that refers to the ‘balance’ a working woman must achieve between her paid work and household responsibilities. So, a woman’s ‘paid work was not objectionable, provided she took good care of her household responsibilities’ (ibid.: 38). In order to achieve this ‘balance’, however, it becomes imperative that women spend only that time in the public sphere that serves the

purpose of carrying out the responsibilities of paid work, thereafter retreating to the home for other duties. In their interviews with a wide cross-section of men and women in Kolkata, the SWSJU researchers were told that should a woman be found wanting in her abilities to balance work and home life, she must get back to where she belongs—the home’ (ibid.).

Spaces, therefore, are not ‘natural’ in their attributes, and, following from the above, have a *social* character. Hence, when thinking about relationships among human beings—that, after all, unfold in specific spaces—we must consider the character of spaces in terms of a number of social categories such as class, caste, ethnicity, and, of course, gender. The freedoms and constraints that confront us as human beings are crucially determined by our social attributes, of which gender is a significant aspect.

Frequently, the gendered discourse of public spaces also represents them as sites where women may both be allowed and afforded security of movement *as long as they behave as women should* (more on this ahead). So, for example, women at nightclubs who wear ‘revealing’ western clothing are often regarded as having forfeited the right to (male) protection and regard. This aspect most directly bears upon notions of female sexuality and the idea that ‘to deliberately titillate men is a fault in a woman and the responsibility for its consequences ought not to be placed upon men’ (ibid.: 28). This also relates to an understanding of masculinity in biological terms: that men possess sexual drives that are both uncontrollable and easily stoked.

Female sexuality and the discourse of public women come together in another way. An example from contemporary Kerala will be helpful. During the 1990s, several scholars have pointed out an increasingly strident debate that indexes ‘augmented public fears about sexual transgression’ (Devika 2009: 33) by women. Hence, ‘visions of dystopia in public discussion in Kerala in the 1990s’ is ‘painted heavily with the horrors of “sexuality unleashed”’ (ibid.). Significantly, young women who had been subject to sexual crimes were often portrayed not as victims, but those whose ‘worldliness’ was to blame for the crimes they suffered. So, a High Court judgement on the so-called Vithura case of 2000 involving the serial rape of a teenage girl noted that she was a “lascivious strumpet” who, as the days passed by... became more and more coquettish and voluptuous by availing the services of beauty parlours’ (Sreekumar 2001, quoted in ibid.). As Devika points out, the ‘fixation with the sexualisation of female bodies is... telling of how misogyny forms a sizable part of elitist cultural panic’ (ibid.: 34). Women in public spaces not conforming to masculine rules of ‘modesty’ are frequently the source of a great deal of masculine (and patriarchal) anxiety regarding the ‘decline of society’. The ‘decline’ perspective appears to have been particularly salient in an era of globalisation, where women are seen to be affected by the cultural and social changes in a manner not ‘befitting’ models of ‘feminine honour’ and respectability.

Finally, in this context, it is *male* notions of what constitutes ‘violence’ that frequently guide women’s recognition of it. So, a woman who has faced harassment may choose to overlook it if, say, her father suggests that it is too ‘trivial’ a matter, or that ‘girls must learn to live with a certain degree of harassment’. This may happen in those instances where the man feels unable to act to redress the ‘insult’ to ‘family honour’, and it seems better to not do anything rather than risk further humiliation. What comes into play in such instances is not so much a consideration of the feelings of the woman but, rather, various contexts of male honour.

IV. MASCULINISED PUBLIC SPHERES AND INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

In order to grasp the relationship between violence, public spaces and masculinity, it is important to understand how the cultures of gender play out across various contexts of civil society and agencies of the state. This will further allow us to make the linkages between the home and the world. Scholarship on the state-civil society interface suggests that there is an inescapable and complex relationship between the two. This interweave is the

crucial first step in exploring the dynamic of this relationship. And, given this, cultures of gender have to be understood as practices that transit across various agencies of the state and institutions of civil society.

Feminist interrogations of the dichotomy between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ have alerted us to the significance of insisting that there is an intimate relationship between the two spheres. So, feminist analyses have shown us that men and women’s participation in one or the other of these spheres is influenced by the ways in which ideas regarding gender circulate within them, as well as intersect. So, for example, if Parliament is imagined as the realm of men and home as that of women, then each gender comes to be established as having its ‘proper’ realm of operation (Fraser 1992, Pateman 1989). This, in turn, has significant consequences for the freedoms and constraints accorded each gender. It is in this context that this section explores the ways in which a ‘masculinized public sphere’ (Moon 2002) comes to be established through both private and public discourses of gender. When we speak of the masculinisation of the public sphere, we refer to the combination of a number of discourses—such as religious, statist and, in some cases, militaristic—that combine to gender space, including the private.

Clubs, Societies, Leisure and Civic Associations

How is gender power consolidated through civic associations such as clubs and societies that, either implicitly or explicitly, base themselves upon masculinist ideologies? How are the conjoined contexts of patriarchal privilege and masculinist ideals normalised through associations? Let us consider the case of ‘traditional-modern’ masculinity as propagated by the Samarth Vyamshala Mandir (SVM), a club for ‘physical exercise’ for young people located on the grounds of the famous Shivaji Park in the suburb of Dadar in Mumbai.¹ SVM was founded in 1925, and its establishment expressed a certain tendency within Indian nationalism whereby rejuvenation of the subjugated (upper caste, primarily male) body was understood as the precursor to regaining *Swarajya* (self-rule). It is one of many such clubs and leisure societies that have been instrumental in the propagation specific notions of masculinity through representing them as part and parcel of ‘nation-building’ and ‘character-building’.

At the time when SVM was founded, it was frequently argued that the depths to which a ‘glorious’ and ‘ancient’ civilisation had fallen could only be remedied through strict attention to the physical condition of the body through allegiance to a disciplinary mechanism which had become alien to it. The theme of physical exercise, masculinity and the task of ‘nation-building’ was, of course, a common one in late 19th and early 20th centuries in a variety of discourses in India.

In the contemporary period, SVM makes a special claim towards preserving and promoting the ‘ancient’ physical culture of *malkhamb*, the name given to both a wooden pole and a series of exercises built around it. SVM activities follow a set pattern, routinised through the practice of many years: children lined up in their various groups (*malkhamb*, *kho-kho* [an Indian game], gymnastics, basketball, and a ‘general’ category), the raising of the (Hindu) saffron flag, children saluting the flag and then dispersing to their activities, etc. At the end of each day’s sessions, the participants line up again for the flag lowering ceremony and, with the nationalist hymn *Vande Mataram* playing in the background, salute the flag and with a shout of *Jai Hind* (‘Long Live India!’) disperse (*visarjan*).

Both boys and girls participate in the various ‘physical culture’ activities of SVM, and though the girls are able to take part in almost all the activities, they do *not* perform on the pole *malkhamb*; their routines being confined to the ‘rope *malkhamb*’, and other exercises such as gymnastics. The proponents of *malkhamb* point out that ‘certain exercises similar to *malkhamb*, can also be traced in the 12th Century Classic, *Mansolhas*’ written by Chalukya (A.D. 1135). In modern times, its history can also be interpreted as tied to the emergence of Marathi Hindu male identity. *Malkhamb* was ‘revived’ as an organised activity through the efforts of Kale

¹ This discussion is based upon original fieldwork by the author as part of on-going research on masculine cultures in India.

Guru. With its strong turn-of-the-century Marathi upper-caste milieu, the suburb of Dadar was fertile territory for the Mandir's establishment. And, though SVM does not have explicit affiliations to any political or religious organisations, it has been an important site for the advocacy and elaboration of upper-caste Hindu masculinity. Here, in myriad ways, the Hindu male body and society—'Indian tradition'—are imagined as one.

For the past thirty years or so, the central figure at SVM has been Ramesh Kulkarni (name changed), a government employee whose life outside office hours has been spent in nurturing an institution that is run on a shoestring budget and attracts a great deal of support from the local area. Kulkarni is a very particular kind of masculine figure which has an important place in the cultural imagination of the post-liberalisation economy: the *modern* renounce engaged in the task of 'improving' society, a task seen to be undertaken at great personal cost and sacrifice. Kulkarni's day begins around 5 a.m., when he leaves his house for the SVM premises in order to supervise the morning session of exercises. At the conclusion of the morning session, he leaves for work from the SVM premises itself. Then, at the end of work, he returns to the SVM, only going back home around 10 p.m., after attending to all the SVM business. This is his routine for the entire week. When asked what his wife thinks of this routine, he responds saying 'she was informed of this before we got married', and is now 'used to it'. Needless to say, for more than twenty years or so of married life, his wife has taken on the role of housekeeper, cook, budget manager and educator of their children; Ramesh Kulkarni is, as he puts it, free to work towards the 'good' of a society that is increasingly caught in the vices of modernity and is unceasingly attentive to its material needs at the cost of the spiritual. The positioning of Hindu masculinity and the male 'improver'—an embodiment of *tyag* (renunciation)—within the matrices of class, caste, and politics of the 'domestic' needs to be noted here. For, quite clearly, the burden of doing 'social good' that is carried by Kulkarni's wife is largely obliterated through the close association of the social—and 'Indian tradition'—with *male* agency. In middle-class contexts at least, such as the one exemplified by SVM, we can see an outline of 'traditional-modernity' in a time of rapid social change. Among other things, it serves the very real purpose of consolidating a discourse of masculinity that seeks preservation of male privileges that in many spheres of life are being brought into question. Hence, in order that *men* do public good, women must take care of the private sphere; once again, the *complementary* nature of the public and the private. The man's public *tyag*, is dependent upon the proper conduct of female domestic responsibility.

SVM also has some women officials, and one of these is Kulkarni's second-in-command, Meera Tendulkar (name changed). Tendulkar has been associated with SVM since the age of eight, and thirty years later is very much a veteran and respected senior member of the institution. She narrates how during the 1980s she performed on the cane *malkhamb* wearing gymnasts clothes which was quite a 'daring' thing to do, in addition to travelling to various parts of the country to perform. The only gap in her participation in SVM's activities was when for four years after the birth of her son, she was an infrequent visitor. One of the 'adjustments' her family has made is that she is at SVM premises every evening from 6.30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Initially, there was some concern in her kin circles, but now her relatives have 'adjusted their visits according to this'. She has managed, she points out, to combine the roles of housewife, teacher (she is a college lecturer in psychology) and deputy to Kulkarni 'without much effort'. So, here the 'female modernity' that is permissible is that of someone who learns to combine, rather than have the option of opting out of 'feminine tasks'. It is important to remember that even where clubs and societies do not exclude women from membership, they may still be sites for the propagation of patriarchal and masculinist gender politics.

Educational Institutions and Processes of Identity Formation

Let us now consider the relationship between education processes and gender. There are two key issues we need to explore when we think about the link between education and gender. First, how does formal education at the

earliest periods of life—schooling—inculcate normative gendered values and behaviours? That is to say, how do schools teach boys to be ‘boys’ and girls to be ‘girls’? The school marks the first link between the pedagogic programmes of the family and that of the state and, often (though not always), such programmes replicate patriarchal values. Second, while on the one hand schooling may be complicit in reproducing dominant values, it is also important to inquire about the ways in which it empowers those whom it educates. That is, *how* does schooling equip the schooled to effect changes in their material and social circumstance?

A great deal of scholarly analysis that assumes an automatic connection between education and paid work and an improvement in women’s position in non-western countries has been influenced by similar assumptions in feminist scholarship that has dealt with the historical experience of *western* societies. This has also proved to be a popular perspective within policy contexts. To zero in upon schooling and work as productive policy measures of women’s ‘empowerment’ has seemed to be an easier task than incorporating the seemingly abstract and complicated nature of cultural factors that influence gender power. Notwithstanding this, it is important to explore the ways in which gendered power—the relationship between men and women with the household, for example—operates to stymie the best laid plans for gender equity. Education is but one factor towards addressing gender equity; it can not itself stand as proxy for ‘empowerment’. In other words, we need to engage with the larger social context that the ‘educated’ and employed woman encounters that can act as a counterweight to the quest for empowerment. While an educated woman may find paid employment, who decides how she spends her income? How do norms and discourses of sexuality, marriage and deference to ‘tradition’ constrain everyday lives of the supposedly empowered—educated and employed—women? The fundamental aspect is to understand the extent to which women have control over decision-making processes that affect their lives. This is something that can not simply be understood through talking of education itself as a sufficient indicator of empowerment.

Malhotra and Mather (1997) provide a valuable corrective to the notion—widely prevalent in both academic and policy literature—that education and employment are powerful indicators of the social positions enjoyed by women. First, it is important to remember that ‘access to resources is distinct from control over them, and only the latter can be considered an indicator of power’ (ibid.: 604). However, even in those situations where women exercise power over a particular sphere, say in financial decision making with the household, it is not necessary that they will have a similar say in social and organisational matters; so, an educated young woman in paid employment may well be able to decide whether to purchase consumer goods or not, but this does not translate into her ability to dictate whom she may marry. This is because power is ‘multilocational’: it operates in different spheres—social, domestic, political and economic—in different ways. Hence, if a woman has a say over social issues within the household (perhaps because she is an older woman), this does not necessarily translate into an ability to exercise autonomy outside it. In considering women’s abilities to take decisions about their lives it is fundamental to consider the broader social and political spheres within which their lives unfold. Hence, as Malhotra and Mather point out, ‘the relevance of schooling and paid work in determining domestic power depends on the social context under consideration’ (ibid.: 607).

Further, if we focus too narrowly on what makes for women’s empowerment—through an excessive reliance on the access-to-education framework—then we are likely to miss the dynamics of how the different spheres of which women are part interact with each other, in turn either constraining or promoting women’s advancement as social beings. Hence, taking the Sri Lankan case as focus, Malhotra and Mather point out that ‘women’s control over their earnings allows them a role in some spheres of domestic decision-making, but not others’ (ibid.: 609). What, then, might be the broader social contexts we need to keep in mind in order to fully comprehend issues of constraint or facilitation? Even in those societies, such as Sri Lanka, where women are subject to fewer constraints than in other parts of South Asia, women’s domestic power will depend upon the manner in which patriarchal and masculinist definitions make meanings in the domains of ‘class and ethnic differences, the nature and dynamic of productive work, a woman’s life course, and the structure and composition of the household’ (ibid.: 607). Hence, middle- and upper-class women are more likely to have more say in family matters, even though women from lower socio-economic categories may actually contribute

a greater percentage of household income; women from certain ethnic backgrounds tend to face greater constraints as decision makers in financial and social issues; not just current work status, but also experience of past work is likely to secure a considerable level of authority for many women; life cycle contexts such as motherhood and age can be significant factors in determining how much of a say a woman has in different decision-making contexts; and, in some cases, if women live away from in-laws they may be able to exercise greater independence, whereas in others, this may be achieved through residence with natal kin who will support them in personal and financial matters. Finally, after a point education may not matter: so it isn't as if a woman who is educated above the 12th standard is likely to have greater say in how to conduct her life—and that of her family—as compared to someone with only 11th standard level of education.

It is important, then, to remember that 'even independent of educational and work issues, there are clearly defined cultural norms regarding the power women wield over household matters among ethnic groups and social classes' (ibid.: 623).

The most significant lesson we might draw from the above is that formal educational levels in themselves are inadequate indicators of both women's capacity to protect themselves from violence and men's attitude towards it. While education is a necessary condition of empowerment, it is not sufficient. Educated women do not necessarily possess the means of deflecting violence within the household and hence—given the intrinsic connection between the home and the world—continue to be subject to the violence of public spaces. What is required is not simply a diploma or a degree, but specific understanding (by women) of their rights as humans and citizens.

V. THE HOME AND THE WORLD: WOMEN AND WORK

The world of work is of great significance when we seek to explore both the contexts and causes of violence against women in public places. We need, first, to begin with certain ideas regarding work itself. Particularly, the idea of 'men's work' and 'women's work' has been important in the structuring relationships between men and women. Of course, what gets defined as 'women's work' is itself the consequence of a number of historical and social factors. So, for example, in the Kumaon Himalayan region of northwest India, the identification of 'harvesting fuel, fodder, roots, herbs and berries' (Gururani 2002: 235) as women's work has much to do with the long history of male out-migration from the region which led to a 'process in which the burden of livelihood... came slowly but surely to rest on women' (ibid.: 235). It is interesting to note the ways in which the gendering process operates in those contexts where both men and women work. So, in the Kumaon Himalayas, when men do go to the forest to collect firewood or other produce, their representation of this activity is couched in the ideals of dominant masculinity. So, men speak of how they were able to bring back 'in one night' what it took women six months to collect. Hence, 'men's trips to the forest were an assertion of their strength and ability, which helped to reinscribe patriarchal relations of power and inequality' (ibid.: 239).

Recent changes in social and economic spheres—including 'globalisation'—have led to important developments in urban contexts. In particular, this relates to the significant increases in the demand for workers in new as well older professions—some which were historically women-centred, and some not—that has led to greater visibility of women in public spaces. So, there has been a visible increase in the number of women workers in industries such as media and communication, new technologies (including call-centre work), service industries (such as bar-hostesses work and check-out operators), travel and hospitality, and banking and insurance. The increase has been cumulative rather than sudden. So, writing in the mid-1990s, one observer pointed out:

The last decade has seen a systematic rise in the employment of women in the banking and finance sector. The result of a multiplicity of factors, including: profound social changes taking place in India regarding women's education and employment; the changing policies of management, especially after the nationalization and reorganization of the LIC and of

major banks; the policies of the Indian government; international changes in banking and finance and, not least, the technological changes being effected in the industry.

[...]

These all have a specific impact on women employees, who are being recruited in large numbers in the banking and finance sector, mainly in the clerical category. Women employees are increasingly looking at their work in terms of career prospects and are keen on learning new skills and advancing in their careers, despite severe limitations. They are organizing themselves into unions and separate women's caucuses within and outside unions. (Gothoskar 1995: 174)

So, there is increasing visibility of (non-elite) women in public work spaces. However, notwithstanding the above, it is important to remember that although economic growth in India has created greater employment opportunities for women, it nowhere—at least in the formal sector of the cities—matches the rate of increase of male employment. 'In the era of globalisation', a recent report on urbanisation and women's employment points out, 'it has become commonplace to argue that trade openness in particular generates processes that encourage the increased employment of women' (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2007: 1). However, as Chandrasekhar and Ghosh go on to suggest, 'rather than the much cited' sectors such as information technology and finance, 'the greatest labour market dynamism has been evident in the realm of domestic labour' (p. 5).

Hence the problem of sexual harassment is a problem that, though it affects white-collar women workers, has significant consequences for poorer women. For, '92 per cent of working women are in the informal, unorganised sector, where they don't get any statutory protection' (Patel 2007: 109). Keeping in mind this caveat, we need to take account of the fact that the increasing visibility of women in the *public* workplace attracts a male hostility in terms of the changing nature of popularly held opinions regarding the 'proper' spaces of men and women. The irony is that in keeping with the economic demands of globalisation—where increasing consumerist aspirations require an additional earning member in the family—the 'working wife' is a common male expectation, but she also raises male anxieties.

There is a further aspect to consider with regard to the place of women in service and hospitality industries. In a deeply hierarchical society such as ours, the providers of services that enhance bodily comfort have traditionally enjoyed a very low status. This attitude finds a place among the processes of the contemporary era. So, it is not uncommon for, say, air hostesses and those who work in bars, to face the double jeopardy of male attitudes towards women in public places *and* traditional attitudes towards service providers. Such women are also, thanks in no small measure to the culture of Indian cinema, imagined as 'loose' women who do not mind—if not welcome—male attention. For, the argument goes, by both their demeanour and dress—'friendliness' and western wear—they lack the signs of respectability and modesty that characterise the 'traditional' Indian woman. Men's engagement with women in such professions seems to carry the baggage of a relatively recent fascination with western (white) women, a fascination that is structured in equal parts through desire and fear. In cinematic terms, this fascination may be thought of through the screen persona of Helen, Bollywood's Anglo-Indian 'vamp' and, before that, the Australian-born actor Mary Evans, famous for her role as Fearless Nadia in a number of films made in the 1930s and 1940s (Thomas 2005). Contemporary forces of globalisation and their impact on women's employment are, then, the site of a complex set of male responses that hover between desire, anxiety and hostility.

VI. SPACES OF LEISURE AND CONSUMPTION

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). The offer of 'safety' seeks to guard women's 'reputation', and hence brings with it, among other restrictions, a 'desexualised version of public visibility (ibid.). It is desexualised in the sense that women—unlike men—are prohibited from public expressions of sexuality. The choice is clear-cut: women should be safe in public spaces, but this also entails 'proper' conduct on their part.

It is in this regard that we need to consider some newer contexts that relate to women's access to public spaces and masculine reactions to it.

The rise of a new consumer culture that includes a larger section of the population than before has entailed the production of both new spaces as well as new identities. In terms of the former, they include new spaces of residence, leisure and shopping, and with regard to the latter, the relatively recent figure of the 'consuming woman'. The hectic construction activity that relates to gated residential communities and shopping malls are important to consider in this context. An extraordinary range of large and small cities across the country—with equally mind-boggling inventory of land area under construction, or completed—constitute sites of such activity. So, the Lucknow-based Sahara corporation has plans for the 'world's largest chain of well-planned self sufficient high quality townships across 217 cities in the country' (Ahmedabad: 104 acres; Coimbatore, Kerala: 103 acres; Lucknow: 200 acres); it has already constructed the Amby Valley township near the city of Pune in Maharashtra on 10,000 acres which is described as 'independent India's first planned, self contained, aspirational city, remarkable for its unsurpassed grandeur and plush signature features'. In the Rajasthan township of Bhiwadi, some 60 kilometres from Delhi, no less than eleven real estate companies are reported to have launched *gated* residential projects in different price ranges, hoping to cash in on the proposed development of a number of 'Export Processing Zones' and 'Special Economic Zones' by large corporations such as Reliance and Omaxe.² The Omaxe group has residential projects in twenty-two cities across nine states in north and central India. These include the Omaxe Riviera (Rudrapur, Uttarakhand) and Omaxe Park Woods in Baddi (Himachal Pradesh), a township that is 'home to some of the top industries like Nicolas Piramal, Bajaj Consumer Care, Ranbaxy, Dr. REDDY'S Lab, Torrent Pharmaceuticals, TVS Motors, Colgate Palmolive, Dabur India, Cipla, Cadbury's, Wipro, Wockhardt, Procter & Gamble, Marc Enterprises etc.'³ The Omaxe Heights in Lucknow offers an 'in-house club with swimming pool and wave pool, tennis court, basketball court, banquet/community hall, squash court, steam room, jacuzzi, gymnasium and television lounge'.

While the numbers of operational shopping malls in India are not comparable to North America, it is not for want of local ambitions. So, before the economic downturn of the past few years, retail operators and mall entrepreneurs had predicted there would be around 700 malls in India by end of 2010 (Goswami 2010). At present, there are 172 malls already operating in India that 'offer 52 million square feet of space' (ibid.: 12), and by the first quarter of 2011, this number is expected to rise to 350. At present, North India has seventy-nine malls, western India fifty-six, the eastern region sixteen, and south India twenty-one. South India is expected to treble the number of malls (to seventy-two) by this time, registering the fastest rate of growth. The National Capital Region has the most number of malls in the northern region, with Gurgaon home to eleven (compared to Jaipur's five and Lucknow's three).

The promises of spatial modernity held out by gated communities and malls have important consequences for our thinking on the relationship between space and gender. A significant aspect of the spatial narrative of consumerism is the concurrent one of the 'consuming woman'. And, while the consuming woman is usually imagined as a middle-class figure, the aspiration to be one is not limited to the traditional middle classes. Indeed, for many younger women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the idea of being 'middle class' (which itself is a complex notion in the Indian context) is tightly bound up with being able to take part in the

² www.indiarealitynews.com. Last accessed 15 August 2009.

³ www.omaxe.com. Last accessed 11 July 2009.

new consumerism (see, for example, SWSJU 2010). Further, the consuming woman is an object of great interest and research among marketing and advertising companies (Srivastava 2007).

The most significant social characteristic of the new spaces of consumerism is their invitation to *all* consumers to participate equally in the *public* life of such spaces. A ‘consumerist democracy’ is the key to both profitability and an implicit justification for an activity that, historically, has been looked at with suspicion. However, it is also the site for male anxiety regarding the consuming woman. For, the consuming woman is one who spends upon herself, rather than necessarily furthering the interests and welfare of the family (and particularly the males among them). ‘Professional women’, as Tanika Sarkar points out, now ‘have access to unprecedented self-reliance, [but] even housewives, faced with the ad culture and the shopping arcades, seek out things that are specially meant for themselves’ (Sarkar 1995: 212–13). Contemporary economic and cultural changes pose an interesting challenge to masculine notions of the self: consumption is a good thing and none should be excluded, but what about the consuming woman who appears to ‘spend like a man’? So, at the present time, the idea of the ‘public woman’ (viewed with suspicion if we recall the earlier discussion on the masculinised public sphere) has become entwined with that of the consuming woman.

In some instances, the potential ‘threat’ of the consuming public woman is resolved through the notion of the traditional-modern woman, where the woman as consumer is, nevertheless, positioned (or positions herself) as being able to strike a ‘balance’ between her public activities and her ‘responsibilities’ towards the home. Hence, the modern woman can, when required, come back to being a good housewife. In other cases, certain spaces such as gated communities are able, through strict control over space, to produce a ‘safe’ realm for women. However, given the male dominated nature of the Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) of the gated communities that are responsible for safety and ‘security’, the rules of protection referred to in the opening paragraph of this section apply. Also, while in gated communities women residents are afforded ‘protection’, the same may not apply to the female domestic workers who serve the households: both within the compound and between the spaces of their homes and the gated community, female domestic workers may be subject to harassment.

The development of privatised ‘public spaces’ such as gated communities and shopping malls are often looked upon with favour in as much as they are positioned alongside the ‘dangers’ of the street and the bazaar. And, further, gated residential enclaves work towards producing a sense of the public through organising a variety of activities—religious and non-religious—that imitate the activities of the street. What makes possible the ersatz pell-mell of the street within the gated enclave is the directed circulation of the discourse of consumerist choice and intent that is, in fact, *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, intensely engaged with—that ‘public’ woman of the gated community can be both the guardians of tradition *and* take part in the sexualised presentations of the self; the morning after elaborately dressed women have performed the rituals of *Karva-Chauth* (to ensure their husbands’ well-being), they pace the condominium grounds on their exercise rounds dressed in skin-hugging clothing. And, unlike the constraint placed on women at street celebrations of the spring festival of *Holi* (that can also involve a sexual economy of ‘fun’ [Cohen 1995]), at corporate-sponsored *Holi melas* (fairs) in many gated communities, men *and* women dance together to Bollywood songs on an open-air stage. The broader context of this is, as already suggested, 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 appear to 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 manageably hybrid modernity—reformulates the ‘fraternal social contract’ (Pateman 1989) 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.

There is an additional issue connected with the making of such ‘public’ spaces: they tend to promote the ideas of a Hinduised public sphere. The public acts that simulate the street are almost exclusively in the nature of a Hindu world of beliefs and rituals. Here, masculinity, religion and the public sphere converge.

However, more significantly, it is clear that a very large number of women who wish to take part in the processes of contemporary modernity—including consumerism—do not have access to the ‘safety’ of the gated community. Their everyday lives as public women—as workers, commuters, leisure seekers, shoppers, etc.—unfold in places where they are open to male hostilities that target the putative threat of the public-consuming woman. It is the park, the bus stand, the street, the footpath, and the tourist monument that more properly needs to be ‘secured’. However, safety and security can not, simultaneously, be ‘offered’ to women as part of the bargain of ‘protection’. Finally, in this context, it is also inadequate to assume that what is needed are better urban planning visions in order to design spaces where women will not face the dangers of violence. For, bricks and mortar do not prevent violence against women, people and their attitudes do (see also Vishwanath and Tandon-Mehrotra 2007). Delhi’s public spaces—where crowds gather to watch rather than intervene—provide adequate evidence of this. This way of casting the issue allows us to remember that while most women face potential violence in the masculinised public sphere, the level and frequency of the threat nevertheless varies according to an individual’s social standing. Some women are more able than others to deflect menace; instead of catching a bus, they can go by private transport.

VII. ‘CUSTOM’, GLOBALISATION AND THE MASCULINISED PUBLIC SPHERE

A recurrent feature in the Indian context is the perceived contest between ‘indigenous traditions’ and ‘foreign modernity’. This is a particularly important context with respect to a variety of debates—cultural, political, legislative, etc.—that relate to ‘women’s issues’. A significant way in which this debate unfolds is through casting women as the bearers of ‘local traditions’. And, since traditions are generally seen to be fixed, the argument usually runs that in order to protect ‘our’ traditions from ‘foreign’ influence ‘our’ women must be also be shielded from change. In certain countries within the region (particularly in South Asia), this was a common theme in colonial debates on women’s issues (Chatterjee 1993). The ‘local tradition versus foreign modernity’ debate plays an important role in the making of masculinised public spheres as well in violence against women within these spheres.

Debates about ‘our traditions’ (and how to protect them) often sit alongside expressions of ethno-nationalism based on the forging of a homogeneous cultural identity. That is to say, cultural identities are sought to be defined in terms of a consensus that primarily derives from a power hierarchy where men’s interests are placed above those of women as a group. Here, the ‘honour’ of the community becomes coeval with that of men, and while both men and women might be punished for disobeying honour codes, it is women who bear the greatest burden of upholding community honour. The ‘khap panchayats’ provide a particularly gory example in this regard.

Expressions of ethnic nationalism—expressed through notions of honour, shame, valour, etc.—are commonly based upon appeals to mythic and masculinised histories. In this mythic past, men and women—and hence the society of which they were a part—lived harmoniously since, the argument goes, they followed the rules of tradition and each knew his/her organic relation to the other; each acted in a way that was ‘proper’ to it, biological imperatives having solidified into social norms to produce a well-ordered social machinery. According to such narratives, social dysfunction comes about as a result of different genders (and, in particular, women) not knowing their pre-ordained roles. Hence, in these ways the politics of the household that oversees the quotidian relationships between genders becomes linked with national-level formulations of gender politics. The domestic, then, both draws upon and contributes to broader debates about gender and its manifestations. Ethno-nationalist movements and their gender politics are, therefore, significant sites of discourses on gender

power. For example, ethno-nationalist movements frequently demand the implementation of ‘customary’ laws that have particularly deleterious effects on the position of women in society. Such movements also contain within them both seeds and justifications of violence against women—frequently organised around notions of honour and shame—as well as non-dominant ethnic groupings.

The combination of shared identities formed through religion and cultures of masculinity is a prevalent feature of Indian society. Religious solidarities are often mobilised through appeals to a shared masculinity. Here, rituals, both religious and secular, play a crucial role as storehouses of masculine cultures. There are specific connections between globalisation, religion, religious violence and gender norms that need to be understood. For example, ‘globalisation’ is often seen as a threat to existing religious values, leading, in turn, to stricter reinforcement of putatively religious rules that particularly affect women’s rights as equal citizens. Further, desires for a pure community of believers may lead to textual understanding of belief, and subsequent discrimination against women (as well as religious minorities).

In some instances, an attempt to reinforce imagined religious norms also form the basis of restrictions upon women in public spaces. I have deliberately used the word ‘imagined’ in order to emphasise the frequent application of justifications based upon ‘religious values’ to justify gendered power. Consider, for example, attempts by members of the religious Right to both disrupt Valentine Day celebrations, as well as publicly humiliate young people who take part in them. Here, ‘Indian values’ and ‘Hindu values’ become intertwined to be represented as one, and particularly the women who take part in Valentine’s Day activities come to be regarded as transgressing both national and religious values. Implicitly, the guardians of such putative national and religious cultures are men; once again, a masculinised public sphere.

Ethno-nationalism and the idea that ‘ethnicity’ is a fixed essence can reinforce gender power through the emphasis on the *stability* of identity. That is to say, ethnic identities tend to be built around the idea that what is typical of a particular group is so because of certain behaviours that can be expected of its men and women, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, etc. And that the identity of a group crucially depends on its members following its cultural rules which are usually understood to have been passed down from time immemorial. The idea that ethnic identities are fixed and have been so ‘from time immemorial’ is, as a great deal of scholarship has pointed out, simply false. All identities are constantly in the process of change and flux and, in as much as ethnicities are understood to be fixed and certain behaviours are expected of women and men (lest ‘time-honoured’ cultural rules be violated), they are part of the system of maintaining certain power hierarchies, including those of gender. When men come to be defined as possessing certain qualities, women too are attributed their own ‘essence’ and deviations from these become liable to punishment.

‘Custom’ often comes into play in situations of intense change. So, the rapid urbanisation taking place in India has pointed to a significant dimension of gender politics. In January 2009, newspapers reported that a gang of ten young men had raped a young woman in the Delhi National Capital Region. Press reports indicated that the men had come upon their victim as she sat in a relatively isolated spot with a man, perhaps her boyfriend. The gang had been returning from a match-winning performance in a cricket tournament. This is how the *Hindustan Times* newspaper reported the issue:

With malls and university campuses crawling closer to the villages at a steady pace, sometimes even entering them, boundary walls can no longer prevent some common spaces where the villagers and the city residents meet. [A student at one such institute of higher education noted that] ‘We have studied in co-ed institutions from the beginning and being friends with a girl is not uncommon. But it is an issue in these villages. If I go out with a girl, local boys make it a point to harass us’.

However, the report went on to say, ‘women from the village [from where the perpetrators are reported to have come from] blame it on city girls. “In our village, the women cover themselves up. Our girls do not make boy

friends. City girls come to lonely stretches around the villages and indulge in obscene acts. Late night culture of the city has spoiled the girls”, said Asarfi Devi, an octogenarian from the village’. There is a wider context to this than the somewhat simplistic ‘modern city person’ vs. the ‘backward villager’ angle. As one villager pointed out, ‘part of the reason was also the effort to keep villagers out. “Residents want boundary walls to keep out villagers. Are villagers untouchables? If you respect the villagers, they will respect you”’.

VIII. MASCULINITIES AND THE VIRTUAL PUBLIC SPACE: THE MEDIA SPHERE

The media should also be considered a virtual public sphere that contributes to attitudes and behaviours towards women in physical public spheres. We might frame this discussion in terms of the symbolic violence that the media public sphere may inflict upon women.

In India, media images of women are most frequently inspired by debates between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Hence, as one observer points out, ‘perhaps the most important role that television is playing at present is the conflation of television programming with new, globally constructed versions of “modernity” and the changing dimension of the role of community in contemporary civil society. And women are the focal point of both these changes’ (Gupta 2000: 61). A key question in media representations and debates is the following: How modern should the non-European woman be and yet maintain her ‘local’ identity? In other words, the non-western woman (and, this is usually assumed to be a monolithic category) is implicitly assumed to be the bearer of ‘tradition’, such that the most crucial battles over the maintenance of tradition in the face of perceived attacks upon it by ‘external’ forces are fought around representations of women. A contemporary representation of women within this context concerns that of the ‘new woman’ (Birch et al. 2001: 135). The ‘modern woman’ can most be found in ‘in the pages of glossy magazines which cater to the emerging and relatively prosperous urban middle and upper-middle classes’ (ibid.), as well as in television advertising and regular programming. As Sunder Rajan (1993) points out, the new woman is usually portrayed as ‘attractive, educated, hard-working, and socially aware’ (p. 131). The modern woman is also represented as independent in the decisions she makes, as well as ambitious and seeking a career path for herself. And, being a working woman, she is also a consumer. From jewellery advertising to those that promote household goods, the modern woman is ubiquitous.

While the selling of products is a crucial reason for the presence of the modern woman in advertising, the purely commercial aspect is inadequate for an understanding of the changing nature of gender representations in the media. ‘The representation of the new woman’, it has been suggested, ‘are also a way of reformulating masculinist ideologies which domesticate political assertions for equality by women’ (Birch et al., 2001: 137). For, the most significant aspect of such representations is that the woman’s primary role is defined as the self-sacrificing mother and the nurturer of the family. Hence, in an advertisement for a brand of contraceptive pills in an Indian magazine, a woman is the key figure. However, it is what she says that is interesting: ‘I am mindful of all the needs of my family, no matter how small’.⁴ Hence, simultaneously as female desire is foregrounded—through de-linking sex from reproduction—the act of using contraception is represented as responsible behaviour towards the family: one must not place a burden upon the family’s resources through having more children. The possibilities of female desire are thus domesticated through pointing to her ‘primary’ role.

IX. CONCLUSION

A significant body of theorisation has tended to proceed from the perspective that violence towards women occurs as a *consequence* of social disorganisation. However, as another strand of scholarship has pointed out, violence towards women—whether in public or private spaces—can be better understood as an attempt to *maintain* the existing structures of gender power, rather than a breakdown in the social order. Hence, feminists increasingly suggest that ‘we need to see violence as bound up with the very constitution of cultural forms’

⁴ An advertisement for an oral contraceptive in *Meri Saheli* magazine, January 1999.

(Cribb and Barnett 1999: 51). We may, similarly, position our discussion about violence, women, masculinity and public spaces within this framework: it acts as an attempt to maintain existing structures of power in a time of change.

Second, the public and the private are not un-connected spheres, and the ways in which women are treated in either of them forms a mutually reinforcing process. So, if a judge says that though rape is a crime, ‘the woman may have acted or behaved in a manner so as to incite the man’, and discourses within the household reiterate the perspective that women must not ‘loiter’ in public spaces, then these combine to produce discourses about women in public spaces and the modes of behaviour ‘proper’ to them.

Finally, there is the issue of ‘cultural values’: many women may not like to assert their autonomy lest this be seen as ‘disturbing social codes and stepping outside the bounds of the cultural definitions of femininity. Therefore, such cultural stereotypes may result in reluctance by women to question traditional values’ (ibid.: 61) that lead to violence against women in public spaces. The issue is to demystify ‘our’ culture so that that it is not treated as the repository of all that is good. Rather, the point is to see it as a contested field where different positions of power seek to normalise asymmetries as natural and inevitable. And, that cultures are not stable and fixed and, therefore, are open to change.

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