

A City of Men?

An Ethnographic Enquiry into Cultures of Youth Masculinities in Urban India

Shannon Philip

Lady Margaret Hall

Oxford Department of International Development

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Name: SHANNON PHILIP

Candidate number: 676269

College: LADY MARGARET HALL

Supervisor: NANDINI GOOPTU and
MARCUS BANKS

Title: A CITY OF MEN? AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ENQUIRY INTO CULTURES OF YOUTH
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Abstract

A City of Men?

An Ethnographic Enquiry into Cultures of Youth Masculinities in Urban India

The gender order in urban India is changing rapidly. Several economic, political and sociocultural shifts have brought with them new opportunities and challenges for Indian men and women. This thesis attempts to understand some of these social and cultural changes from the perspective of a group of affluent young men in Delhi. By ethnographically studying young men and their masculinities in urban public spaces of leisure and consumption, this thesis explores some of their relatively new practices of consumption and embodied performances of gender, as well as its consequences on gendering a city space.

Through focusing on newly commodified spaces like gyms, shopping malls, night clubs, bars, metro trains and cruising parks in Delhi, I argue that a politics of space, age, gender and class come together to mark men's identities, bodies as well as urban spaces, creating forms of belonging and exclusions in a neoliberal India. Within this context, I explore how ideas of what it means to be a young man are changing in a consumerist India and how this in turn shapes young men's relationships with other men, women, families and changing city spaces.

Using ethnographic data collected over fourteen months of fieldwork in Delhi, along with visual and cultural analysis, this thesis lays bare the layers of masculine performances and reveals the everyday attempts at embedding and reproducing a heterosexist patriarchal social order under the guise of a 'new Indian man' and his 'new' India. In the process, I critically but empathetically explore the gendered hierarchies and anxieties that emerge in contemporary India and its consequences on various bodies and city spaces. The chief arguments are presented in five empirical chapters: 1) A 'New' Indian Man, 2) A Masculine Body, 3) Desexing a Masculine Body, 4) A Smart and Masculine City, and 5) A Safe/Unsafe City.

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Note on Terms and Translations:

Throughout this thesis there are terms used in Hindi by my research informants which I have translated in what I understand to be the most apposite way of interpreting them within their spoken context. I have provided the actual Hindi term used by informants to allow readers familiar with Hindi to make their own interpretations of the words.

Similarly, when Hindi phrases and terms are used from film songs and film scenes in the thesis, they are also translated into English on my judgment of the most appropriate meaning of such terms within the context of their filmic meaning. Once again, I have provided the exact terms used in the films to allow Hindi speakers to see how I have reached my translations.

Hindi swearwords and jokes frequently used by my informants are also provided in their exact usage. But they are also used analytically in the thesis to understand them as gendered speech acts which have multiple meanings and gendered significance. In these cases I have provided an English translation in what I judge to be the most apt use and meaning of the terms.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Paradox

“At 5:15pm, I was born”

“And at 5:16pm my father said... “My son will be an engineer”

“What we wanted to become, no one asked us only...”

These are the opening lines of three college going Indian men in a highly successful Bollywood film called ‘3 Idiots’ (Hirani, 2009). These lines touch on some of the core dynamics shaping young masculinities in contemporary India. In this scene, the young men discuss with each other the kinds of lives their families envisage for them and lament the fact that they are never consulted. For the families in the clip, there is a precise and a set trajectory that the lives of sons are expected to take: the proud Indian father, thrilled to have a new male heir, declares and decides within a minute of the child’s birth, that he will go on to have a respectable life as an engineer. This scene is depicted in black and white with a comedic and melancholic tune to suggest the conventional and boring nature of such familial imaginations. The infant is then shown as growing up into an obedient engineer son with well-oiled and combed hair, still depicted in black and white, and is shown as going on to have an arranged marriage with a woman that his family chooses for him.

In the film, this opening scene is then contrasted with what young men want for themselves. After explaining that no one asked them what they wanted in their lives, a burst of colour and music in the film depicts a life full of fun, mischief and freedom that young men desire for themselves. This is a world of parties, dancing, laughter, fashion, shopping malls, clubs, music, women, sex and a general sense of being ‘free’. It is a life which is in stark contrast to the ‘old’ expectations of parents. The three young men are shown wearing vibrant t-shirts, with stylish cropped haircuts, muscular arms, carrying modern gadgets, exploring various places on their bikes and in cars, and living a life full of jubilation with a ‘new’ attitude. The men in the film present this as a ‘modern’ way of life which is desirable and categorically a better way of living. Their central message in the film is to encourage all young men to really ‘live’ and ‘enjoy’ this new life rather than ‘rush’ through life like their parents allegedly did.

For the many young men I met and worked with during my fieldwork in Delhi, this film holds a special place and was often cited as an ‘inspiration’. The film shows on-screen many of the aspirations, constraints, hopes and challenges that they as young middle-class Indian men experience in their everyday lives in a rapidly changing context. For one young informant, Raj, who lived at home with his parents in Delhi, enjoying this new life meant going on dates with women, engaging in sexual activity before marriage, shopping and wearing fashionable clothes, going to dance clubs and parties, enjoying weekends bowling or hanging out in the many cafes and bars mushrooming around Delhi, and generally having a more ‘open’ approach to life. He explained to me “Times have changed, we are like the three idiots, doing our own *masti* (fun), living our life freely”. However such participation in a ‘modern’ life is in tension with the social demands and obligations put on young men like Raj by their families, resulting often in a charged and paradoxical social context where young men try to balance different social, moral and cultural worlds to lead lives which they think are meaningful.

As the opening scene of *3 Idiots* shows, young men’s displeasure at ‘not being asked’ about their lives does not depict their defeatist acceptance of their situation. Rather it points to where the colourful story of their lives ought to begin. The beauty of this film, and its special place for the young men, is precisely because the narrative of the film places the stories and experiences of young men at the centre of these big shifts taking place in contemporary India and presents their case without any judgment but rather always with empathy, humour and style. In many ways, the film legitimises young men’s struggles and desires for a ‘free’ life and creates a space where their new ideas of the self and the world are respected and accepted. As the opening scenes of the film shows, young men usurp the idea of being labeled an ‘idiot’ by families and societies, to then turn it on its head and reclaim being an ‘idiot’ as a site where they can demonstrate agency, gain respect and live the lives they wish to lead.

Similarly, this thesis too attempts to delve into the lives of young men to understand some of the gendered, generational and class based changes taking place in their sociocultural contexts from the perspectives of the young men themselves. The thesis puts the stories of young men and their various social anxieties, hopes and strategies in the centre of the narrative. By taking seriously what young men

think of as being important to them in India today, the aim of the thesis is to create an empathetic yet critical analysis of the contemporary lives of young men and their engagement with broader sociocultural and economic shifts taking place in India. Understanding their context, as well as their everyday realities, allows us to explore how young men negotiate their social and moral worlds to lead agentic and meaningful lives within their social and cultural constraints and to explore some of the profound consequences this has for contemporary Indian society.

This enquiry is timely and important in the Indian context particularly because India continues to change rapidly and unevenly, placing Indian youth in constant encounters between 'new' moral worlds, value systems and lifestyles along with 'older' ideals. Exploring how young men manage their lives in the face of this constant flux, helps us understand how processes of globalisation itself are shaping contemporary Indian society as well as how social relations in India are evolving. In particular for young men, this balancing act requires careful strategies, consumption and bodily practices which shape the way they relate to themselves as gendered subjects and raises fundamental questions about what being a 'man' means in a changing India for them. Similarly, questions arise about how the influx of new globalised images and discourses, as seen in the opening clip from *3 Idiots*, alters the relationships, if at all, of young Indian men with their bodies, sexualities and their embodied gender practices.

Exploring these questions have in turn important consequences for understanding how gendered relationships amongst groups of young men and between young men and women are also shifting in India. From a feminist perspective, such an understanding of the shifts in the gender order in India provides crucial insight into exploring possibilities and limitations of various efforts for gendered equality within the local patriarchal context. Similarly, the changes on the physical landscape of urban India as well as the changing imaginations around a 'developing' and 'modern' nation raises important questions about how ideas of citizenship and belonging are shifting in the country. Hence this enquiry attempts to explore several important questions about contemporary Indian society and about the lives of young Indian men and their masculinities.

A 'New' India

The emergence of a 'new' India provides the empirical context through which the shifts in Indian masculinities can be explored. India's move towards economic liberalisation initiated in the 1980's and fully embraced by 1991 marks an important shift in its post-colonial trajectory. This process of economic liberalisation opened up Indian markets to global capital and consumerism and radically began to shape the politics of space, gender and class (Fernandes 2006, Anjaria and McFarlane 2011). Over the years it has increased economic inequality in India, given rise to a strong and consuming middle class and has contributed to a urban bias for wealth accumulation and employment opportunities (Basole 2014, Corbridge, Harris and Jeffrey, 2013). Through liberalisation the Indian state itself has moved away from a developmentalist and socialist agenda to a consumerist idea of the nation (Mazzarella 2004, 17).

Within this paradigm shift, the Indian state, public media and the private sector, collectively declare the move as the birth of a 'new' India, and with it the emergence of 'new' Indians who are neoliberal enterprising subjects, allegedly full of individualised passion and energy, with new aspirations, spaces and imaginaries (Gooptu 2009, 2013). The process of making this 'new' India is linked to the neoliberal project of creating a 'new way of the world' wherein attempts are made at embedding a culture of competitive, professionalised and commoditised management of the self (Dardot and Laval 2013). In this process, there is a concerted effort to try to justify these neoliberal shifts by claiming a moral and social superiority and presenting these socioeconomic changes as benevolent and 'empowering' (Gooptu 2013). In this context, the 'newness' of 'new' India refers to a process of production of a distinct social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of India's economic liberalisation (Fernandes 2006). Hence for this thesis, I define 'new' India as a project of attempting to reconfigure imaginaries, spaces and citizenship in line with particular ideas of a neoliberal 'modernity' to create 'modern' but uniquely 'Indian' subjects.

In demographic terms, these shifts have most visibly affected the lives of young people in India (Lukose 2009, Nisbett 2009). The category of 'youth' in particular has been framed as an 'untapped

potential' to establish the project of building 'new' India by governments, policy makers and private sector investors (Williams-Ørberg 2008, Matthew 2017). India is favourably positioned within this narrative against other Asian countries such as China for having the worlds largest demographic of young people and hence framing the nation itself as a 'young nation' poised for change (Kaur & Hansen 2016, 268). Such specific social and local constructions around 'youth' have led scholars to avoid using universal definitions of 'youth' but rather focus on contextually derived understandings of social forces that shape and create 'youth' (Nayak and Kebily 2008) Hence for this thesis I define 'youth' through their social relationships of dependency on families in economic, social and cultural terms, and their framing as potential agents of economic growth in a 'new' India. In this context, an understanding of the dynamic relationship among youth, consumption and neoliberal expansionism requires an interrogation of the conditions under which young people engage with new identities and spaces of consumption and their relationship to these processes (Lukose 2009).

These attempts to 'make' a 'new' Indian and its corresponding subjectivities have largely been an urban phenomena. The urban bias of this process has seen massive investments being made in consumer advertising, the building of thousands of shopping malls and the creation of new commodified public spaces, backed by a set of regulatory changes by the state which encourages private-public partnerships and commercially oriented 'development' projects in Indian cities (Srivastava 2014). In this process, scholars have argued that consumption begins to stand in for development and visible signs of wealth become new symbols of national progress (Upadhaya 2008). Similarly in spatial terms, Dupont (2008, 2011) explains that the 'making' of this 'new' India is made synonymous with projects of commodifying and gentrifying urban spaces. She argues that in a city like Delhi, the attempts at reconfiguring space can be seen through four central spatial categories of residential, commercial, educational and recreational spaces which are getting commodified (ibid).

The very emergence of designated 'recreational' spaces and ideas of consumerist 'leisure' in India are an important tool in trying to establish a new urban social order, along with a new vision of life and a commodified way of living (Brosius 2010). As scholars have argued, for urban young people in

particular, participation and imaginaries around such urban leisure and access to various recently mushrooming sites like gyms, cafes, bars, clubs or malls now structures what a 'good life' means for them as individuals and allows them to tangibly experience a 'changing' India (Brosius 2010, Lukose 2009). The new lifestyles advertised in and through these spaces, as well as popular images in the media which are produced through the market, represent specific modes of living, fashion and types of consumer goods that become definitive of being 'middle class' and 'young' (Liechty 2003).

In this context, it is not that the realms of work or education are no longer important for youth, rather in addition, there is a new and overwhelming emphasis on 'leisure' in a 'new' India. Partaking in such urban leisure is a source of pride which signifies a 'world-class' self which is no longer part of a 'third world' but rather belongs to a 'world-class' nation (Brosius 2010, Mankekar 2000). As Athique and Hill (2009) point out, in a country like India where mass consumption had been actively disparaged for several decades in the name of social cohesion, and where it remains out of the reach of the majority, the impact of such changes to the urban leisure architecture and ideas of a 'good life' have very particular and profound connotations wherein urban space is greatly reorganised, and around it numerous people have to reorganise their lives too. It is hence through this important empirical lens of 'leisure' and changes in the 'urban leisure architecture' that I explore young men's sense of belonging and self in a 'new' India.

The mediascape and the broader visual field is an important part of manufacturing this imagined 'new' India, as well as a product of it. The visual space is largely 'cleansed' from the problems and 'backwardness' of 'old' India, along with its conventional ways of thinking and doing things (Kaur 2012). An attempt is made to 'leave behind' that which does not fit in with the imaginary of a prosperous, techno-friendly nation of consumerism and fun. As we see in the opening scenes of the film *3 Idiots*, the 'new' nation and the 'new' young men of this nation celebrate and enjoy a 'new' life and attempt to leave behind the 'old'. Kaur and Blom Hansen (2015, 5) explain this as 'new' India's spectacular arrival onto the world stage through an "extensive and never-ending mediatised projection of India's re-formed self at events that command the global gaze, as well as below-the-radar

transformations ranging from conspicuous patterns of consumption to forms of leisure and entertainment that appear in and transform everyday life”. Within this empirical context, the images of consumption and plenitude that currently dominate the visual sphere try to establish middle class masculinities as the norm (Lukose, 2009; Srivastava, 2007). Building on these idea of ‘New India’, Ritty Lukose (2009) uses anthropological understandings of citizenship to explain how gendered subjectivities are constructed within these commodified logics in a ‘new’ India. For Lukose (2009), the socially celebrated forms of youth masculinities and femininities are rooted in ideas of liberalisation and attempt to make exclusionary claims towards other masculinities and femininities. Hence in the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006) of a ‘new’ India, the neoliberal context seeks to create a classed imagination of the nation-state and its citizens.

In this process, the city is pictured and understood primarily through market-led imaginations and hence is depicted to be exclusively for the middle classes and the wealthy, with no positive discourses about slums, slum dwellers or the working poor (Baviskar 2006). Similarly in the dominant political rhetoric, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also outlined his vision for building ‘new India’ to fulfil “the dreams of 65% of the population who are under-35 youths in India” and by offering the poor an “opportunity to do something instead of seeking handouts” (Matthew 2017). In this narrative, the youth are the custodians of a ‘new’ India and the poor are neatly framed as poor for a lack of their own actions which can be changed through getting them to ‘do things’ rather than providing ‘handouts’.

In Partha Chatterjee’s (2004) influential essay titled “Are Indian Cities Becoming Bourgeois At Last?”, he traces the history of how such tendencies for segregation have long constituted a middle class identity in India but become more formalised through capital intensive shifts in post-liberalisation India as well as the intensification of the circulation of new images of global cities, new leisure and consumption practices as well as far greater access to international travel. In this context, the slum in particular has long been a dominating feature of the urban condition in India as a result of the imbalance between demands for cheap labour and a lack of affordable housing (Harris 2011). However the process of neoliberal expansionism in ‘new’ India, place the middle classes in an ‘intimate but

traumatic' relationship with the urban slum and its residents because of the new imaginations about the 'world-class' city that are emerging (Athique and Hill 2009). As a response, the middle classes try to escape and distance themselves from slums and their dwellers through building large gated residential properties (Datta 2016b, Waldorp, 2004), pay and use roads and urban infrastructure (Ghertner, 2011) as well as various exclusive spaces of leisure and consumption (Brosius 2010). In the context of such shifts on the urban landscape, important questions arise about who belongs in which places of the city and whose city are we talking about in the first place.

This relationship between the middle classes and inequality has empirical connections with masculinities too. As Jeffrey (2010) has argued, India's economic expansionism has had an uneven effect on various groups of men wherein young educated but unemployed middle class men face extended youths and low employment opportunities which instills in them ideas of 'uselessness' and 'worthlessness'. Young men are caught up in a politics of 'waiting' where although educated, they lack the social and cultural capital and networks to get jobs. Probing the various attempts of accumulating of such social and cultural capital by young men, opens up important analytical themes to try and understand the precariousness of young men's attempts to be 'modern' in the face of great inequality and uncertainty in a 'new' India.

In this thesis, I focus on one group of men, and their cultures of urban youth masculinities, that I label as the Urban Smart Strivers. Although my informants self-identify as 'middle-class', the great heterogeneity within this class identity makes it an analytically weak concept. The 'fuzziness' about the Indian middle classes (Fernandes 2006) obscures the vast variations and tensions within this large group, and treats 'middle-class' as a pre-given and stable category. Hence in this project I use the label of 'Urban Smart Strivers' derived and modified from the Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research report on the 'Great Indian Middle Classes' (NCAER, 2004) which conceptualises 'Strivers' as part of the wealthier sections of the vast Indian middle-class who are better off than lower middle-class 'Seekers' but they are not members of the other categories labeled 'Deprived' or 'Global' elites either (ibid).

The label of 'Strivers' produced by NCAER is also used by development practitioners and private sector companies to understand demographic trends amongst the 'middle classes' (McKinsey Global Institute Report, 2007). I choose to modify this term and introduce two discursive elements of 'Smart' and 'Urban' which relates to social and cultural traits of being 'modern men' as used by my informants themselves. The concept of 'Strivers' for the purposes of this thesis, is linked to a sociocultural insecurity in 'new' India around the social practices of consumption and embodiment, wherein as I will demonstrate, young men from the middle classes strive to be 'modern' in ways they value, but do not necessarily always achieve. As Cornwall (2002) has argued in the context of Nigeria, masculinities under neoliberalism often add to the 'uselessness' experienced by men, as women get recast as consumer citizens who can have significant new spending power. The process of 'striving' amongst men then is an attempt to create a social and cultural usefulness and belong as an appropriate part of 'new' India which is never a complete process. Hence the 'strivers' are chasing an image and way of being that has not quite materialised, and perhaps never shall, but they nonetheless aspire for that projected image which in contemporary times begins to define what or how a 'man' should be for them.

In this way I critique the NCAER definition of 'Strivers' which only quantitatively measures consumption, and do not use the term 'strivers' as a fixed category, but use it as a discursive and performative category which underscores the unevenness of India's economic and sociocultural shifts. Further within this context, patriarchy continues to be an enduring and defining aspect of 'new' India which takes on new forms for young men. Instead of focusing on the economic aspects of this dynamic or the changing nature of work, which are important in the restructuring of gendered relations, I am interested in the ways in which a new set of equally important aspirations, consumer desires and cultural practices emerge in the lives of 'strivers' and how they negotiate these in their everyday contexts. Through studying the Urban Smart Strivers, my aim is not to create a single identity which removes complexities and ambiguities, rather it is to probe and bring out tensions, hence making the term useful for analytical purposes. The label allows for a 'cognitive shortcut' (Hutchings 2008) wherein young men become a discursive category rather than a demographic category and allow me to unpack what being 'urban', 'smart' and 'strivers' means in the context of my informants.

Roaming, Grooming and Protecting?

Having explored the empirical context of a 'new' India, the central analytical questions that this thesis engages with are primarily around the three themes of Roaming, Grooming and Protecting. My informants and I went 'roaming' or '*ghumne*' in Delhi on an everyday basis after work or college and on weekends and holidays using public transport like metros and buses or sometimes in their family cars and bikes. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers going '*ghumna/ghumne*' is a pleasurable activity, which gives them space, freedom and a sense of authority, away from their families. In the contemporary Indian context, Mazzarella (2004, 238) and Nisbett (2009, 72) use ideas of young men 'roaming' or going on trips for 'boozing' and 'fagging' (smoking) to describe activities of young men in their free time. Similarly Lukose (2009) uses the concept of '*karnagan*' or literally 'going around' in the context of young men in Kerala who roam aimlessly for leisure and pleasure. Although Mazzarella, Lukose and Nisbett correctly mention the idea of 'roaming' for the young men they study, their research focus and interests mean that these are not the primary questions their ethnography engages in. Such 'roaming' however is the point of analytical departure for my thesis and I look at 'roaming' as a methodological technique further in the next chapter on Concepts and Methods.

Having spent time with my informants 'roaming' around in the city of Delhi, I am interested in asking why and how 'roaming' becomes an important activity which allows young men to come together as a homosocial group to create an inner social world for themselves. Further within this homosocial space, I want to explore how young men celebrate and partake in the pleasures of 'new' India through sex, drinking, smoking, shopping, horseplay, jokes and violence by studying these practices and to explore what they tell us about the practice of 'roaming' as well as generational and homosocial dynamics shaping the lives of young men.

Similarly for the Urban Smart Strivers, not every place is worthy of going 'roaming' in the city. I want to explore which specific sites and places are deemed worthy of going 'roaming' by young men and what this tells us about how they view city spaces. Furthermore the often aimless purpose of 'roaming' for men also begins to hint at how spaces are gendered and marked differently for and by men in relation to other groups of men as well as women. Hence I want to probe the relevance of the

relationship between young men, masculinities and the gendering of urban spaces in India, which in turn leads to questions about how women's access to those spaces is also shaped.

Similarly, when going 'roaming' with young men, encounters with new visual representations and aesthetics of masculinities take place constantly. In the cultural worlds of the Urban Smart Strivers images of a commodified male body that is groomed, muscular, hairless, fair, active and distinctly heterosexual dominate their visual worlds when out roaming. How do such visual and discursive images shape ideas of what it means to be a 'man' and of having a 'masculine' body for the Urban Smart Strivers? Indeed, empirical studies suggest that in India sales of men's grooming products are now growing at twice the rates of women's cosmetic products (Moss 2012, 53) and this is a trend that is mirrored across South Asia (Maycock 2017). In this context, I am interested in analytically probing the grooming and aesthetic practices of young men and their relationships with attempts to build a neoliberal masculine self. What is analytically important here is not the fact that men are taking an interest in grooming, which is a much older practice, but rather my focus is on what such types of gendered consumption, grooming practices and discourses tell us about the construction of masculine subjectivities in a 'new' India and the changing gendered relationships amongst masculinities and femininities.

For young men then, I want to analytically explore 'grooming' and 'roaming' as not just practices of encounter but also participation which allows them chances to engage in elaborate rituals of seeing and being seen, as well as celebrations of the 'new' masculine self (Brosius 2010). Probing how young men participate in such a process allows us to explore men's agentic abilities in fashioning active bodies who engage in various ways with commodities, spaces, images and their meanings. As scholars demonstrate, grooming, presentation of the self and appropriate embodiment are crucial to present a 'modern' self image for youth (Brosius 2010, Nakassis 2013). But its analytical relation to how urban spaces are constructed and imagined remains unexplored in the Indian context. In particular, the gendered and classed nature of the 'public' and the 'urban' in 'new' India remain unanswered which I aim to explore. Through parallels from other cultural contexts, we can see that the idea of such 'roaming' and 'grooming' amongst young middle class Indian men, operates in tandem with the development of

gendered public spaces. For example, Elisabeth Wilson's (1992, 74) work on the 'Flanuer' in early European Industrial society outlines the relationship between the proliferation of public spaces of leisure demanding and legitimating the growth of leisured and groomed 'public men' in the European context. Such 'public' men and their roaming around the city, creates and stabilises the 'male gaze' of this leisured man taking visual possession of the emerging city (ibid).

In this context, I want to explore how such a 'male gaze' when 'roaming' around the city produces and maintains gendered city spaces in 'new' India. Particularly in the context of Delhi which is labeled as the 'rape capital' (Brosius 2017) I want to probe how the Urban Smart Strivers make sense of such discourses and how they understand the place of women in cities of 'new' India. In this context, I seek to explore narratives about 'protecting' women as an analytical theme to understand how cities are conceptualised through gender and why women need 'protection' in cities in the first place? This also opens up questions about which women need 'protection', who they need 'protection' from, and indeed who does this 'protecting' in a 'new' India? Hence the key themes of gendered roaming, grooming and protecting get tied together in this thesis to explore complexities around 'A City of Men?' which tries to analytically understand the relationships of men, masculinities and city spaces. From this analytical context, the main research question that this thesis tries to answer is: How are gendered subjectivities and embodiments constructed and performed for and by urban young men in India and what consequences does this have for gendering city spaces?

This empirical and analytical exploration in the context of contemporary India, also has a much wider historical relevance. Indian masculinities have historically been shaped by the sociopolitical forces at play within particular periods and as a result masculinities have been fluid and changing over time. In the next section, I briefly explore these historical changes in masculinities and their relationship with spaces, discourses, and bodily practices to contextualise my study of contemporary masculinities.

Historicising Indian Masculinities

In pre-colonial India, Rosalind O'Hanlon (1997, 1999) explains that military service had high social and political status in the imperial courts as well as important practical implications, because it provided

seasonal work for men when they were not employed in agriculture. Training in military skills was an important way to make oneself eligible for work in the large imperial armies of the time. In this setting, various ideas of bodily health, military ability and literary accomplishments became socially celebrated markers for the cultured elites and militarized gentility. These ideas of military might were supposed to be directly linked to the might and generosity of the King (ibid). Fighting champions regularly found patronage in early modern courts where they were used to entertain and encourage a military ethos.

Different bodily practices were established in different “zones of military entrepreneurship” across pre-colonial India and hence there were multiple articulations of the masculine body. Gordon (1994) explains that in pre-colonial India there were three principal military regions. North India had the Mughal-Rajput culture founded on heavy cavalry, warfare on plains and land revenue through military service. In Western India, partly due to the mountainous terrain of the Western Ghats, the military culture comprised of peasant-warrior armies with light cavalry who used the mountains and forts of the region as refuge to attack slower moving imperial armies. In contrast, the Nayaka culture of Southern India depended on superior fighting skills using swords, lance and shields because they had unreliable access to cavalry horses. What these different military styles demonstrate is that the militarised imperial masculinity and its embodiment had to be differently trained and strengthened depending upon the military culture of the region (O’Hanlon 2007).

Building on these regional variations, the pre-colonial period also saw different tools and fighting equipment being used which required different strengths and abilities. For example the bow need strength from the arms, shoulders and back to fire the arrow and manage the conditions of wind etc. Swords on the other hand came in different shapes and sizes and required upper body strength. Axes and war clubs were heavy to smash through things and required more crude strength, and bodily height was an advantage. For the most competent warriors, and also for the not so competent warriors who simply wanted to survive in battle, training their bodies was crucial and the individual men paid great attention to its practices (ibid). Crucially, these were all practices that associated men with the outside world and marked a social and spatial difference which juxtaposed imperial masculinities with the

indoor spaces of the household and the harem that women occupied (O'Hanlon 1997, 16). Such historical practices of the body provide an interesting comparison to contemporary bodily practices of men that I explore further in the thesis.

In the 19th century colonial period, aggression and militarism were a crucial part of the occupying British (Connell 2005, Chowdhury 2001). The East India Company's army became the default arena where the local culture of military practice and wrestling exercises continued during the early stages of Company rule (O'Hanlon 2007). At the same time, there was a general assumption amongst both Indians and the British that the colonising British were more 'masculine' than the colonised Indians (Sinha 1995). Edward Said (1995) suggests that the 'Orient' was created as the weak, irrational, non-martial 'Other' in contrast to the strong and rational Englishman. This was demonstrated in the way the British colonial officers scoffed at Indian men for being weak and non-martial but at the same time valorised Indian communities such as the Gurkhas and the Rajputs who were considered 'martial races' (ibid). Sinha (1995) posits the notion that the Bengali middle classes fostered the self-perception of 'Bengali effeminacy' because they aspired to establish a new hegemony in order to gain employment within the colonial machinery.

At the same time, a space became available for Hindu nationalist movements to dominate the Indian masses in the late 19th century. They tried to fashion a more militarised Hindu male in attempts to establish control and enjoy a patriarchal dividend whilst maintaining the rhetoric of national freedom and Indian culture (Banerjee 2005). Organisations like the Araya Samaj, for example, began to feature ideas of bodily practice strongly. They linked the education of the mind and the body and became interested in 'training' young minds into active and contributing citizens (ibid). They focused on programs of physical culture, exercise, controlled sexuality, diet, and the environment, derived from Vedic texts, which were deemed to be 'beneficial' to India. Influenced by the Social Darwinist thought in Britain at the time, the Arya Samaj embodied the fears of a 'decline in the Hindu race' (Fischer-Tine 2006). A remedy to these fears was ensuring healthy and active Hindu youths who were able to have robust children and ensure the continued existence of Hindus.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, social service and self help organisations like the Arya Samaj helped establish extensive networks of flexible educational institutions across northern India. It trained several social servants and active citizens through 'making' the mind, body and spirit through teachings and practice. Older Indian traditions of brahmacharya, wrestling and ayurveda were used to shape and mould young men for social contributions. In the 'character building' efforts of Arya Samaj, food was controlled and kept light in order to keep the young healthy and fit. Meals were consumed in open air rather than in closed rooms. The daily routine too for the young students was planned and operationalised, it included waking up early at four or five in the morning, work, study, physical exercise and rest in measured amounts as well as religious prayers (ibid).

During this period, controlling sexuality and conserving semen were also important. The work of Alter (1992) explains how the idealised body of the male wrestler was understood as being built on a reserve of semen stored to fuel the body. Controlled diet, rest and appropriate sexual conduct for the wrestlers began to be embedded into the social fabric (O'Hanlon 2007). The understanding was that the biomoral benefits of celibacy and semen conservation would create healthy and socially active citizens. Students too were controlled and had to observe 'brahmacharya' where masturbation and nightly emission were frowned upon (ibid). The science of training, wrestling and physical sports became closely tied together in this narrative creating a situation where physical culture and bodily regimes associated with the 'Akshara' (wrestlers' residence) culture were extolled. As Watt (2005) explains, these practices were important to create a sense of empowerment and agency within the nationalist movement and create a successful example of self-government in education.

Later at the time of the nationalist struggle for Indian independence, masculinities like that of Gandhi rose to prime importance on moral excellence rather than physical strength (Alter 2000). The idea of moral superiority was also applied to the non-violent strategies of the Gandhian movement. The 'inner-character' of men became an important part of the masculinities discourse at the time. During the same period however, women were reduced to their bodies and it was their sexualities that had to be 'protected' or controlled (Banerjee, 2005).

The masculinities discourse of colonial India has important analytical relevance in understanding elements of contemporary Indian masculinities. Alter (2004, 2011) and Srivastava (2004) for example point to the fact that ‘semen anxiety’ is also seen in contemporary India which views the loss of semen as adding to national weakness. The narrative around a controlled Hindu sexuality is contrasted and strengthened against a counter-narrative of Muslim hyper-sexuality and uncontrolled excess (Anand, 2011). This is not to suggest that ideas of masculinity have simply transferred from colonial to contemporary India, rather the point is that dominant masculinities are defined in relation to the wider sociopolitical trends of the time.

In this context, cinematic representations of men have also undergone a significant shift. As Consolaro (2014) demonstrates in newly Independent India, the hero, who was often relegated to an unimportant or powerless position within society – being a migrant, dacoit, or *goonda* – fought the establishment in order to restore justice, to help other people who were as marginalised and oppressed as he was. She goes on to argue that nationalism and socialism required over-blown oppositions, and the rich/poor binary remained uncomplicated: corruption, dishonesty and falsehood were associated with the former while the latter represented virtue and morality, no matter how distorted by traumatic events (ibid). The figure of Amitabh Bachan or Dev Anand in the 1970’s depicted the ‘anti-hero’ who fought the establishment from the margins and possessed a mixed set of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities often charged with the socialist ideology of the time.

However by the 1990’s as India approaches economic liberalisation and the project of building a ‘new’ India emerges, the male hero is “freed from the burden of the socialist crusade” (Consolaro 2014, 8). His problems are transformed from systemic issues to problems that are more ‘inner’ and behavioural. From the 1990’s the male hero in Hindi cinema is represented predominantly as a man who is fastidious about his grooming and embodiment and is always shown wearing fashionable clothes (ibid). Similarly, this consuming masculine figure is spatially depicted most often inside shopping malls or driving fancy cars and travelling abroad. Consolaro (2014, 11) explains that the male protagonist no longer has to prove his honesty or self-sufficiency, as long as he has money and can consume, he is fine.

Similarly, these shifts were also mirrored in the commercial world of advertising as depictions of men changed and evolved within their changing historical context. For example in Nehruvian India, immediately after Indian independence in 1947, advertisements were ‘remedial’ concerning addressing deficiencies in the self or society and building a civic citizenship and the nation (Chowdhry 2009). However with India’s move towards economic liberalisation, adverts have now evolved to more aspirational and stylised images encouraging citizens to become individualised consumers along gendered lines (Haynes 2012a). It is in and through this context of a changing and shifting idea of what it means to be an ‘Indian man’ that both the nation and its masculine subjects have been historically constructed. In contemporary India, the image of a ‘new’ India, brings with itself the emergence of a ‘new’ Indian man which I explore further in the thesis.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

The next chapter is the conceptual chapter which explains the analytical framework as well as the methods and research design of this thesis. The remaining chapters of the thesis present the empirical material according to five themes. Each of the empirical chapters start with a vignette and have visual cultural analysis weaved through them to unpack their different themes. Finally, the conclusion brings the themes together and addresses the main research question.

- **Concepts and Methods:** Building on the context of study explored in the introductory chapter, I provide the conceptual and analytical framework of this study. This chapter also looks at research ethics, positionality and methodology.
- **A ‘New’ Indian Man:** I begin with a vignette of young Indian men’s leisure practices and situate it within their culture of a commodified urban youth masculinity. I look at the politics of space, gender and class interplaying to create a normative ‘new’ Indian man.

- **A Masculine Body:** In this chapter I start with vignette in a gym as an important site to understand commodified identities operating in and through men's bodies. I explore how ideas of masculine respectability in a 'new' India are embodied by a young 'new' Indian man.
- **Desexing a Masculine Body:** Through a vignette in a men's toilet I explore ideas around men's honour and bodily shame. I look at how sexualities are differently inscribed on bodies allowing men's bodies to be made into 'public' and 'hard' bodies. I ethnographically also reveal the cracks in this process of desexing and disciplining men's bodies.
- **A Smart and Masculine City:** In this chapter, through a vignette at a metro station in Delhi, I explore how the city space is remapped by young men. Through their classed and gendered ideas of spaces worthy of 'roaming' and others that are not, I understand their conceptions of urban spaces in 'new' India, its women, slums and the poor.
- **A 'Safe/Unsafe' City:** I begin with a vignette of young men's 'innocent fun' driving around in their car teasing women in a market area of 'new' India. Through this, I problematise the gendered violence discourse in Delhi to expose the politics that shape and limit it.
- **Conclusion:** In this final chapter, I bring together themes from the empirical chapters to address the main research question and demonstrate the complexities around 'A City of Men'.

Chapter Two: Concepts and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an analytical framework which I use to analyse my ethnographic material in the later empirical chapters. I also explain the methodology of the thesis and explain my positionality and rationale in carrying out this research as well as the ethical considerations involved in the process.

Analytical Framework

My analytical framework brings together concepts to analyse the construction of men's gendered subjectivities and embodiments, which shape their use of urban spaces, in a context of neoliberalisation and a consumerist citizenship. I find the concepts of masculinities, embodiments, neoliberal self, urban space and public culture as important analytical tools to understand urban youth masculinities in contemporary India.

Masculinities: Masculinity is an inherently relational term. It exists in relation to femininities and to other masculinities to create a 'gender order' of 'men' and 'women' positioned relationally to each other (Whitehead 2001). Because 'men' and 'women' are created relationally, they have to encapsulate different traits to substantiate their different constructions. In male-dominated gender orders or patriarchy, masculinity exists in contrast with a complementarily subordinate femininity (Connell 2005). In order to be accepted as a legitimate 'man', regular acts that are culturally, legally, socially and historically intelligible need to be performed by individuals (Butler 1996). Hence masculinities are always a 'work in progress' which involves complex building and rebuilding, consolidation, representation and enforcement (Hearn 1998, McDowell 2011, Srivastava 2007).

In the Indian context, masculinities are produced in and through various changing localised social structures, histories and cultural formations resulting in multiple cultures of masculinities (Srivastava 2004, 2007). The fragmented nature of the cultural sphere in India, compounded by the regional, linguistic, historical and religious differences, means that there is no centralised or singular idea of

‘masculinity’ or even ‘sexuality’ in India. These are all processes that are mediated in and through a plurality of cultural flows and political forces, interplaying with the specificities of space, sites as well as historical and political contexts. Within this logic, as Srivastava (2007) explains there are multiple cultures of sexualities, masculinities and femininities in India and conceptualising them through studying fluid ‘cultures of masculinities’ allows researchers to demonstrate the multiplicity of possibilities. The dispersed social and cultural domains where these gendered codes are embedded for men, allow them to simultaneously appear at many sites, without one central source, hence making them appear omnipresent and normal, rather than exclusionary (Srivastava 2004) hence making the study of masculine cultures a useful analytical tool which allows a holistic approach to studying men and masculinities in the Indian context. These cultures of masculinity are relationally created and hint to the possibility of many different value systems and ways of being a man existing in close quarters and across different spaces and times (ibid). Connell’s (2005, 2014) more recent writing, partly in response to criticisms to the idea of ‘hegemonic masculinities’, have also rejected the idea of a singular ‘global dominance’ model of masculinity against which all are measured. This has allowed to open up the space to study multiple masculinities and ways of being a man that coexist, often hierarchically but never in fixed or static forms. Hence I find studying ‘culture of masculinities’ a useful way of thinking about the many different types of masculinities that I encountered during my fieldwork, through which I choose to study one particular cultural group and their wider sociocultural world.

More than just being an identity for men, masculinities are also a configuration of bodily practices that are accomplished in social action (Whitehead 2001). In other words, the performance of being a man requires action and embodiment, it produces subjects that ‘do’ their gender. What count as socially accepted performances and actions for a particular masculinity are defined by the hegemonic forces at play in a given setting (Butler 2006). Hence the ‘enactment’ of a masculinity, takes place within a sociocultural context through the shared codes of that particular context. It is this enactment, rather than ‘expression’ (Srivastava 2004), of the appropriate ways of being, talking, walking like a man that I explore in the empirical sections.

Similarly, another important dimension of masculinities in gerontocratic systems like India is that young men and their masculinities are not independent but created relationally within an 'age-gender' matrix (Harris 2012). Young men's masculinities are shaped within the social contexts of their gendered and generational relationships with others, wherein for example older women and older men occupy a position of implicit social power and status, even when young men have 'explicit' power owing to their gendered position as men (Harris 2012). De Neve's (2004) work in Tamil Nadu in south India contextualises this point very well. He identifies dominant 'styles of masculinities' like the 'Patron', 'Householder' and the 'Cosmopolitan' wherein he unpacks their style, symbology and performance in various contexts. The 'Cosmopolitan' man for example chooses to emphasise his sunglasses amongst his young male friends but emphasises his role as a father and householder in front of his mother. In other words, men's performances are context specific and constantly shifting to match wider structural forces in which their lives are lived. In this context, my analytical approach is to understand enactment of appropriate masculinities amongst young men in public spaces away from the family and the home.

In the Indian context, scholars working on youth masculinities have argued that because young unmarried men do not have defined 'rights of passages' into a ritualised manhood, they spend great amounts of time in homosocial spaces where exhibiting their masculinities amongst male peers is crucial (Osella and Osella 1998, 2006). Within such a generational and gendered dynamic, understanding homosociality is central to how cultures of youth masculinities operate in India. As Osella and Osella (1998, 2006) explain, in the 'rich parallel homosocial worlds' masculine performances by young Indian men are highly competitive and compulsorily heterosexual because of the deeply embedded nature of a localised patriarchy which operates through son preferences, dowry practices and endogamous marriages and an institutionalised segregation between young men and women. Resulting often in these all male contexts wherein masculine performance is exaggerated and groups of young men stand together at bus stops, street corners or tea stalls and partake in 'big talk' about forbidden behaviours like smoking, sexual experience, or drinking in a secretive manner away from women and family members (ibid). Hence analytically understanding such dynamics of homosocial bonding and practices, allows for a close examination of how cultures of youth masculinity are structured, operate and are enacted in urban India.

In this context, the use of public spaces for homosocial bonding, building masculine networks and for leisure and fun are important for young men. The homoerotic power and potential of these homosocial interactions amongst men in public spaces has to be negated in their masculine performances and they have to be directed towards women (Chopra, Osella and Osella 2004). It is also often in public spaces that young Indian men are free from the patriarchal authority of the father figure and have some space to demonstrate their own sense of masculinity and exercise social control (ibid). Hence questions around how the Urban Smart Strivers have ‘fun’ in public places and how they perform their masculinities in such contexts pose important analytical questions around the relationships between masculinities and the gendered nature of urban spaces which I explore empirically in the thesis.

Embodiments: The performances of youth masculinities can only be understood in and through the body, because it is through the body that a particular gendered construction is enacted (Thapan 2009, McDowell 1997, 2009). In this context, the body is considered not as a biologically fixed entity, but rather a socially and culturally inscribed object of and for the social construction of masculinities, they are both objects and agents in social practice (Connell 2005, McDowell 1997, 2003, Cornwall 2011). In understanding the everyday embodied performances of masculinities, Bourdieu’s (2001) idea of ‘habitus’ and Foucauldian (1990) ideas of bodily ‘discipline’ help analytically locate the body and its social practices in a context of social power. The body and the social world are closely connected to each other, wherein overtime, individuals come to learn the styles, manners and customs of their social worlds. Crucially, these are never overtly prescriptive but take the form of ‘tastes’ which structure choices and lifestyles (Bourdieu 2001). In such an ‘open system of dispositions’ (Bourdieu 2010) a shared and comparable and seemingly ‘free’ system of embodiment emerges wherein actors can compare positions with others and create a sense of distinction or refinement. These forms of appropriately refined embodiments, in the context of India’s rapid economic and sociocultural change, are crucial for the Indian middle classes to create, compare, draw boundaries and make social exclusions as I shall explore.

Using such a lens on embodiment, scholars like Thapan (1997) and Lukose (2009) in the Indian context, study everyday speech acts, grooming, walking, looking, touching as acts of power within a

classed and gendered social context. Similarly Butler (2006) explains that because gender is a performance, facial expression, speech acts and bodily comportments that take place in this field of interactions, produce gender and its various inequalities. For Butler, it is through the ‘repeated stylisation of the body’ within a ‘regulatory framework’ that gender and gendered identities are produced. Most crucially these processes of the body, operate within the “the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Butler 2006, 136). In the empirical section, I unpack how this regulatory frame of embodiment powerfully shapes cultures of urban youth masculinity wherein young men who practice non-heterosexual sex in private, constantly bolster a heterosexist framework for appropriate masculine embodiment. Hence gender and the body are not treated through a binary division in this thesis, they are rather thought of as “a persistent impersonation that passes as real” with the aim of producing a fabricated but coherent identity (McDowell 1997, 164).

Similarly, Connell (2005) has argued that there are various ‘circuits of social practice’ that link bodily practices and social structures, resulting in a ‘social embodiment’ operating through cultures, institutions and economic relations. The adornments on the social body, also serve as markers to embody a culturally legible masculinity and its positionality. For example, practices of grooming body hair amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, serve as markers of a culturally legible masculinity as we shall see wherein bodies are treated as a ‘flexible object’ with several ‘options and choices’ (McDowell 1997, 187) by the young men in order to display appropriate social codes and values. Similarly clothes are another important aspect of embodiment that allow bodies to ‘slip’ gender off and on (Suthrell 2004) and also offer an important analytical tool in understanding masculine embodiment in the empirical chapters. Clothes and grooming practices place bodies safely within a gendered space and discourse, and become a tangible indicator of normative structures of gender and appropriate embodiment that are so obvious, that they are often taken for granted (Cornwall, A., Corrêa, S. & Jolly 2008). Gender is hence well defined and segregated through clothes and consumption and in this context a socially-produced sense of self preselects and shapes a culturally constructed wardrobe, accessories, gadgets etc to create an appropriate gendered embodiment and aesthetic (ibid). At the same time, as I will

demonstrate, not wearing appropriately embodying gender through clothes and consumption practices can also dangerously mark bodies as being outside the gender binary.

In this context, the act of 'shopping' for gender appropriate clothes becomes a deeply political and socially charged activity based on binary ideas (Suthrell 2004). By problematising young Indian men's clothing, shopping, grooming and embodiment practices, I situate their styles and practices into a material dimension which analytically allows us to understand how gender and class operate in and through such practices. These boundaries highlighted by gender specific dress are seldom crossed lightly or without intent, nor are the contortions and movements of the body rarely done to challenge the norms which define its correct embodiment (Cornwall, Corrêa and Jolly 2008). These provide the analytical support to explore the ways in which young Indian men embody their masculinities and what defines the parameters of such embodiments. At the same time, to complicate the 'all-powerful' image of men, analytically studying embodied practices of men, also reveals the gaps and anxieties between the normative ideas of gender and the everyday realities of men's lives as they make desperate efforts to act, dress, walk and talk like 'men' (Guttmann 1996).

Neoliberal Self: In the context of the urban Indian middle classes, the concept of a neoliberal self is an analytically useful tool to problematise ideas of a 'new' India and a 'modern' self within it. Dardot and Laval (2013) have explained neoliberalism as both as a destructive process which breakdown rules, institutions and rights, but also crucially as a productive process, which attempts to create a new existential norm and a 'new way of the world'. Central in the productive process is the construction of a neoliberal self, wherein the self is an accountable and responsible subject, beyond the boundaries of the market and the state. Individual actors are 'encouraged' and trained to become subjects who are active and work for an enterprise but remove all distance from it so as to give the impression of working for oneself.

In this context, keeping both agents and agency in view is crucial to avoid a static understanding of how subjects are constructed. Gooptu (2009, 6) instead of focusing on state policies, focuses on public culture, everyday practices and the lived experience of neoliberalisation, as a process, from the perspective of the actors and agents. In this process, individual subjectivities are recast with enterprising attitudes in an attempt to embed a market ethic. There is a crucial individualisation and self-responsibilisation of the subject, to become responsible for his/her own self-representation, self-government, self-management and self-advancement (Gooptu 2009, 46). In this context, the presentation of the self is a strategic issue for enterprise and 'making' of the body is part of the manufacturing of the neoliberal subject (Dardot and Laval 2013, 273). In Chapter Three A Masculine Body, I explore this process of literally and discursively 'making' a suitable self and body amongst the Urban Smart Strivers.

Yet at the same time, as Gooptu (2013b) has argued, the attempts at creating such rational neoliberal selves is not a 'natural' process and hence it becomes important to valorise and moralise this new individual pursuit of the self and frame it in terms of a moral and virtuous quest (Gooptu 2013b). As I demonstrate in the empirical chapters, forces of the market working with image makers and advertisers, attempt to present a commodified masculinity as a virtuous self which has a crucial role carved out for the process of making 'smart' cities and through them the 'development' of India. Within this process, masculine subjects are constructed through pervasive cultural tropes of neoliberal managerialism and entrepreneurship around appropriately gendered 'self-improvement' and 'new thinking' (ibid).

Similarly, neoliberalism and patriarchy are inseparably intertwined and mutually productive in the context of India. Cornwall et al (2016) explain that the political economy of gender is shored up by the patriarchal ideology within neoliberalism which naturalises gender inequalities, whilst also reordering the binary. These processes seek consent and are not coercive, which allows them to be experienced as an 'opportunity' to strive and improve, to be 'rational' and 'just' whilst couching the deeply entrenched patriarchal continuities which re-order and re-package gendered hierarchies. (O'Neill,

2016). It is from within this context that I define the 'modern' and 'modern men' as formulations that I am using analytically to understand how young men are making sense of new subjectivities in highly gendered ways. As is well known, the term 'modern' comes loaded with baggage and meanings, particularly in the case of India (see for example Appaduari and Breckenridge 1988, 16). Hence in this thesis, I do not claim that these are in fact 'modern men' or 'modern practices' of such men or use 'modern' as a central analytical term, but rather I treat it as a descriptive term used by young men themselves to describe their belonging in 'new' India as appropriately gendered consumer citizens and I in turn try to explore some of their meanings and ideas around being 'modern'.

As has been pointed out, in this process of establishing a new commodified masculinity, the unevenness of neoliberalism, its evolving nature and its incompleteness are crucial in creating anxiety, insecurity and vulnerability amongst men due to their failure in living up to the ideas of such 'new' neoliberal selves (Cornwall, Kariotis and Lindisfarne, 2016). In the Indian context, ideas of the neoliberal self gain political legitimacy, by obscuring and attempting to gloss over the grave difficulties experienced by young men in materialising these identities. Furthermore, the highly class based narratives of 'progress' of the nation similarly require young men to gloss over the 'lack of progress' in the process of establishing an enterprising culture. In turn, through narratives of 'hard work' and consumption, legitimacy is attempted to be achieved by appearing to be speaking on behalf of the dispossessed and the powerless citizenry (Kaur and Hansen 2016). Hence consumption and the neoliberal self become 'moral' projects which are for the betterment of all people, but young men's inabilities to materialise these go largely unaddressed. As I demonstrate in the thesis, young middle-class men, given their position within these discourses, desperately attempt to create a sense of usefulness and coherence around their 'modern' selves.

Urban Space: Men's performances of masculinities are linked to how feminist human geographers understand the relation between gender and space. McDowell (1983, 1999) explains that a public/private dichotomy of space maps onto a constructed masculine/feminine divide of how men and women access or are expected to access spaces and perform their gender. This crucially rests on a

gendered divide between production and reproduction which becomes an important structuring element of urban space and urban processes (ibid). In this context, public spheres are primarily the domain of men where they legitimately control space for work, loitering or socialising, whereas the private sphere of the home is the 'appropriate' domain for women (ibid). Srivastava (2010) explains that without the relational element that connects the 'public' and the 'private' to the 'male' and the 'female', the 'public' would collapse. He goes on to make a further distinction between the 'private' and the 'domestic' wherein the domestic is the sphere where women and men make compromises and often work in close quarters with each other. Hence in this context, looking at men's public performances of masculinities allows us to analytically unpack the construction of such spaces.

In India, the constructed relation between women and the domestic sphere also uses a narrative of 'risk' in crossing these spaces, often along classed lines (Krishnan 2014b, Ranade 2007, 2011). There is a masculine anxiety to guard public space and keep it as the realm for men which in turn creates and legitimises hostility towards women and their use of the same spaces (Srivastava 2012). Sangari and Vaid (1990) in their seminal work on feminist historiography of India have convincingly demonstrated that patriarchy is not a system that predates or supersedes class or caste relations in India. Rather they are intrinsic to the very formation of and changes within these categories. They explain that patriarchal systems are class differentiated, open to constant and consistent reformation and crucially define gendered roles and ideologies in and through their logics (ibid). For example, working class women in India have historically moved in and through 'public spaces' for their work, yet middle class and elite women's access to public spaces has been restricted as a marker of their classed and often caste superiority. Such mutually enforcing roles of patriarchy and class are crucial to understanding the gendered nature of public spaces as I demonstrate in the Chapter Six A Safe/Unsafe City where the protection and 'risk' to middle class women in public spaces of 'new' India is a central preoccupation for the 'new' Indian man.

Also in this context, it becomes important to unpack how Indian city spaces are made into 'unsafe places' for women in the first place. Feminist human geographer Doreen Massey's work (1994) on the

relation between space, place and gender, explains the crucial difference between space and place, wherein space can be considered as the unshaped social potentiality of a particular location, however place becomes a manifestation of a location in and through social relations. At the same time, such organisation of space also shapes the social relations and gender performances that take place within them so there is a mutually constituting relationship. This allows us in the empirical chapters to analytically probe how city spaces are turned into 'unsafe places' in and through social relations, rather than an inherent 'unsafeness' in urban spaces. Furthermore, Massey's (1994) concept of 'power geometries' allows us to think about how places are made out of not just capital relations but power relations which construct the rules and boundaries both socially and spatially of who belongs and who does not belong. These processes of establishing socio-spatial boundaries do not operate evenly and allow particular bodies with differing power to occupy and be in the spaces. In this process different relations of power amongst men and competing 'cultures of masculinities' have differential power and access to spaces. In the empirical chapters, I explore a variety of spaces, like the gym for example, which are turned into masculine spaces by men and their attempts to instate boundaries of bodies that belong and do not. Crucially however, these relations can change and be challenged over time so they are not fixed and hence revealing possibilities for feminist challenges (Massey 1994).

Similarly Geetha (1998, 91) explains that a 'public patriarchy' in India maintains a public-private divide wherein men's public authority is linked to the roles they play in the sphere of familial relationships and the relational dimension of such relationships feeds into sustaining the public/private, masculine/feminine divide. The dyad of outside/inside with public/private provides normative models for regulating male and female use of and access to personal and social space as well as to mark 'us' and 'them' (Geetha, 1998 144). The gendered nature of such 'public and private' space upholds a binary opposition between men and women, and thus bolsters the ideological workings of heterosexual hegemony (Namaste, 1996, 227). Hence within this dyad, on the one hand men and women are separated into their spheres, but they are at the same time also brought relationally with each other through heteronormativity (ibid). These gendered divisions do not often stand up to empirical probing because there is much gendered 'border crossing' in spaces like the shopping malls of new India

(Menon and Johri 2014). However they do represent normative frameworks of how lives, work and relationships between men and women are meant to be viewed and understood (ibid).

Furthermore in a context of neoliberal expansionism in India, urban space is classed and exclusionary through a new 'regime of knowing' wherein as Ghertner (2015) explains, the visibility and aesthetics of urban spaces become the most important way to mark them as 'safe', 'modern' or 'legal' spaces. He argues that 'modern' people belong and use 'modern' spaces and they can tell by *seeing* which spaces are 'modern' (ibid). Hence a reciprocal relationship between space and people exists, wherein places are given specific social meanings, and identities are constituted through places and likewise places become 'modern' because of the people that inhabit and attempt to give it meaning (McDowell 2009). As I have already explored, in 'new' India the city is understood to be exclusively for the wealthy but the urban poor and migrant labour are always around to operate the large informal economy and provide labour (Harris-White 2004, Ghertner 2015). Hence as I will explore empirically further, both class and gender are institutionalised into the built environment of 'new' India in complex and paradoxical ways.

Similarly for young Indian men in particular, various urban public spaces from cybercafes to shopping malls to streets corners and tea stalls are significant in understanding their youth cultures (Nisbett 2009, Lukose 2009, Jeffrey, Jeffery, & Jeffery 2008). Through the concept of 'youthful publics' Hopkins (2013, 201) explains that the relationship of young people and public spaces is variable and negotiated by age, gender, social background, class and even rural-urban divides, which in turn can give youth public legitimacy or public hostility and hence have to be understood within their contextual relations. Particularly for Indian young men, these spaces provide a crucial function in maintaining their homosocial bonds with other young men (Nisbett, 2007). In these homosocial urban spaces, scholars demonstrate that the homoerotic power of these sites has to be negated and directed towards women (Osella and Osella 2006). Hence by analytically studying young men's use of spaces, their homophobic and sexist language as well as their embodied performances of masculinity, I attempt to explore the workings of heteronormativity in and through such spaces. However as McDowell (1999) points out, such practices of space and embodiment also create margins for non-normative ways of being and

acting, or as Butler (1993) would call them 'object bodies that do not matter'. Hence through critically studying the gendering and heteronormativity of urban public spaces I also attempt to reveal the hidden cracks and margins where cultures of homosexuality and homoerotic practice take place amongst young men, often side by side with masculinist and homophobic narratives.

Through such a focus on men's embodied strategies in urban public spaces, their anxieties in trying to maintain control and coherence becomes evident, as does the fact that men have no 'inherent masculinity' or inherent power over urban spaces (Connell 2005, Whitehead 2001). Hence by ethnographically exploring men's attempts at gendering spaces of 'new' India, I try to draw out tensions for men in being appropriately 'modern' and 'manly' and in appearing to be in control of urban spaces. At the same time, men's claims over public spaces and their use of violence against women are powerful tools which maintains patriarchal social ordering of space (Krishanan 2014a, Ranade 2011). Particularly in the case of India, men's violence in various forms towards women in public spaces is a grave issue with profoundly detrimental consequences for women and their well-being (ibid). Hence in this context, studying masculinities in relation to gendered urban spaces becomes a way of analytically unpacking both the power and privilege accrued to men in patriarchal societies, but also the cracks of such gendered and social power.

Consumer Citizenship: Consumption is a discursive site for contesting and imagining the nation and its gendered citizens in contemporary India (Fernandes 2006, Lukose 2005, Srivastava 2015). This discourse rests on notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' of India in gendered ways (ibid). Similar to the gendered division of space, Indian feminists have demonstrated that the anti-colonial Indian nationalism has historically constructed dichotomies of India/West, Private/Public and Tradition/Modernity, which rests on a nationalist patriarchy placing women as 'carriers of tradition', 'private' and the 'spiritual home' of the nation (Sinha, 1995, Chatterjee, 1993). Both 'tradition' and 'modernity' have been in India carriers of patriarchal ideologies wherein neither is value free or unproblematic - they are both eminently colonial and post-colonial constructs (Sangari and Vaid, 1990). Historical attempts at being 'modern' and for 'modernising women' have been framed as the attempt at 'recasting' women for

companionate marital relationships and familial duties, as well as allowing particular and limited avenues for social and political participation (Rajan 2003).

Similarly contemporary forms of a consumerist-nationalism create and tame ‘new Indian women’ who can traverse the ‘nationalist public’ as ‘liberated consumers’ if they carry their ‘essential femininity’ whilst doing so (Lukose 2005, Krishnan 2014b). Women are encouraged to apply an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ into their daily lives and become ‘CEO’s of the home’ (Gooptu, 2009). In this process their femininities become both a source of ‘modernity’ and ‘liberated choices’ but they are also the vanguards of ‘tradition’ (Mankekar, 1999). The ‘new’ Indian woman requires balancing the “appropriate difference” of the Indian family—cosmopolitan due to appropriate levels of “exposure” to the world, but also homely and grounded in a cultural identity that maintains the sanctity of a woman’s sexual purity (Radhakrishnan 2011, 169). To the best of my knowledge, there are no similar studies of young ‘new Indian men’ in a context of ‘new’ India, its spaces and its politics which are themes that I explore in Chapter Three ‘A ‘New’ Indian Man’.

In the process of becoming neoliberal subjects of ‘new’ India, ‘soft-skills’ of self-representation, communication and appropriate embodiment become highly valuable socially and culturally (Gooptu, 2009, 2013b). The citizen-consumers become ‘enterprising selves’ that take responsibility to embody and correctly position themselves to take advantage of economic, social and cultural opportunities of a ‘new’ India (Gooptu 2013b). This set of new visions, images and practices of the nation and its ideal citizens is one of the fundamental aspects of neoliberal economic restructuring in India (Kaur 2012) which attempts to recast the normative idea of a citizen as a consumer (Fernandes 2006). Unpacking such ideas of a consumer-citizen in gendered terms also points to the ‘outsider’ status of bodies that do not consume appropriately.

Scholars working on consumer citizenship in India have argued that such ideas not only change relationships amongst individuals and the market, but also social relationships with families and their idea of the nation. Patricia Uberoi's work (2009) for example explains that the display of affluence and

wealth of the 'family' in films and televisions, allows to create a 'utopian' effect through which viewers recode their own family situations as echoes of the 'perfected' consumerist images on screen. She explains how in hugely popular Indian films, there is an image conjured of a realm of consumer plentitude, of bourgeois gastronomic and sartorial excess, consumer goods, computers and malls. Through this the nation, which is visually absent, is more powerfully imagined through articulations of 'Indian values' of consumption and luxury within which the consumer-citizen is legitimately encouraged to consume as a patriotic duty. At the same time, contemporary India's poverty, inequality and suffering are completely absent from such imaginaries and displays of the nation and its wealthy consumer citizens. This symbolic erasure of other forms of legitimate citizenship brings together the politics of gender, class and space making it analytically important to probe how such exclusionary practices operate in relation with ideas of a 'new' India and its gendered and classed citizenry.

Public Culture: Building on the idea of a consumer-citizenship taking hold in India, it is important to unpack the dynamic nature of the larger sociocultural shifts in India as processual rather than fixed or static (Gooptu, 2013). With this focus, I find the concept of 'public culture' as defined by Appadurai and Breckenbridge (1996) as a zone of cultural debate in contemporary India where various ideas flow in complex and contradictory ways, a useful analytical tool to understand broader sociocultural shifts in the country. In trying to study the public culture of a 'new' India, I analytically use 'culture' in the way Uberoi (2009, 4) uses it to allow the commonalities across forces of media, cultural and social discourses to come together to reveal the 'dialogical intertextual' relationships across various mediums which in turn shape a dynamic 'public culture' (Appadurai and Breckenbridge, 1996).

Similarly, scholars like Consolaro (2014) use 'public culture' in the Indian context to unpack the mixing and blurring of boundaries between the realms of politics and marketing, film-star worship and consumerism, civil society struggles and skilful image construction allowing for visual, textual and discursive messages to come together to create a rich understanding of cultural processes. I too

similarly study visual images, adverts, movies, songs, jokes as well as state discourses as part of the flows within the sociocultural worlds of the Urban Smart Strivers in the empirical chapters.

These various flows and mediums of cultural representation, as Christopher Pinney (2004) points out, operate on different scales, from the nation, to the city and to particular sites as well as the home. As a result, these processes give rise to new forms of political/aesthetic/cultural practices that characterise India, but never as a homogenous whole, always deeply fragmented and specific to how they are read and understood from various subjective positions. In this context, Appadurai's (1996) idea of 'mediascape' is also particularly useful to tie together these 'global cultural flows' taking place in multiple mediums and scales, along with the shifts on the landscape in material ways, as I explored in the section on the changing nature of urban space.

Scholars working on public culture in India have argued that the middle-classes and their partisan interests have become the social basis for public cultural formations in the country. As Ravinder Kaur (2016, 309) explains, the process of 'rebuilding' India after Independence has now completely shifted to a project of 'rebranding' the nation and creating the 'right image' of the nation which is in line with middle class aspirations and anxieties. In this process, the nation itself is rebranded as a commodity within the global market which has significant consequences in how the country is viewed from within by its consumer-citizens and from a global perspective. Public culture is a powerful and charged site in 'new' India because as Srivastava (2007) explains it is public culture, rather than direct state power, which has become a more powerful agent of change and influence. Srivastava goes on to explain that it is in and through public culture that attempts are made to develop normative definitions of masculinities and identities, making an enquiry into such attempts crucial for the study of contemporary Indian masculinities.

The shifts in public cultural representations of masculinities in India have also been well documented by scholars (Srivastava 2015, Haynes, 2012b, Derne 2000). There is a gradual shift in the public construction of the Indian male from being a citizen fighting for the independence of India in the

1940's, to an 'angry young man' fighting for a civic nation in the 1970's, to the celebration of a pan-Indian male connected to global consumption networks as a consumer-citizen in 'new' India since the 1990's (Consolaro 2014). The new image of the Indian male is represented by the financially secured hero, well groomed and fastidious about looks, and mostly seen in around or inside shopping malls and posh restaurants in the country or abroad (ibid). At the same time, what makes him 'Indian' is a cultural identity rooted in patriarchal and bounded conceptions of the family, honour, nation and gender roles (ibid). In the empirical chapters to follow I explore these shifts in the public cultural imaginations of masculinities amongst the Urban Smart Strivers.

Settings and Methodology

To establish my ontological standpoint, this doctoral project is essentially an enquiry into constructions of the masculine subject in contemporary urban India. Apart from exploring the process of subject construction, I want to engage with expectations, anxieties and pressures that shape such subjectivities and their performances. In part, my project of examining the contemporary sociocultural construction of masculine identities also relies on understanding the continuous and contradictory processes of imagining the nation and its ideal male citizen. I have chosen to study such social and cultural narratives through film imagery, adverts, magazines and other visual and discursive fields, because they reflect the forces of religion, class, caste, global capital, consumerism and gender interplaying.

I chose the city of Delhi as my field site because of my initial interest in studying urban gendered violence which was a politically charged issue in Delhi from December 2012 following the gangrape and subsequent death of a young woman on a moving bus in the city (Brosius 2017). This particular incident had sparked political, academic as well as media discussions about the issue of violence towards women as a particular problem in Delhi (ibid). These narratives often compared the 'unsafeness' of Delhi with the 'safeness' of other large Indian cities like Bangalore, Mumbai or Chennai. Hence given the particular focus on Delhi at the time, and my ability to fluently speak and write Hindi, the local language, meant that Delhi provided an interesting and manageable field site for my doctoral research. Through focusing on Delhi my attempt is to understand broader processes of

urbanisation and subject creation that are taking place across Indian cities and hence following other scholars working on urban politics I use the focus on Delhi to talk about larger Indian social processes (Baviskar 2003, Donner 2012).

I spent fourteen months in total over two trips in Delhi between August 2014 and January 2016. In Delhi, I initially met my informants at two sites which I systematically visited, a tea stall in Connaught Place and a cigarette stall in South Extension, from where as our relationship grew, they took me to other sites of leisure and consumption in the city and introduced me to their social worlds. The young men I worked with, were not urban elites so did not live near these places of urban leisure and pleasure because they were in the most expensive areas of the city. All the young men traveled to these sites after work or college and make an effort to come to these places to be there and spend time there because they value them as important sites of a 'new' India. I deliberately chose these sites in central Delhi to reflect the dynamics of an urban metropolis and to allow myself access to a mixed and wide pool of men across class and social backgrounds.

The fieldwork for this thesis is built on data from three sets of young men in Delhi whom I met whilst 'hanging out' at the two central sites. One set was in educational institutions, the other educated but looking for employment, and the final set was educated and working young men. I combine findings from the three groups under the label of Urban Smart Strivers because their difference in employment status does not greatly shift their consumption practices and class based aspirations. Secondly, the economic difference between working and non-working young men was not particularly great because all the young men lived at home with their parents so their youth status was greatly dependent on their families. In this context, what binds the three sets of young men together under the label of being an Urban Smart Striver are their shared practices of consumption as well as their shared performative elements of their 'middle classness' (McGuire 2011, Brosius 2010). As several researchers working on the middle classes in India point out, using econometric or income based assessments or definitions about middle class identity is hugely complex if not impossible in the Indian context (see Fernandes 2006 or Nisbett 2009). Instead studying the performative elements of being middle class that go beyond simply measuring consumption in narrow ways allows for processual and socociocultural ideas

around middle class identity to emerge. Brosius (2010) for example explains that in a context of great economic inequality in India, shopping malls or cafes are domains where ‘Erlebniskulture’, or internalised displays and celebration of the self are orchestrated for one’s own self and others (Brosius, 2010, 25). Most interestingly, she argues that it is actually more important to be seen in the shopping malls than to actually shop and hence revealing the performative elements of ‘middle classness’ that go beyond measuring incomes and spending to explore the sociocultural codes and values at play. Following such methodologies, I too choose to focus on the performative and stylised ways in which the heterogenous group of Urban Smart Strivers attempt to perform a coherent classed and gendered identity.

In total I had eight key informants who form the Urban Smart Strivers (profiles in Appendix 1). They were all unmarried, north-Indian, Hindu, middle or upper caste and between the ages of 20 and 27. They were relatively affluent members of the ‘middle classes’ and came from socially advantaged families based in Delhi, which allowed them higher levels of consumption, access to family cars and bikes, smartphones, pocket money for cigarettes, gym memberships, drinking and shopping. But they were not urban elites or even ‘upper middle-class’ because they were not English speaking and had never travelled abroad.

Religion and caste were two factors that the young men claimed were ‘unimportant’ in their lives. Rather than taking this at face-value, there is a social significance in such claims which I explore in part in the thesis. Nonetheless, the idea that young men were ‘above’ caste and religion meant that these were not conversations that were held openly and young men were desperate to present an image of themselves as ‘modern’ and hence ‘casteless’ and secular. Satish Deshpande (2013) has called this the paradox of ‘castlessness’ in India where caste privilege is enjoyed by speakers without having to acknowledge, or outrightly rejecting caste as important. In methodological terms, during the practice of ‘ghumna’ or dating or consumption amongst friends, caste and religion were ‘unimportant’ and never a focus of conversation or social practice, and hence are not central themes in this thesis. This finding is in line with other researchers working on youth masculinities in India for example, in the context of

Kerala, Osella and Osella (1998: 191) argue that youth can ‘masquerade’ as being above caste because the dictates of adult personhood around caste do not restrict them, so at this stage in their life cycle, young men can be above caste in that sense. Similarly in the context of young men in Bangalore, Nisbett (2009, 52) explains that although caste and religion are not irrelevant for young men, they are not structuring principles in the study of their youth cultures.

Feminist scholars have argued that caste often has strong implications at the urban household level and within domestic spaces (Grover 2009), however this was a realm of social life that was inaccessible for me as a male ‘friend’. Unlike village based ethnographies, the nature of the urban field, and my particular focus on urban youth masculinities, meant that spending time with families and interacting with them in a systematic manner would have compromised my research aims and focus of working with young men. As I demonstrate in the thesis, the relationship amongst my research informants and me, is based precisely on maintaining a realm away from the family and the household where ‘old norms’ and caste and community respectability and honour are reproduced for young men and hence place several restrictions on their ‘fun’. So although I met the parents of my research informants and went into their home spaces occasionally, I could not ‘study’ those spaces and their relations in great detail. As a result however, similar to the experiences of other young male anthropologists working on Indian masculinities like Nisbett (2009) or Rogers (2008), I got much greater access to youth cultures, set apart from the spheres of family, work and the home, allowing me to explore masculinities and its relation to urban spaces in and through such youth cultures. Furthermore as Srivastava (2010, 104) explains, doing ethnography of modernity is necessarily always a ‘fragmentary analysis’ and cannot provide a complete picture of social life from all domains and spaces. He goes further to argue that researchers ought not to even aim to ‘join the fragments to present a ‘whole’ picture’ but rather to focus on highlighting the ‘fleeting experiences’ that constitute parts of life in a city in contemporary times (Srivastava, 2010, 104).

By ethnographically studying these young men in the context of their social worlds and privileging their ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger 1999) this thesis takes on an iterative research design wherein the data is

presented and analysed in and through the perspective of the young men. This is a multi-sited urban ethnography which also uses photo-elicitation and film-elicitation (Banks 2007) as and when informants encounter images in their routine 'roaming'. The role of imagery and its encounter on an everyday level is crucial in unpacking deeply embedded ideas of masculinities on the one hand for understanding historical, social and political processes that create and maintain gendered visual constructions of a 'man' (Haynes 2012, Lukose 2005). But images also allowed a 'neutral third person' (Banks 2007) to talk about when discussing sensitive issues like hurt or disrespect. Rather than using a top-down framework of concepts or analysis, I seek to present that data from 'living inside' (Pinney 1997) their culture of youth masculinity. Hence I think of young men's lives and practices not as 'transgressions' or 'subcultures' which some of the youth masculinities literature does (see Kimmel 2008 for example). Rather I look at the wider sociopolitical and generational context in which young men's practices are situated and study them in and through their contexts.

The ethnographic material is gathered through participant observations, and is contextualised through films, images, jokes, advertisements and consumption in men's broader social worlds following the methodologies of other ethnographers studying contemporary urban and youth cultures (Derne 2000, Mankekar 2000, Liechty 2003, Nisbett 2009). I treat social practices and the visual images as part of a discursive field of meanings, embodied actions and messages which have to be carefully understood as political and social practices. With this aim, I have focused on the films and visual imagery that are important for the young men I was working with and which are valued from within their culture of urban youth masculinity.

Visual culture as Pinney (2004, 10) explains in South Asia has a particular local saliency which describes and maintains a set of overarching representational idioms which are implicated in various partisan agendas yet retain a power capacity to affirm common tropes, anxieties and desires. As he explains, there are different positions within a shared epistemological frame, which contrary to imaginations, is a source of great political freedom and optimism in India rather than an 'escape'. I did not opt for a systematic content analysis of all media images and models of representing masculinities as several

other scholars have done in various contexts (see for example, Macnamara, 2006, Moss 2011). But rather like Lukose (2009) and Nisbett (2009) who collected their visual and cultural references by spending time and being with young people, I too chose images and references that emerge from within the cultural worlds of the Urban Smart Strivers. The analysis of images and references that are carried out in the empirical chapters are based on the films I saw with my informants or images, songs we talked about, billboards we collectively encountered and jokes and images shared amongst us on social media. As a result, the thesis explores four films that were popular amongst informants, along with three key songs and seven iconic Indian male personalities that were important for the young men. There are indeed several other counter-images and alternative images that circulate in the public sphere, but these were not part of the cultural worlds that the Urban Smart Strivers occupied and a focus on such images would require a different research question and methodology. Hence in this thesis I do not claim to provide a systematic analysis of Bollywood popular culture, but only an exploration of key visual and sociocultural references important for my young men.

I made field-notes in my phone and sometimes discreetly in my notebook when out and about roaming with my informants and then converted them into longer and more substantial field-notes on my laptop upon returning home at the end of the day in Delhi. I did not use a voice recorder or a coding software to code my data, because such methods privilege the spoken and formal word first of all, which would hide the many dimensions and covert forms of knowledge that I was interested in drawing out. Being a participant-observer, working across multiple sites was the only feasible methodology to collect the kind of data I was interested in gathering. Furthermore, it is only through long-term interactions in non-structured ways that we can come to a deeper understanding of men and masculinities. In short questionnaires and in initial conversations, men's answers often rearticulate the status quo (Jackson 1999) creating an impression that 'men' and 'masculinities' are categories that have a priory and fixed existence which can be documented by asking individuals direct questions about themselves. If the analysis ends there, which in many development contexts and policies it often does, we get a one dimensional understanding of men and their lives as feminists working in gender and development have long pointed out (Jackson and Pearson 2005). I found, similar to the long term

engagement of scholars working on masculinities, that over time and through building mutual relationships of trust, men express their distress and their vulnerabilities, they talk about the sense of hurt and pain that they carry within themselves and how they cope or make sense of it. Men then start to appear not like the strong patriarchs they are expected to be, but much more humane and vulnerable. Similarly through ethnographic observational methods like the one I employ in this thesis, the contradictions in what men say and do also becomes evident. This allows us to question the normative and discursive level of masculinities discourse and their embodied actions in the context of everyday social relations.

Ethics and Consent

I obtained oral informed consent from my informants at the early stages of my fieldwork and at repeated intervals throughout the course of my time with them. When first meeting informants, I would make it clear to them that I was a researcher and in Delhi on research purposes, studying 'youth culture'. I also gave my personal contact cards to them as a token to make clear my status, university affiliations and my intentions. Handing out these cards with my email address, telephone number, name and department contact details, made me look 'professional' as one informant told me and thus encouraged the young men to feel comfortable about talking to me about various issues. These cards also made my university affiliations clear to them allowing them the chance to ever trace me and my doctoral project. During the course of long conversations, I would make sure to tell the young men that I found a particular story or conversation interesting and would ask their permission to reuse it. This allowed my intent to use conversations as data to be clear to my informants. In some conversations that young men were particularly sensitive about, I would similarly ask for their consent to use such information and often it would prompt young men to elaborate further or repeat 'facts' so that I could get their story 'correctly'.

Several months into my fieldwork, I was introduced to the 'gay park' which was opposite the tea stand in Connaught Place where I met my informants. I was introduced to the park through one of the

Urban Smart Strivers I met at the tea stand and the park then became an important site for my fieldwork. In the ‘gay park’ where identities were always veiled and carefully exchanged, I was not as forthcoming with giving cards in the first instance when I talked to young men, but over the course of the conversation I would make my researcher position explicit and if appropriate hand over a card so that they could trace me at any point. Similarly, when taking photographs of sites and young men, I made sure I got their explicit consent for use of their images in my thesis and for potential publications. I initially tried to get signatures for the use of photographs but that made young men uncomfortable, and so was a strategy I had to eventually drop. Nonetheless, armed with a large and prominent DSLR camera, I never took any covert images and always made sure that the young men saw the photos I took of them and collaborated in deciding which photos they liked and which I ought to discard from my camera. I was always careful in following their wishes and directions around the use and aesthetics of their images.

Researching ‘Men’ in a City

The political anchor of this project is based upon my training and engagement with gendered and social development issues in India. I situate my work not as a disengaged academic, but as someone actively trying to remain true to academic rigour but at the same time thinking about the addressing some of the bigger questions that I think need answering in the world today. As a pro-feminist young queer British-Indian man, I see myself as someone deeply engaged in development thought and work and seeking to contribute to development practice on issues of gender and inequality. Personally I feel that in order to make an effective contribution to the field of gender and development and the study of men and masculinities, a deep and thorough understanding of the context and the politics has to come to the fore. This thesis adds important complex layers to the often limited existing knowledge in development studies about men as gendered beings and the world of men more broadly. As social scientists committed to international development, it is I feel our job to work to produce more accurate knowledge whilst also engaging with concerns of how such knowledge is translated into practice. This does not mean that as academics we allow the power of the ‘development discourse’ to dictate the

terms of our research through funding or donor priorities for example, but it also does not follow that as academics we see no use in engaging with the world of gender and social policy.

Female scholars working on masculinities like Chopra (2003, 2007), Van De Gaag (2014) or Alexander (1996, 2000) have written about their standpoint as women studying men and masculinities through their relative exclusion from various spaces like the barber shops, the tavernas and house parties which were all male context in their studies. In contrast other scholars like McDowell (1997, 2011) have written about the ‘frankness’ of young men in talking to female researchers. In my fieldwork, as a young British-Indian man I was included into most spaces and practices that young men participated in owing to my gender and Indian racial background. This also however required me to constantly ‘act’ like an ‘Indian man’ in a context that the young men I was working with could understand and relate to. During fieldwork, I found myself correcting, altering or deliberately acting in ways that would allow me to fit in with the group. This meant that I had to constantly be aware as to how to position my embodied masculine self, the clothes I put on, my speech and its tone as well as its content. I was most nervous when meeting new friends and acquaintances of my key informants who would expect and assume a high level of cultural and appropriately embodied knowledge whilst interacting and hence this opened up rooms for ‘errors’ on my part. At the same time, the moments I felt most comfortable were also in homosocial group settings where I could hide behind the shadow of other young men’s presence and observe things silently but actively and not worry about the way my body moved or did things. Although over the course of doing fourteen months of fieldwork I was close and comfortable with my young men, I was nonetheless afraid of being somehow ‘found out’ to be not quite the ‘man’ or the ‘Indian’ they wanted me to be till the very last day. Although I never actively deceived the young men with my thoughts or opinions, yet the many assumptions they had about me, which allowed me ease of access in the first place, were what scared me about getting ‘found out’.

My social role in the field changed from context to context. I was broadly seen as a similar aged ‘friend’, sometimes a slightly older brother and almost always someone who was both inside and outside at the same time. I found the idea of becoming ‘friends’ with my informants problematic from the start

because it felt to me an incorrect representation of what our relationship was. Although I casually referred to my informants whilst in the field as ‘friends’ and sometimes ‘brother’ as was colloquially done, I was also always trying to keep my researcher position visible to my informants. I was, for my informants, a young man very similar to them, but there were class difference, there were differences in lifestyles and there was a difference in where we came from. My regional roots in the South Indian state of Kerala often meant that my informants thought of me as a ‘simpleton’ from the South of the country in line with their broader tropes about the region (see Osella and Osella 2006). As a result I felt that they always took on an instructional role towards me. ‘Showing me around’ the city of Delhi and its various pleasures, telling me how things are done and what was not done, were practices for young men to demonstrate their urban skills and sensibilities and for me to learn the ropes of how to ‘be’ with them in their social worlds. For them, I was new to the city of Delhi and new to India in some ways, they often introduced me as ‘from outside’ (*bahar se*) which allowed me to be a ‘novice’ in the group, yet be intimately part of it owing to the assumed to be shared gendered sensibilities. However I was also required to learn the cultural competence and socially embodied knowledge quickly because of my Indian roots which created arbitrary lines at the kinds of questions I could ask them and the kinds of questions which ought to be ‘too obvious’ for me as an Indian man.

My sexuality was never something I could discuss openly with most of my informants who only enjoyed sexual contact with women and were embedded deeply within heteronormative cultures which depended on homophobia to define itself. I was constantly afraid of the way I was standing, my voice, the way my hands were moving or what the expression on my face was and how my eyes were scanning the scene - at all points I was afraid of being ‘caught’. It was only in the intimacy of being with one informant at the time that I really ever felt completely at ease with my informants. The group homosocial dynamic in particular, I felt required me to be careful and alert. At the same time, young men confessed to me their close bonds with other men but these were always through the language of ‘bhai’ and ‘yaar’. However in a ‘gay park’ I did meet informants who enjoyed having sex with men, and with them I could be more open about my homosexuality which meant that I was closer to them in a way I could not with the other informants.

Fieldwork in Delhi with young men was both a moving and a challenging experience for me. I have come away with lots of new thoughts, several unanswered puzzles as well as some close bonds that I wish to maintain. At various points of my fieldwork I was both amazed and disturbed by the young men that I met. Several of my own questions and embarrassment about my sexuality, as well as my experiences of being bullied and ridiculed in my all boys school in Gujarat in West India came rushing forth to me at various points in my time in Delhi. In many ways I felt that carrying out this research had in part forced me back into the closet. When out and about with my informants, I was nervous about bumping into some queer friends in Delhi which would in turn I felt 'expose' me. Yet, this fieldwork also came with many answers to anxieties and questions that I did not know that I carried with me. Having left India as a teenager, during the peak of my tense relationship with gendered expectations that were required from me, several of such issues remained unaddressed, until I returned to do fieldwork and live in India again for an extended period of time. Why was I made fun of in school for not being good at sports, why was I so anxious about PE classes or changing clothes in front of other teenage boys in my year group? Or why was it that I had more friends from the girls school next door and felt so alone and friendless in my own school? These were just some of the questions that I started to make some peace with by engaging with men who were similar to what my teenage friends in India had been like. Hence working on this thesis has not just been an academic exercise for me, this has also been a personal journey in more ways than one. And this was a journey that I am glad to have undertaken as a researcher.

Chapter Three: A 'New' Indian Man

Introduction

This chapter explores what being a 'man' in 'new' India means for the Urban Smart Strivers. It focuses on how gendered identities are constructed for them by various sociocultural processes, and how young men engage with these in dialectic and relational ways. I explore how in 'new' India, young men experience and are required to manage the contradictory identities of being 'modern' yet 'masculine' and 'Indian' through various everyday social practices. In this process, a fragile cohesion emerges between a consumerist Indian citizenship and a deeply engrained patriarchy, wherein men's gendered identities are commodified to discursively create a 'new' Indian man. Through studying young men's everyday practices and discourses in the realm of urban leisure, I reveal the incomplete process of becoming such 'new' Indian men and the anxieties that come with it.

The chapter begins with a vignette of young men going to a dance-club in the afternoon, which is then contextualised within broader ideas of youth masculinities in 'new' India. The next section explores men's discourses of marking distinctions through being 'smart', which consequently causes social exclusions in access and practices of their 'youthful fun'. I then move on to looking at how consumption itself is made into a masculine enterprise appropriate for 'real men' and how new discourses of men's commodified masculinities come to be uniquely 'Indian' too. Through this context, I finally look at how love is expressed in 'modern' but 'manly' ways and offer some concluding remarks.

Off to the Club

It was 1:45pm on a warm Delhi afternoon. I was waiting for Raj to come and meet me at Lajpat Nagar metro station. He was 30 minutes late, but by then I was used to waiting for my informants for long stretches. I suddenly got a call from him so I picked up the phone but there was no answer, just music in the background. Then his voice shouted out "Yes brother (*bhai*) where are you?" I replied by telling him that I was standing by the metro exit as we decided. I asked him which exit he was at but he replied "No brother, I'm on the road, come towards the front". To which I was confused and asked him what

he meant. He was very cryptic and said in a loud instructive tone “Yeah, come to the front”. I did not understand what he meant but I followed his instructions and walked towards a parked car.

I looked through the tinted window and saw Raj sitting on the driver’s seat gesturing me in. He was not smiling but had a friendly look on his face nonetheless. Slightly nervously, I opened the car door and a refreshing burst of chilled air rushed out. As I got in, I stretched my hand out towards Raj and said “Hi brother, amazing car” with a big smile. He looked pleased by the comment but did not smile back. With a tone of warmth he then asked me “And brother, how are you?” I replied that all was fine with me, but Raj had stopped listening. He was concentrating on the road as we began to merge into traffic. I noticed that Raj was more dressed-up than our previous meetings. Today he was in a black full-sleeved shirt, with a white psychedelic print on the front. I was glad that I too wore a relatively nice shirt.

Inside the car, the atmosphere was very different from the outside. The car was cool with the air conditioner working on full power, I could smell the car perfume and music poured out of the speakers on the doors. Looking at a hot Delhi afternoon zoom by from the darkened windows created a sense of privacy and excitement as we drove through traffic, noise and pollution. In a brisk turn of mood Raj abruptly told me “Friend (*yaar*), my phone’s mother’s been fucked, I don’t know what’s happened to it”. He picked up a lifeless iPhone, pressed it frustratedly a few times and passed it to me. Raj explained “I got it second hand, but it was working fine, it has all the numbers”. I helplessly asked “what happened to it?” But unimpressed by my question, Raj did not reply and simply picked up his MP3 player to change the song.

He flicked through a few songs and settled for an Iggy Azalea track. I was excited by the familiar music and told him that I liked the song. He seemed pleased by it. I asked him if he liked Iggy and he again seemed uninterested in the question and peered into his music player. After a few seconds, Raj slowly read out in English the name of the song, “Black wee...weedow” and I encouragingly affirmed him by quickly blurting out “yes, yes, Black Widow” and nodded incessantly. Our conversation about music led him to play me his favourite song. He explained “All *Badshah* (Emperor) songs are good, but this one is

just great” as he played a popular Hindi rap song ‘*Wakebra Swag*’ (Different Swag). Raj clearly loved the song because he hummed the chorus whilst moving his shoulders slowly to the song. Before I knew it, we reached a residential colony to pick up another friend who was supposedly going to join us.

Raj got out of the car, not knowing what to do, I too jumped out. He walked-off to buy a cigarette so I followed him and we bought single cigarettes each at a corner stall. As we had the first drags of our cigarette and moved back towards the car, still in the peak afternoon sun just after 2:00pm, Aditya turned up. He walked up confidently to Raj and gave him a hug lovingly. Raj replied to this in mock anger and exaggeration “Vaginaboy (*chutiye*) how long do you take to get ready, yeah brother, we were waiting for you!”. Aditya seemed entertained by this overture but did not respond. Aditya then turned to shake my hand and gave me a hug saying “How are you brother?”. Although this was the first time we had met, it seemed to me that Aditya did not need me to respond, because he quickly moved his hand to snatch the cigarette from Raj’s mouth.

Raj did not let go of his cigarette. He held Aditya’s hand and pushed it away, taking an exaggerated drag from his cigarette. Aditya laughingly pretended to struggle and stop Raj from having that drag. Both of them kept laughing and glancing at me intermittently as they entered into a physical lock. Not knowing how to react, I tried to look consumed in my cigarette and rested against the car as the two men became more entangled. Raj eventually passed Aditya the cigarette which Aditya put to his mouth and smoked. Once we were done with our cigarettes, Aditya rushed to the front of the car and said “Don’t mind brother, I’ll sit in the front”. I agreed immediately and Aditya got in the front and took charge of the music with great gusto and laughter as we drove off to the club.

Young Men in a ‘New’ India

This vignette provides a glimpse into some contemporary realities for young men in a ‘new’ India.

There are several themes that need unpacking here. Firstly, this is an India where iPhones, international music, branded clothes, clubs and drinking, luxury cars and high levels of consumption have become part of everyday realities for groups of men like Raj and Aditya. Such opportunities for leisure and

consumption are relatively new in their scale and accessibility amongst the middle classes (Donner, 2012). As various scholars explain, these processes mark India's arrival onto the 'world stage' of globalised consumption and as a nation of abundance and modernity (Liechty 2003, Donner 2012). For young men like Raj and Aditya, belonging to this changing India, is an exciting and seductive prospect. It marks a transition of moving away from a nation of poverty to a 'new' global India of abundance.

Raj articulated this excitement to me once at a party, pointing with a sense of pride to our plush surroundings he said "Look, we also have everything now, good food, malls, girls, everything". Raj's comments, mirroring those of many young men I worked with in Delhi, signal the optimism of educated and upwardly mobile young men in the nation's 'development'. Amongst young men, participation in such practices of consumption and leisure allowed them a chance to tangibly and materially experience a vision of a 'world-class' India and locate themselves as young 'world-class' selves within it. As Brosius (2010, 23) explains, one crucial condition in experiencing this 'new' India of abundance that Raj eludes to, is the aesthetic and performative dimension of making the self visible in a orchestrated practice of seeing and being seen and hence attempting to legitimise this 'modernity'. Within this context, the display of 'western' tastes of Raj and Aditya indicates the "visual urban embodiment of globalisation" which as Fernandes (2004, 2415) explains is crucial to dispel fears of late industrialising nations being 'left behind'.

In his attempt at becoming global, Raj's concerns about work, studies, families or futures do not go away. Rather, a new set of concerns about making sure to get the right selfie, money for the entrance to clubs and bars, being seen to be coming in a car and with equally well put-together friends have emerged. These are not just 'superficial' concerns or 'passing' temporary phases, rather these dynamics point to various important aspects of contemporary cultures of masculinity in urban India. The emergence of such social and cultural practices of consumption, as well as their profound shift in defining a 'new' India, means that young men now value and desire such processes greatly. These spaces provide avenues to enact a new sense of self which is appropriately modern, gendered and classed. In the vignette, Raj is a 'new' consumer in a fancy car and fashionable clothes, but he is also

controlled in his speech, does not smile too much and has a particular set of speech and bodily acts. As we will see in this chapter, these are crucial aspects of a commodified masculinity in 'new' India.

These new social imaginaries and practices have brought profound changes to ideas of what a 'good life' means to young men. Raj for example came from an affluent family of working professionals in South Delhi. He respected his father for being a successful patriarch who was hardworking and socially connected and with two sons and a household that depended on his role as the provider. However Raj considered his father's outlook and approach to life and consumption as 'narrow' and 'backwards'. He explained that his father was afraid to 'talk' to other people 'openly' and take part in 'new things'. Raj on the other hand desires an individualised presence in the world which he feels allows him to 'express' himself and be 'free' through being a successful consumer. As Raj explained to me, "I want to live free (*khulke*) not like my dad, only saving, saving". The pursuit of fun with friends, of music and globalised tastes, allowed him to create a 'good life' which was 'modern' but also morally and ethically superior as it was allegedly founded on consumerist free 'choice', 'hard work' and 'self-expression' rather than 'old fashioned thinking' of his dad.

At the same time, young men like Raj and Aditya are aware of being 'junior' and being dependent on their families and communities in crucial ways (Osella and Osella, 2006). They are not free floating 'modern' agents but are bound in filial obligations and responsibilities as young men. When for example, Raj and Aditya go out dancing and drinking at the club on a Saturday, they have to do so in the middle of the afternoon so that they can return home in the evening. In the car on the way to the club, Raj gets a call from his father asking him where he is. Before picking up the call, Raj turns off the loud Hindi rap music and responds to his father saying that he was en-route to college for extra classes over the weekend. Because Raj lived with his family who did not fully approve of his habits, he had to pretend he spent the whole day in college. The forces of neoliberal marketisation, which are highly malleable (Gooptu 2013a), respond to such social constraints by moulding the realm of commodified leisure to the localised context. Hence as the parties took place in the afternoon, they allowed both of Raj's moral and social worlds to coexist side by side. By getting home in the evening he remained a

good responsible Indian son to his parents, but out partying in the afternoon in the swanky bars and clubs of Delhi, he could be successfully ‘modern’ too. Hence there was a constant negotiation forcing young men to participate in this ‘modernity’ in compartmentalised ways, leaving them ‘caught in-between’ their moral and social worlds given their generational position (Philip 2017).

Being Smart Men

For the Urban Smart Strivers belonging in a ‘new’ India, is principally through a commodified masculinity articulated in and through the metaphor of being ‘smart’. In talking about themselves, Raj and Aditya used the English term ‘smart’ to explain to me that they were ‘smart men’ (*smart bande*). The project of such being ‘smart men’ required, as Raj explained to me, appearing hard, confident, and aggressive but equally being refined and sophisticated in appropriate ways. The appropriate enactment of such a ‘smart’ masculinity allowed him not just access to spaces of ‘new’ India, but also opportunities for getting high status employment, the ability to ‘sit and stand’ with ‘civil company’ (*ache log*) and interact with good-looking modern Indian women in malls and clubs around the city. Similar to Lukose’s (2005) idea of young men desiring to be ‘*chethu*’ in the Kerala context, being ‘smart men’ brings together clothing styles, respectability, embodiment and an attitude about the world. This notion of ‘smart’ hence begins to define a youthful commodified masculinity for the Urban Smart Strivers.

As we see in the vignette, for Raj and Aditya, going to a club by car, carrying iPhones and ‘dating’, mark them as not just socially ‘modern’, but they also mark their high economic and class status. These are activities and spaces that not everyone in the middle-classes can afford and are certainly out of reach of the urban poor and working classes. Yet the power and vision of such commodified leisure and subjectivities shapes the national imaginary of what modern and urban ‘fun’ should look like (Baviskar and Ray 2011). Like Raj, all the Urban Smart Strivers spent a great deal of resources and energy in their grooming and self-presentation to create and demonstrate their subjectivities. As Raj explained to me “you get respect (*izzat*) if you are smart”. This is what allowed the Urban Smart Strivers to mark a sense of difference from other men in the broad ‘middle classes’ who they felt were not ‘smart’ men. Hence embodied consumption practices get closely related to notions of respect and respectability for

the Urban Smart Strivers. In the image below for example, Fig 1, young men show their smart selves through the careful display of a commodified masculinity marked by their phones, shoes, stylised stance near a car and located within the upmarket leisure area of Connaught Place.



Fig. 1 Urban Smart Strivers, Delhi, Philip 2016

One young informant, Sampat, who worked at an IT firm in Delhi explained to me that he had to be appropriately dressed and presented because he did not want to be mistaken for being ‘old fashioned’ or a ‘village bumpkin’. He also did not want to be mistaken for a lower middle-class man or a ‘local type’ who overdress and has no economic or social ‘substance’. Hence he felt the right balance had to be struck in looking ‘urban’ and ‘smart’ for a large metropolitan context like Delhi where one has to be worldly and cosmopolitan. This fine line in being smart is similar to anxieties for young men studied by Nakassis (2016) in the urban south Indian context around ‘doing style’. Style in this context, is not something young men wear, but it is something they do to perform an appropriate ‘youth’ and masculinity. Nakassis (2016, 5) explains that through ‘doing style’ a ‘semiotic of difference’ gets articulated in material form.

When discussing which men Sampat thought were ‘smart’ men from the vast middle-classes at a shopping mall in Delhi, he explained “You can immediately see and tell (*dekh te hi*) their mannerisms,

talking style, clothes, everything”. Sampat was very clear that these were not just conversations or traits that men had to talk about, they needed to be demonstrated through some social and embodied action: “all this you have to do and show (*karke dikhana*).” Hence smartness for him is represented discursively and through appropriate consumption practices that mark men as ‘smart’. Sampat's comment also hints at the embodied ‘way of being’ (Thapan 1997) smart which I explore in more detail in the next chapter.

‘Smartness’ becomes the quality through which the Urban Smart Strivers distance themselves and draw boundaries from other masculinities and femininities. The knowledge of being ‘smart’ is socially coded and the policing of this code becomes a way of marking other masculinities as inferior. One way of distancing from such ‘inferior’ masculinities, by the Urban Smart Strivers, is demonstrated by jokes they make and send via social media platforms. An example is a joke in Hindi below which explains that a village man, after watching a popular Bollywood film, comes out thinking that women like buffalos and sings a song about it repeatedly to his girlfriend. The joke relies on the knowledge of a famous song from the film *Sultan* (Ali 2016) called “Baby likes Bass” (*Baby Ko Bass Pasand Hai*). The music genre of ‘bass’ music is phonetically similar to Hindi word for buffalo ‘*bhans*’. Hence the punchline of this joke is premised upon the village man, not knowing the difference between bass music and a ‘*bhans*’ (buffalo).

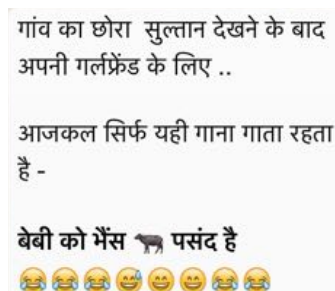


Fig. 2 Online Hindi Joke (Source: Whatsapp Group)

Urban Smart Strivers like Raj and Aditya have knowledge about bass music, it plays in their cars and the clubs they frequent, hence they can situate themselves through this joke as appropriately ‘modern’ men who correctly read and receive the song. The villager’s unfamiliarity with ‘bass music’ of a liberalised urban India marks out not only the physical space to which he does not belong, but also the symbolic ‘new’ India to which he is an outsider. The social boundaries of marking ‘smart’ and ‘non-smart’ masculinities within the narrative of this joke, points out the anxieties for Urban Smart Strivers who attempt to legitimise their own respectability and ‘smartness’. Whilst at the same time, they try to

exclude rural and 'non-smart' masculinities both spatially and socially on the basis of an ascribed inferiority. This 'joke' is situated in a wider context of hierarchy of urban subjectivities attempting to claim a superior status by portraying rural masculinities as 'backward' 'traditional' and 'rustic'.

Ethnographic work suggests that discourses to humiliate rural masculinities are so powerful in Indian cities that young rural men experience personal shame at not being culturally adept and think of themselves as 'new born babies' without social skills or speaking 'half-english' and feel useless socially in cities (Rogers, 2008, 85). Hence this joke operates through deep rooted notions of a rural-urban divide in perceptions of masculinities and attempts to devalue any alternative non-urbane subjective experiences of men within a context of globalisation.

Further, in this 'joke' the non-smart man is presented as some one who does not have a controlled manner of speech. He "repeatedly" (*gata rehata hai*) and almost uncontrollably sings the incorrect song to woo his girlfriend. This is in contrast to Raj's controlled and cryptic style of speech that we saw in the opening vignette which marks Raj's superior gendered and urbane 'smartness'. In the vignette, Raj has a careful demonstration of a 'modern' sensibility, indicated through his taste in music, clothes and cars, but he also presents an image of someone who is 'hard' with a steely appearance that does not smile and is brusque. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, role of this 'hardness' is assumed to be a 'natural' masculine trait which he knows how to use. However the villager's masculinity is portrayed as unable to do so and hence has an uncontrolled manner of speech and song. Such imaginations around rural men's inability to self-control has important consequences for discussions on gendered violence in the urban context which I explore in Chapter Six A Safe/Unsafe City.

Similarly, in being Urban Smart Strivers, too much 'formality' is not desirable when out '*ghumne*'. As we see in the vignette, amongst Raj and his other 'smart' friends, there is no need for displays of excessive politeness or courtesy. Polite conversations and the use of the formal pronouns like '*aap*' (you) are reserved for girlfriends and older family members or for demonstrating social distance and respect. In contrast, the cultural competence in knowing when to be brusque or to swear and hence remove social distance is extremely important to cultures of urban youth masculinity for the Urban Smart Strivers. For example, when I meet Aditya for the first time in the opening vignette, there is no need for

pleasantries and other greetings between us because the assumption is that we are equals and ‘brothers’. In this way, such speech acts, as well as silences, define social competence and in-groups of similar smart men who are ‘brothers’ (*bhai*). Consequently, they also mark out-groups and inferior socialising skills amongst young men who don’t know how to interact with ‘brothers’. During the initial stages of my fieldwork, understanding these codes of socialising and speaking were completely alien to me as a researcher and I often made ‘mistakes’ when meeting young men. As Raj and I got closer, if I made any ‘errors’ like smiling too much or not having a deep enough voice, Raj would be quick to add excuses on my behalf explaining that I was from abroad or ‘outside’ but also explaining that I was his ‘brother’ which meant that he had to teach me the ropes. In doing so, Raj gently but firmly disciplined my own gendered performances so that I too could try becoming smart like him. As feminist scholars have demonstrated, through such expressive language and shared speech acts and codes various ideologies of gender are naturalised (Geetha 2007, 141) and hence allowing ‘smart’ men to interact with each other whilst establishing brusque conversational styles and controlled speech as ‘masculine’.

Similarly, the demonstration of smartness required that Hindi conversations also be peppered with appropriate English words to mark a sense of distinction. Raj and Aditya for example, almost exclusively spoke to me in Hindi and addressed me as ‘*bhai*’ (brother). Yet when we were in some malls, I noticed that they would call me the English shortened form for brother, ‘bro’, or occasionally ‘buddy’. Further, the ‘correct’ pronunciation of words and brands is a source of anxiety for the Urban Smart Strivers. As we see in the vignette, Raj has difficulty in pronouncing ‘Black Widow’, an American pop-song that he has on his MP3 Player. He would often explicitly ask me to pronounce or explain English words to him so that he could pick up the ‘correct’ pronunciation. At other times I noticed how young men would whisper English words they hear or see written around cafes and shops to practice their pronunciation without trying to getting noticed. Brosius (2010) similarly found that young people in Delhi most desired accents of Indian TV and Radio hosts who were American-Indians or British-Indian because they epitomised an aspiration globalised Indian identity through language.

Men's Youthful Fun

These anxieties and aspirations are viscerally experienced through urban leisure spaces and its architecture for the Urban Smart Strivers. To go back to the vignette, the party that I attended with Raj and Aditya in the afternoon was held at a venue called 'Club London'. The symbolically international name of the club and its restricted entry through a payment of Rs 1500 (£15) per person, allowed for a 'world class' and exclusive experience for the Urban Smart Strivers. In the context of Raj and Aditya, the entry charge was a substantial sum of money that required some saving up or careful management of their budgets. Raj for example got a pocket money allowance from his family of around Rs 5,000-8,000 (£50-80) for his leisure expenses. Likewise Aditya who was already in employment and earning on average Rs20,000-25,000 (£200-250) a month, would also set aside around Rs 4,000-5,000 (£40-50) a month for such expenses. Going to these parties once or twice a month was crucial for them to maintain their social standing and to meet with several friends who frequented these parties. Occasionally, Raj would use his social networks of friends and 'event promoters' to negotiate free entry for himself or a few of his friends. Hence knowing how to talk to the door staff and the organisers was crucial and required many of the cultural competencies that I explored above.

The physical setting of 'Club London' was in stark contrast to the surrounding area because it was demarcated by a large wall surrounding the club and had several security guards and 'bouncers' restricting entry into the building. Several fashionably dressed people kept coming in and out of the heavy doors which would swing open allowing the loud music to seep out. Many taxi and rickshaw drivers, as well as construction workers and labourers from neighbouring buildings watched the busy scene from the side. This watching crowd added to a sense of excitement and a self-conscious feeling of privilege and entitlement amongst the party goers who stood outside the club smoking, talking, taking selfies and generally enjoying the feeling of being watched.

Inside the club, the space was arranged in large and darkened square room with a 'DJ booth' and a bar at one end and a dance floor in the centre. Heavy bass and electronic music, along with random Hindi and English words, filled the space as young people danced, drank and took selfies. On the walls, huge

images of the London Eye and Houses of Parliament, along with several images of red telephone and postal boxes attempt to create a 'world class' ambiance. Through these symbolic images, the social space of the club is marked as 'world class' quite literally. It is significant that the references here are not to a middle income foreign country, but to iconic images of an advanced capitalist nation like the United Kingdom with an important post-colonial legacy in the Indian context. The desire to be in such a 'world class' space was further highlighted by the fact that Raj explained to me that he liked this club because even 'white tourists' (*gore log*) went there, and hence indicating its 'authenticity'.

Similarly, no one comes to the club in 'traditional' Indian clothes. Great effort and care is made to pick outfits, accessories, perfumes to create the appropriately westernised 'look'. Young women stand around in large groups wearing heels, often after changing clothes in the toilets. They often get free entry during the early hours of the party but have to nonetheless buy drinks or court young men to buy them drinks. Young men stand around smoking and walking around consciously, getting their photographs taken by the many photographers at hand and seek to splurge money on women and 'sponsor' drinks for the table. During initial visits to these clubs and bars, I would smile for the camera but was soon encouraged to practice and perform a studied expression of anger and concentration at the camera. Aditya trained me to look into the camera with a 'tough' look, gazing straight into the camera with a frown or a look of anger and arms spread out or tensed up. He explained to me that these were "boy poses". As Connell (2005) would argue, these are 'skilled practices of the body' which are tied together with the construction of masculine identities. Although I look at the themes of masculine embodiment in the next chapter, what is important to point out here is that these poses and photos, were then shared by the various photographers on social media websites where young men would 'tag' themselves on the photographs and their friends would comment on how 'good' (*mast*) the guys looked or how much 'fun' they were having. These photographs became evidence for the clothes, poses and youthful fun the Urban Smart Strivers and their friends were having, much beyond the space of the club. Raj would often 'share' these photos with friends and write how he was 'living a good life' or was a '*Badsha*' (Emperor) marking his status as a leisured and consuming young man.

Approaching women in the club was a very tricky enterprise for young men. Often they would initiate conversations with women they already had talked to before either in person or online, in the hope of getting more introductions to their friends. However breaking social distance with women in the club was very difficult and a source of great nervousness for the young men. To curb this anxiety, the women were framed in particular ways amongst narratives that the young men created. For example, Aditya once explained to me that girls in the club were usually ‘bold types’ and were ones you could ‘flirt’ with but not make ‘girlfriends’, “Not all of the girls are good, some are loose (*chalu*), others are very bold and over (*babut over hoti hain*), they are okay for flirting and talking, but nothing more yaar, the girls in the club are not good girls usually”.

Indeed on several occasions, I saw the Urban Smart Strivers trying to initiate contact with women, but get rejected or laughed at by the girls and her friends. In such moments narratives about ‘ordinary’ girls were useful for the Urban Smart Strivers to manage their own fears and anxieties. What was striking to me personally however was the number of young women, fashionably dressed and confident, coming up to some of the young men and telling them that they want to have photos taken with them. The Urban Smart Strivers would never refuse such overtures of the women, partly because they would be overwhelmed by the display of confidence, but at the same time, they would also be flattered immensely by the gesture. The photographer taking the photo would then add the photo of the ‘couple’ on social media which then allowed the men a chance to contact the women to initiate online conversations. Such active sexual and agentic actions of young women, in the context of the club, were seen as part of a ‘modern way of life’, which furthered men’s own sense of being part of a ‘new’ India, but also fed into their fears around ‘bold’ women. I explore this theme of sexualising women in more detail in Chapter Six A Safe/Unsafe City.

Following on from the vignette, just before Raj, Aditya and I were about to reach the club entrance, Raj stopped the car for a moment, picked a song with a heavy bass, did not roll down his window but turned the music up to full sound. I observed his body tense-up as he put one arm stylishly on the steering wheel and the other lay loose around the gear box. He then slumped his body to the side of

the window and rested it in the space between the door and the window, off centre from his seat and took on a carefully arranged 'relaxed' pose. Having prepared himself and his 'look', Raj started the car again, manoeuvring it through a swarm of young women and men, whilst beeping his horn loudly. From inside the car, I could see people looking at us and Raj responded by looking back at the crowd but never for too long, trying to appear nonchalant appearance as he drove through the crowded ally. This became a very careful orchestrated performance of the masculine self in and through the appropriate use of the body, the car, music and his masculine display. Raj's enactment of a confident, 'effortless', 'modern', young masculine self took detailed movements of the body as well as control over space. The car carrying his young well dressed male friends and loud music suggested a man of substance and social success not just for Raj but by association for the group too. Raj's symbolic attempt at commanding power over the crowded space by creating a powerful presence, had social power and legitimacy because it was in line with ideas of 'smartness' that the audience around him value. To me such performances of looking 'relaxed' in stylised ways, are closely linked to men's desires and anxieties to present themselves as enjoying a 'good life' that is 'free' and 'abundant' in a 'new' India. but require various strategies and subterfuge to keep up a coherent narrative.

Such masculine performances of 'modernity' and 'youthful fun' do not take place in a vacuum. There is a broader social world of meaning and significance in and through which such ideas emerge, are valued and are performed by young men. One such example is a Hindi song which was Aditya's personal favourite, as well as a huge hit at the parties, gyms and in cars at the time of fieldwork called 'Manali Trance' from the film *'The Shaukeens'* (Sharma 2014). In the song, Indian supermodel turned actress Lisa Haydon is seen drinking, dancing and smoking tobacco as well as marajuana in a modern club setting with other young and fashionable people as she sways to fast repeated beats of music similar to the song Raj plays for me in the car. To create an atmosphere of intoxication and 'youthful fun' the video slows down Haydon's sways and suddenly speeds them up allowing the viewer to share in a delayed, confused yet carefully created visual experience. The power of 'youth' and a 'good life' are important generational themes that come out in the song, making it particularly appealing for young

men. The lyrics of the song glamorise and make smoking, drugs and having ‘fun’ as an exciting and enticing avenue to individually ‘release steam’:

My mood changes as I smoke the grass

Badla mizaaaj mera phookte hi grass

Grass feels like the cure for everything

Grass lage hai mohe sabka ilaaj

I must sway in the intoxication of this

Thoda toh main jhoom loon iske nashe mein

C'mon DJ hit the dubstep trance

C'mon DJ laga de dubstep trance

Even though marijuana sale and consumption is illegal in India, this song was a huge commercial success. For young men like Aditya and Raj, this song provides cues and images of what modern leisure and ‘fun’ ought to look like. In conversation about music and drinking, Raj once explained to me that these days in India, such practices were not bad habits (*gandi cheez*), but were in fact habits of the nawabs of ancient India (*nawabo wale shauk*). Raj’s comment, made part in jest, alludes to a sense of luxury and cultured consumption associated with the Nawabs of a glorious Indian past. To me this symbolises an attempt to indigenise modern consumption practices that they value by positing them as having a long connection with ancient India, and hence not misplaced in a contemporary and modern India either. It is also significant that these are presented as cultivated habits (*shauk*) rather than clandestine, uncultured or illegal consumption, suggesting the respectability of such urban leisure (see Bourgois 2003 for comparative). Although marijuana has a more complex legal and social context in India, for Raj it was part of the wider continuum of activities that he was ‘forbidden’ from partaking in by his family, yet they were nonetheless glamorised aspects of his cultures of urban youth masculinities. As a consequence of this dual narrative, practices of smoking, drinking and dancing, which have complex histories in India, get repackaged in commodified ways to represent a modern way of life.

The influence of such commodified ideas of appropriate leisure and consumption, also comes to shape material choices that young men make in their attempts at creating and presenting a modern masculine self. Interestingly, one young friend Aman told me that he ‘chose’ not to drink, dance or smoke because he did not enjoy it, even though he can afford them. He rearticulated to me that modern ‘fun’ was not a “bad thing” (*gandi cheez*) and that he often went to ‘birthday bashes’ organised by his colleagues and

friends in various bars and lounges because it was a nice atmosphere (*mabol*). For Aman these “things” (*cheez*) were a marker of India’s development as he explained that “India is also improving now, we too have everything (*sab kuch hai*)”. So even though Aman did not consume drinks, cigarettes or drugs, these practices and their corresponding spaces enjoyed a cultural legitimacy nonetheless.

This cultural dominance was further evidenced by the fact that Aman often wore a hat which had the English words ‘DOPE’ across the top. When I talked to him about the hat he explained how a double discourse was at play in this instance. On the one hand he told me that his girlfriend (*bandi*) gave him the hat and so it was special to him. He added that she enjoyed seeing him look ‘smart’ and ‘good’ when they went out together he felt wearing the hat when out and about with her added to his social appeal. Aman felt that he personally also liked the hat because they were really ‘in’ and so contributed to his ‘smart’ look. Such social legitimacy within Aman’s cultures of urban youth masculinities allowed the ‘DOPE’ hats to have important contextual relevance which were about being ‘smart’ and ‘respected’, rather than markers of a hedonist or a rebel. In a different cultural context, young men in such hats may well be associated with a different set of values. Nonetheless, the fact that these hats and other similar accessories are available for mass consumption (Fig. 3) hints at their popularity and wide social appeal. It is significant that the hats in the image have English words like ‘DOPE’, ‘DJ’ ‘C’mon’ or ‘BOY’ which signify globalised form of leisure practices and language.



Fig. 3 Urban Men’s Fashion, Delhi, Philip 2016

Partaking in such youthful leisure is a fragile and anxious practice for men too, given the generational and spatial politics of their contexts. Raj for example, enjoys smoking with friends when out '*ghumne*'. But he is always wary that someone from home might see him and reprimand him. The 'risk' in smoking requires careful negotiation. He never buys packets of cigarettes and as we see in the vignette he smokes single cigarette at a time so that he is never 'caught' carrying cigarettes home. This risk, is countered by the fact that amongst his culture of urban youth masculinity, 'smoking', 'grass' and 'dope' are part of a broader continuum of urban leisure. The desire to be seen smoking has a new value ascribed to it, rather than being a 'new' practice per se, in a context of neoliberalised 'youth culture' (Lukose 2005, Donner 2012). These are no longer clandestine activities, but have begun to represent a sophisticated 'modernity'. In my observation, the policing by the family served as a tool to strengthen the importance of the homosocial bond in accessing the city space and the 'modernity' offered by a 'new' India. Although Raj was scared of being 'caught' by his family smoking, he would pose for photos with cigarettes in his hand, often blowing the smoke into the camera to create a 'smoke screen' effect which he thought was cool and fashionable on social media. This is different to the young men Nisbett (2009) worked with in Bangalore who bonded with each other in similar homosocial terms over smoking and 'boozing' but did not want to make their activities public. However with the Urban Smart Strivers, part of being urban and smart requires a public display and celebration of such identities not just in public spaces, but also on social media images which showcase their ability to consume and look 'cool'.

Manly Shopping

Similar to the gender and class differentiated practices of 'youthful fun' men's consumption of various goods is also through gendered discourses. To pick one example, Aditya used one popular brand of deodorants called 'HE' during the time of fieldwork. Aditya carried one of these 'HE' deodorants in his office bag and told me that he found the scent to be 'strong and masculine' (*mardonwali*). In the advertisements for 'HE' deodorants (Emami 2017), which is linguistically marked as masculine already, the product's marketing attempts to further speak to several codes of urban masculine anxieties and

respectability by claiming that the deodorant is for ‘real men’ who respect women. In Chapter Seven on A Safe/Unsafe City, I explore this idea ‘respecting’ women in more detail. But here I want to focus on the idea of a ‘real’ man who uses a ‘strong’ perfume. Once when in conversation, I commented how expensive I thought the deodorant was at almost Rs 200 (£ 2) for one bottle, he laughing told me that it was only for ‘superheroes’ and ‘real HE-Man’ and hence he buys it but others could not. This parallels the argument by the Osella and Osella (1999, 423) about the remaking of social hierarchies and inequalities through consumption choice, leisure and taste. Aditya’s consumption of the expensive product allowed a sense of exclusivity which attempted to reassure him of his status as a ‘real’ man who buys manly products.

What is also striking for me, is that the ‘HE’ deodorants come in different styles which are labeled ‘Party’, ‘Conqueror’, ‘Smart’ and ‘Ruler’ (ibid) which seems to explicitly target men through the themes of urban leisure of a ‘new’ India. In the HE deodorant advert, (Fig 4) the pointed finger of the celebrated Bollywood actor Hrithik Roshan, is individually attempting to beckon a connection with the viewer and addresses young men in individualised ways, asking them ‘are you smart?’ and ‘are you confident?’ The coding around the commodity as specifically a men’s product, is achieved by labouring the symbolism around how the product relates to men’s qualities like ‘steely resolve’, ‘always sure of himself’, taking up ‘challenges’ and the men’s ability to ‘beat it to a pulp’ and ‘never ever back down’.



Fig. 4 HE Deodorants (Source: HEbeinteresting.com)

Similarly other grooming products like men's fairness face washes or men's lip balms are marketed as 'The Ultimate' or 'Fair and Handsome' (2015) and 'Protective' (Garnier 2017) with characteristics of being 'fragrance free' or designed for men's 'tough skin'. Marketing for one popular product, the Head and Shoulders shampoo, categorically tells men to stop using 'women's' shampoo before they stop becoming men themselves (Head and Shoulders 2016). In my observations the cultural work done by such symbolism is interesting because they use patriarchal ideas of 'masculine traits' as the bedrock on which men can smile, groom and 'express' their modernity whilst shopping and grooming themselves without questioning their masculinity.

Haynes (2011) demonstrates similar attempts in colonial India to tap into male anxieties at the time to create 'willing' consumers through advertising. Similarly, the market forces propelling consumption in the contemporary period also exploit men's anxieties around being suitably 'modern' and 'manly' and encourage greater consumption as a way of addressing their tensions. Srivastava (2010) too argues that more than financial and resource insecurities, it is the uneven forms of structural, social and economic change which contribute to male anxieties about belonging and lacking legitimacy as men. Hence appropriate 'manly consumption' becomes a way to gain legitimacy as masculine beings. Furthermore, as I have pointed out in the contemporary context of the Urban Smart Strivers, young men are not just willing consumers, but they are hierarchically placed as 'superior' men because of their confident consumption of 'manly' goods. The young men are 'challenged' to demonstrate their individual smartness and confidence, which are to be achieved through material consumption in line with attempts to embed neoliberal subject construction.

In 'new' India, such images contain and make palatable the smartness and 'freedom' of young men whilst further embedding a sense of an unchanging masculinity, on to which these modern processes take place. In this context, the consumption of these products are seen by men as not new fads or trends, rather they are attempted to be passed as merely an extensions and expressions of a fixed and natural masculine self. These processes attempt to safely masculinise commodities and in the process commodify masculinities. So shopping becomes a men's activity which is carried out in masculine ways. I observed these ritualised 'manly' shopping trips several times with my informants. Memorably once

when out with Raj from the vignette, whilst discussing his shopping choices, he simply rapped the lyrics of a famous song by Badshah, “new new clothes (*nai kapde*) I must wear everyday” whilst he walked along with shopping bags in his hand.

In attempting to commodify Indian masculinities, India itself is reemphasised as a nation of consumers where ‘active’ citizenship is demonstrated through consumption. I find it significant that the motto for HE Deodorants explored above is “For Today’s Active Man” (Emami 2017). To me this is linked to how Fernandes (2006) understands an ‘active’ cultural citizenship in neoliberalising India wherein the ideal citizen is a consumer. She argues that the changing relationship between the state and capital in neoliberal India, results in a restructuring of the role of the state as well as the nature of democratic politics. Hence an ‘active’ citizen is one who actively participates in consumption rather than a civic individual. In and through this logic, Aditya can become a young active citizen who ‘respects’ women by participating in consumption of HE Deodorants which reaffirm not just his masculinity but also his ‘Indianness’.

Active Sons of ‘New’ India

Sampat, a young man who worked at an IT firm in Delhi as an administrative assistant, articulated these ideas of being an ideal and ‘active’ man for himself, his family and the nation. Like many Urban Smart Strivers, Sampat enjoyed being ‘independent’ and partaking in many forms of urban fun in Delhi. Yet in various conversations he told me that he got his current job through his father’s friend which was quite typical amongst the Urban Smart Strivers. Nonetheless Sampat had internalised the neoliberal project of self-making through various narratives about ‘working-harder’, ‘pushing-ones self’ and ‘merit’. These traits were visible in the way he carried out his filial responsibilities as a young Indian man. Sampat told me that his father had given him a ‘challenge’ of raising at least 5lakh Rupees (£5000) for his sister’s wedding. He felt that it was his responsibility as a young man, a son, and a brother to work hard and save this money to fulfil his gendered and ritualistic duty. Sampat, like many young men I met, made great efforts to live up to the expectations of family and the filial obligations placed on him due to his gendered position. Being with other ‘smart’ young men and going and doing ‘good’ things Sampat hoped to increase his social and cultural capital in a ‘new’ India, which in turn he felt

could help him in the face of the challenges he experienced. By most markers, Sampat was an affluent young man, but he told me that he will not be happy until he had a luxury 'Jaguar car' which he imagined many young men in 'new' India had started acquiring. On several occasions whilst hanging out with me he also asked me to help him with his English speaking skills so that he could develop a more 'professional' personality.

Similarly, when discussing the desires around cars, Sampat's sense of 'active' enterprising masculine duty towards his family also came forth through consumption. A particularly popular car in Delhi amongst my informants was the Mahindra's KUV100 at the time. Sampat explained to me that he liked this particular car because of its size and affordability at Rs 4.5 Lakh (£4500) and how would suit the social status of his family. In comparing this large and relatively expensive car with other cars he explained that he would "rather die than be seen (*dikunga*) in a Tata Nano" which was considered the cheapest and smallest car in the Indian market at the time costing Rs 1 Lakh (£1000). The cheaper Tata Nano according to Sampat, marked a lower middle-class status and hence was not suitable for his family or for his social background and hence he could never be seen in it. As a son, he felt it was his duty to ensure the appropriate consumption standards for his family too. Hence for young men, being 'modern' and 'smart' is never a selfish enterprise, but is a social and connected activity which they feel allows them to better themselves and their families. As scholars of consumption in India have pointed out, consumption is not simply an individualist activity, but rather becomes a moral and noble cause which is seen as good for society and the country as a whole.

Interestingly, the imagery surrounding Sampat's desirable car also reveals the nationalist and 'young' values ascribed to it. In the advert for Mahindra's KUV100 (Fig 5), famous Bollywood actor Varun Dhavan, sits atop the car with one knee folded and one arm casually resting on it and the other arm pushing onto the front bonnet of the car, as he makes a confident face for the camera. The tag line which accompanies this image is "Presenting the KUV100...has young blood in its veins. petrol or diesel in its tank" (Mahindra 2016). This is further elaborated with the description about the car as "Aggressive and imposing on the outside. Refined and inviting inside". There is a repeated emphasis on messages about the car being 'aggressive' and 'young' which combine to make it appealing for Smart

Strivers who similarly imagine themselves as ‘young’ and full of optimism, as well as hard outside but refined inside. Here the central themes that are emphasised about the car, and Dhavan on top of the car, are around being ‘young’ and ‘aggressive’ yet ‘refined’. The distinct absence of any regional, caste, or religious markers in the imagery parallels Kaur’s (2012) idea of the ‘cleansing’ of such images of consumption to create a pan-Indian identity and provide a simplistic but powerful narrative around consumption. Similarly as Cayla’s (2008) work points out, such imagery allows to help bridge the many heterogeneous Indian demographics and spheres without allowing the politics and rebranding of the images to come through. Hence the family, ideas of youth as well as masculinities come together to represent a vision for India and a visibly marked place for young men through being active consumers citizens within it.



Fig. 5 Mahindra KUV Print Advert (Source: Mahindra 2016)

The appearance of the advert, coincided with the release of Varun Dhavan’s super-hit Hindi language film ABCD 2 (D’Souza 2015). Raj, as well as several other informants, referenced ABCD 2 as a film they really enjoyed because of its ‘youth’ feel, further evidenced by the fact that the film was a huge

commercial success in India. In my observations, a borderless flow of messages and meanings about Indian youth masculinities from various sources comes together to create a unified set of discursive actions and thoughts. The film ABCD 2 or Any Body Can Dance 2, produced by Walt Disney Pictures, depicts the journey of a young India dance group, who are initially unsuccessful at a dance competition, but with ‘hard-work’ go on to represent Indian at an international dance competition.

In the film, the dance team comprising of young men and women is called ‘Mumbai Stunners’ which is symbolically linked to an urban identity. Dhavan, the central protagonist of the film, works at a bar called the ‘Desi Cocktail Bar’ which to me symbolically feeds into a vision of a new India of pleasure and consumption. In this filmic narrative, drinking and the bar become respectable activities and places for employment. What is important also is the fact that it is not just any cocktail bar, but rather it is ‘desi’ which stands for local slang about an indigenous cocktail bar that is distinctly Indian. Analytically it is similar to Kaur’s (2016) idea of creating narratives about ‘our own’ products and spaces as ‘vernacular forerunners’ of globalised tastes and futures. This localised ‘modernity’ is then furthered by Dhavan’s character who is depicted as very much the young, urban, educated new Indian male consumer, who is well groomed, is physically fair and muscular, is competent in leading the group and negotiating the elements of the city. The film is replete with attempts at defining the dance group, as well as the act of dancing, as part of ancient Indian traditions and now also a part of a globalised new India. This is done by the group dancing to English songs but beginning them with a collective Hindu chant and wearing ‘western’ costumes but in the colours of the Indian national flag.

Similarly the generational position of young Indian men comes into play when Dhavan is caught cheating in the competition and the judges make references to his dead mother as “revered mother” (*puiya mataji*) who was allegedly a committed classical Indian dancer and the epitome of ‘Indian’ values of hard-work and worship. The symbolic attempt at drawing the parallels between ancient Indian values and contemporary modern dance reach their successful climax at the end of the film when Dhavan and his contemporary dancers wave the flag of India on the international stage and win accolades for the country. A desexualised homosocial bond, which I explore in more detail in the

next chapter, the resounding presences of a 'respectable' mother figure symbolically connected to a glorious Indian past, as well as new forms of employment, leisure and consumption practices are all woven together to create the impression of a seamless message about a 'new' India and its gendered citizens. Analytically, this is connected to Kaur's (2016) idea of a 'post-exotic' India wherein 'Indian values' which are seen as 'original' or 'traditional' are marketed not as 'backward', but rather as forward looking and hence attempting to present a 'post-exotic' image of a 'modern' nation to the outside world. When understood in the context of my informants, masculine anxieties about being appropriate modern sons of the nation and family get tied together through the logics of a consumerist citizenship of a 'new' and changing India.

In reading such filmic imagery, together with the aggressive imagery of the car and the male actor from the advert above, there is a convergence of themes around a successful and optimistic India on the global stage, along with its gendered and successful masculine citizens. As Cayla (2008) points out that such intertextual messaging hint to the masculinisation of India and its citizen, against a feminisation of the West, which is now symbolically positioned as 'watching India' and its achievements. Dhavan's character in the film and in the advert above draws on the 'angry young man' filmic imagery of older Indian actors from the 1960s and 70s that I explored in the historical section, but at the same time the contemporary symbolism is recast in completely new narratives. Here Dhavan's aggression is not about civic injustice but is about creating an imposing and victorious figure that is respected through consumption and material goods within a neoliberal framework of competition and achievement.

Interesting to note here also, is the male character that is presented to contrast Dhavan's socially celebrated masculinity. Dhavan, the 'new' Indian man, is presented in contrast to a young fat and dark man with fuzzy hair who is also dressed in fashionable clothes but somehow lacks the 'smartness' that all the others represent. The fat young man's perceived comical appearance is attempted to be justified as corresponding to his general weakness, irrationality, softness and in ability to consume appropriately. He becomes an important contrast to the Dhavan and his male friends who are 'smart' and 'urban' pleasure seekers in the bar. In a song entitled 'Happy Hour', playing on the idea of discounted drinks,

an exaggerated but symbolically important scene from the film takes place wherein the fat man is electrocuted out of the space of the bar and told “get lost you hippopotamus”. To me there seems to be a clear message of which men and masculinities are entitled to the spaces of ‘new’ India and which can be excluded. Interestingly, the practice of ‘Happy Hour’ in Delhi’s bars begins from 11:00am to allow young college students a chance to drink during the day, similar to the afternoon parties explored earlier in the chapter.

Loving Like Brothers

A ‘new’ India provides new spaces and practices of expressing love and desire for Urban Smart Strivers. Young men Raj and Aditya have girlfriends and enjoy sexual and romantic relationships with them. Hence they are not ‘stoic men’ waiting for arranged marriages, as projected in an earlier literature on Hindu masculinities for example (Dasgupta and Gokulsing 2014, Banerjee 2005, Anand 2007). Rather, they are young men who belong to Trivedi’s (2014) idea of a sexual and romantic generation of urban youth in contemporary India. Terms such as ‘live-in’ and ‘break-up’ have now become common parlance within this group and has legitimacy as a topic of discussion amongst men. Most of the men claimed to have had sexual experiences with women, some would engage in ‘smooching’ and ‘boob pressing’ with their girlfriends when they would occasionally join us for our *‘ghumna’*. Such sexual practice outside of marriage was strictly prohibited for the young men by their families. But amongst other ‘brothers’ in their homosocial spaces, these were ‘achievements’ and young men were congratulated on having girlfriends who were seen as a prized commodity. Connell’s (2003) work on the sexual learning amongst young men similarly suggests that praise and prestige are awarded to young men who find heterosexual partners through framing access to women as ‘conquests’ for men. My social role on many of these dates, became one of helping to guard dark corners near escalators and lifts of the metro stations or malls, for young men to take their girlfriends into ‘privacy’ to engage in sexual activity, similar to Laud Humphrey’s (1970) framing of himself as a ‘lookout queen’ in his now-classic but controversial research. I was then also used as a ‘witness’ in the tall tales young men told their male friends about such ‘achievements’.

The Urban Smart Strivers claimed to be more ‘free’ and ‘open’ about love and expressing desire, sexuality, companionship and lust than a previous generation. In this vein, Aman explained to me that religion or caste did not matter at all to him at all anymore, it was only the ‘looks’ that counted, “I don’t differentiate/discriminate (*bhed bhar*) against anyone on religion (*dharam*) and caste (*jaati*) and all, I should just like the girl’s photo and personality, look and all, that’s it. I don’t believe in up and down (*uppar neeche*)” Hence in being ‘modern’ and part of ‘new’ India, there is seemingly a normative rejection of caste and regional identities when courting women. It was always striking to me that most young men were candid about meeting their girlfriends through ‘friend request’ sent via Facebook to women completely unknown to them. Aman explained that in sending such ‘friend requests’ to connect with women on social media, he did not specifically look for women from his caste or religious background to date because it was not possible or cool. On a normative level, the very idea of being ‘smart’ for these men, required them to present a self-image that was seemingly ‘above’ caste hierarchies as Deshpande (2013) might argue. In practice, these egalitarian claims also had some material basis, because often it would be difficult to tell the caste background of women through Facebook names because women often used abbreviated last names or pseudonyms (Eg Anita CH instead of Chuadhary) on profiles they specially created for such ‘dating’ purposes. Women in turn judged the young men by their profile photos too and the general ‘look’ of their ‘profile’. For this reason, he explained to me that his ‘DP’ (display picture) had to be ‘perfect’. We spent several evenings taking numerous photos with carefully choreographed images which showed off Aman’s clothes, accessories or phone most effectively in order to create a pool of images that Aman could use to create a suitable virtual presence.

These discursive claims about being ‘above caste and religion’ also took on a materiality in the lives of the Urban Smart Strivers because Aman had been dating a young Muslim woman that he had met online whilst he himself was Hindu. To Aman her aesthetic presentation appealed the most as he showed me numerous online photos and conversations about how attractive (*masi*) he found her. The fact that she was of a different religious and caste group was less important to Aman. Yet crucially when I asked Aman who his older brothers were married to, he told me that they are all women from

his same Hindu upper-caste community, hence recreating caste and its importance through marriage. The generational position of young men, allowed them to engage in narratives and practices that on one level seem to break caste and religious hierarchies, because they were inconsequential in that they did not challenge the structures but occupied a liminality. Interesting in Aman's case, his Muslim girlfriend served in creating various essentialised discourses about the inherent beauty of Muslim women in India through various stereotypes about a racial and religious difference in skin colour, hair and facial features which made Muslim women attractive and 'different'. This theme about religious and racial stereotypes remains a theme that I hope to explore further in future research.

Indeed, amongst the Urban Smart Strivers there is great ambiguity about if their girlfriends will become future wives. For Aman and his girlfriend dating was largely a 'private' affair. His generational position as a young man of 24 years of age, he felt he was too young for marriage. This meant that he did not need to bring up the topic of marrying his Muslim girlfriend to his Hindu family at that point in time. This allowed Aman, and other young men I met, the freedom to at least normatively reject 'caste' or 'religion' as factors for discrimination in a modern 'new' India - that was claimed to allegedly be a practice of the 'old' order. The nature of patriarchal arranged marriage means that often familial and generational conflict emerges when girlfriends are attempted to be made wives, often disrupting religious and caste lines (Grover 2009).

One further interesting dimension that such online/offline courtship took was around the values young men ascribe to women depending on their photos. Women in 'traditional' Indian clothes were women who drew the most respect and admiration as 'good women' (*achi ladki*). They were also the women they discussed most in terms of marrying and wanting to establish 'good friendships'. More 'modern' women were the 'fun' women with whom they felt both threatened and a paradoxical sense of ease in initiating conversations. Women with arms or cleavages on display got a lot of discussion in the group, but they also engendered a sense of inadequacy amongst men. "She will go with anyone" as one young man remarked, hinted to me the fears that men had in 'keeping up' with these 'modern' women. Young men often felt that such women had several men on the go at the same time. As Favero's (2005)

ethnography with young men working as ‘tour guides’ in Delhi also demonstrates, ‘traditional women’ marked through her clothes, styles, voice and body postures were the most desirable and appropriate femininities that furthered men’s idea of being ‘Indian men’ in contrast to the ‘loose’ white female tourists to whom they were attracted but also intimidated by. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, given their class and social status, they were candid about not dating all and any ‘traditional Indian woman’ or as they called them ‘rif raf’ (*aise hi*). As one man explained to me, young men had to really carefully pick appropriate girls to date “You have to find the good girls, to know the real chocolatey girls, you have to look at their feet, only the real ones look after their feet too, other girls are just like that”. Here ‘chocolatey’ is an interesting adjective used to indicate sweetness associated with women but also their consumable nature in my understanding. When asked to point out these ‘chocolatey’ markers, he pointed out a young well-dressed and obviously affluent woman with painted toenails and manicured feet as the ‘right’ kind of women. In contrast, he pointed out women with dusty feet as ordinary (*aise hi*) who was not well kept and hence not suitable for him. In many ways, his desire itself was classed and hence only appropriately classed and groomed women were worthy objects of desire. This point about which women are ‘desirable’ and which are not, has serious consequences around which women require ‘safety’ and which women don’t, as I will explore in the final empirical chapter on A Safe/Unsafe City.

Yet at the same time, most of young men enjoyed having a girlfriend, and expressed to me their great desire to marry their girlfriends one day if their families would allow it. I observed the great emotional, financial and social efforts young men often made to be with their girlfriends, spending time with them in public spaces because going to either person’s home space was not a possibility. This was further made difficult with most hotels in Delhi refusing entry to unmarried couples or ‘couples from Delhi’ making it impossible for even fairly economically advantaged ‘strivers’ to rent a hotel room for privacy and intimacy. Indeed as Krishana (2014b, 178) explains renting rooms also rendered the unmarried couples ‘traceable’ hence added to their social and physical danger in carrying out a premarital relationship. The fear of being ‘caught’ by family and relatives, although usually higher for young women, also acted as a deterrent for men from taking too much risk whilst dating. Raj who had been dating his girlfriend for over a year when we met, told me that this had to be a secretive relationship

because not only will the girl lose respectability (*izzat*) but it would have many dire consequences for him too. Raj explained “They’ll beat me to death, her brothers and family (*gharmale*). Now they don’t beat girls so much, but boys they can do anything”. Given the sensitivity to violence towards women in Delhi, young men felt that if the unmarried couple were caught in such ‘transgressions’, anger and frustration towards the young men involved would be demonstrated without any restraint. This relationship between men’s bodies and violence is a theme that I explore in Chapter Four Desexing a Masculine Body.

Although the romantic bond with women is valued by young unmarried men, these are always secondary to the homosocial bonds amongst men. For the men I was working with, ideas of masculine duty and a sense of sacrificing the pleasure of a woman’s company for a fellow ‘brother’ were extremely valorised traits amongst homosocial groups to be counted as ‘men’. The bond between ‘brothers’ was always seen as longer lasting and more ‘genuine’ than it was or could ever be with women. Explaining this difference between friendships with men and women, Raj once explained to me that “When you fight with girls, the next one comes along, its fine, but when you fight with a brother (*bhai*) it really hurts”. Hence an interesting tension emerges between young men’s desire for the company and bond with women, but at the same time, the privileging of homosociality within their cultures of urban youth masculinities. In this process there is a individualised and collective devaluing of women which places women as transient and relationships with other men as important and consequential and hence to be taken more seriously. Such importance to male friendships receive central place for youth masculinities on account of their generational positions but indeed can change as men get older (De Neve 2004). Nonetheless, as Osella and Osella (2006) have argued, the rich parallel homosocial worlds are crucial for young masculinities in India and provide great emotion and physical support to young men.

These gendered dynamics around friendships were most clearly demonstrated to me when hanging out with Aditya and a few male friends after a trip to the cinema. Aditya accused one of his friends for not spending enough time with the group and spending too much time going out with ‘his woman’. Aditya

angrily shouted at him saying “Vaginaboy (*chutiya*) you keep going again and again to meet your woman (*bandi*), and me no one comes to meet me, you have forgotten who your real brothers are, who will be there for you”. To this Mukul, the other young man, replied in an almost louder shout “Who is going to the woman again and again, tell friend, who is going, am I not there for you, yeah, am I not there for you”. Mukul is clear in his response that he has never favoured ‘his woman’ over ‘his brother’ Aditya. He confidently challenges Aditya back and reasserts his loyalty to his friend forcefully and publicly.

I found it striking that rather than apologising for causing Aditya to feel neglected, Mukul directs the challenge back at Aditya in an interesting manner of forwarding and establishing a sense of appropriate masculine duty. In this dynamic neither ‘bhais’ lose face or power in front of the group, but at the same time, the power and strength of the two men and their masculine bond, is heightened rather than reduced, and demonstrated for the group to witness and take stock. Such a challenge also hints at the legitimacy in demanding the absolute power of homosocial bonds in a patriarchal setting which devalues women and bonds with them. Also important is the framing of women as ‘your woman’ indicating a sense of privatised and exclusive ‘ownership’ over the woman. It represents the public power men enjoy or can claim to enjoy over women within a patriarchy (Menon 2012) and has parallels to what Nisbett (2009) found amongst young men in Bangalore similarly discussing masculine ownership of women through the term ‘his woman’. What is also important here is the fact that young men can be ridiculed and castigated for spending ‘too much’ time with their girlfriends, revealing the low status of such bonds with women within their cultures of urban youth masculinity. The all male group reemphasises its own gendered superiority and the superior relationships of men with other men, by the constant devaluing of women. It is striking that within the context of the all male group, the Urban Smart Strivers often made fun of each other’s girlfriends or recent online conquests by calling them “Hippos” (*saand*) or “Elephants (*baathi*) or “dangerous” (*khatarnak*) and the group would then engage in laughing at such caricatures of women.

These gendered narratives about men and women’s relational position is further complicated by the fact that young men also felt threatened by the ability of women to ‘destroy’ male-male friendships. In

Aditya's comment above for example, young men's attraction and desire to spend 'too much time' with women hints at role of such interactions in somehow 'spoiling men' and taking them away from the all male group. The shared assumption at play here is that excessive interactions with women means that relationships with male friends suffer. Nonetheless, these tensions did not take away from the fact that the Urban Smart Strivers often spent hours with me in private discussing their heartaches at breakups with girlfriends and told me at length about how much they missed their girlfriends. Hence although women were devalued publicly within the 'banter' and dynamics of the homosocial group, relationships with women were also deeply valuable for young men.

The importance of this gendered tension between friendships with men and women was most clearly articulated through the hugely popular film *Pyar Ka Punchanama 2* (The Punch of Love) (Ranjan 2015). During fieldwork I saw the film three times with my informants who really enjoyed it and explained to me that the film depicted an 'accurate' representation of gendered relations amongst urban youth. The film's story revolves around 'powerful' and 'independent' women who seem to 'trick' men into relationships and then trap them there. Aditya explained "In this film there is an absolutely correct (*bilkul theek*) depiction of what is going on in India these days, I think they are showing the real things that are going on in today's day and age to young men". He explained that the film showed "what girls have become in India" (*ladkiyan kya ban gai hai*) in India.

Through the film, young men articulated a resentment and a backlash to patriarchal privileges turning upside down in a contemporary India. In this context, it becomes even more important to make sure that 'modernity' itself is gendered to keep patriarchal privilege intact. Aman further explained that "I even watch it with my family, and my mother really likes the film because this is the reality (*sachch*) now." Suggesting an intergenerational coherence at the 'accurateness' of this film. The central message of the film is that the bond between male friends is stronger and more genuine than it is or ever can be with women. This is explained through several 'chapters' in the film which are instructive lessons for young men. The poster for the film provides a telling example. In this picture below (Fig 6), the three male actors appear behind bars looking out helplessly at the camera. This visual narrative places the male

viewer outside the prison frame, creating a sense that there are lessons to be learnt as we see the men behind bars inside a pink heart. What is absent from the image is the explicit presence of any women. They are an invisible yet powerfully evoked force, symbolically represented by the pink heart, which quite literally shapes this ‘abuse’ against the humanised and relatable figure of the young men.



Fig. 6 Film Poster, Regal Cinema Market, Delhi, Philip 2016

What is also striking in this image is the fact that when men visibly express emotions about their relationships and its challenges, these are done through socially coded ways that are appropriately masculine within youth cultures. Here the expression of despair on the men's faces frames the difficulties they experience in their relationships with women as comedic. The 'joke' that is alluded to is one wherein men's foolish action in getting into a relationship with a woman lands him in trouble. At the same time, within the narrative of the film, masculine anxiety about changing gender roles and women's increasing economic power in the film, provide the context for representations and discourses about women as entrapping and disposable at the same time, and hence justifying the need for me to be 'careful' of such women or else end up 'trapped'.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored some aspects of what being a 'new' Indian man means for the Urban Smart Strivers in a 'new' India. This includes various commodified ideas of 'youthful fun' and living a life that is perceived to be 'free' and full of 'choice'. Through various physical and discursive changes in 'new' India, more and more young men now go to bars and clubs, they dance and interact with women freely on social media and in various urban spaces. They enjoy smoking, drinking and being seen in fashionable clothes whilst doing these activities. Indeed, as has been noted, these are not new practices and some of these have long historical continuities. But what is 'new' in all of this is that these ideas of leisure and pleasure now form part of the dominant narrative of a socially celebrated commodified masculinity for young men. It shapes what being a young man in this 'new' India means for them. Such new discourses around fun and leisure repackage ideas of 'youth' and 'masculinity' into more commodified and globalised styles, yet they remain socially and structurally 'Indian' because of the context in which they operate. Hence men perceive themselves as 'modern' 'liberated' and 'free' on the one hand, yet they also remain caught-in-between moral and social worlds.

Chapter Four: A Masculine Body

Introduction

Having explored the discourses of being a ‘new’ Indian man, this chapter focuses on how men’s bodies are made ‘masculine’ and appropriate for a ‘new’ India. It focuses on the body as a key site for discourses of a commodified masculinities to interplay and take on a materiality. In the process, men’s bodies in ‘new’ India have a new sociocultural importance and a growing visibility attached to them. I explore how the Urban Smart Strivers make sense of these changes and how they engage in the processes of ‘making’ such masculine bodies. I argue that for young men, their bodies and its practices are sources of autonomy and agency which allow them new opportunities in a changing India, but they are also constraining and disciplining forces which cause them anxieties. Nonetheless, it is in and through their bodies that young men perform and become ‘new’ Indian men of a ‘new’ India.

This chapter begins with a vignette of my informant Ratish in a gym in ‘new’ India, which is then empirically contextualised in the broader dynamics of the commodification of men’s bodies. Building on the previous chapter, I then explore how ‘smartness’ becomes an embodied enactment for men to mark distinctions and exclusions. In the next section I show how such ‘masculine’ embodiments come to accrue a fragile respectability and then in the following section I explore how such bodies are made ‘beautiful’ and desirable in a patriarchy. Finally I end with some concluding remarks.

Gym Buddies

At 6:30pm I found myself outside ‘A-Fitness Zone’ in South Delhi. The thin shutter, located between a crammed row of houses was half pulled down and looked shut. I usually went to the gym after 8:00pm with my gym-buddy Ratish but today I came early because Ratish was busy later in the evening. The sound of music coming from behind the shutter seemed encouraging so I lifted the shutter to enter. In the large rectangular basement there were a few people working-out but I could only recognise the trainer, Ashok. I went over to him and shook hands whilst scanning to see if I could spot my friend Ratish. But he was not there yet. Instead of waiting for Ratish to arrive, I decided to start with my workout and walked over to the electric cycles.

As the loud Yo Yo Honey Singh tracks kept pouring out I started on the cycle. I was advised only to spend 'five minutes' on the cycle because "nothing is going to change (*pharak*) with such airy (*halke*) exercises" Ashok once told me. That evening as I started, a young woman moved towards the treadmill. We did not look at each other, but she caught my attention because I had never seen a woman in the gym before. She pressed various buttons on the treadmill but there was no result so she turned and called-out to the trainer "Ashok bhaiya" (big brother). Ashok walked over slowly and she explained to him "bhaiya (big brother) this one is not working". To this Ashok knowingly responded "yeah, this one is not working" and turned off the main electric switch. He then asked her to move onto the second treadmill and started it for her.

A few minutes into my cycling, two young men came towards me to use the benchpress. One of them was particularly muscular and the other seemed big but his body was not as well-defined. At the benchpress, the friends encouraged each other saying "hit (*maar*) it, hit it more" as they lifted heavy weights to develop their chests. One of the men egged his friend to lift a heavier weight as a 'challenge'. The tired friend, reluctantly said "*yaaaaar*" (friend) in an elongated manner, but did not refuse the 'challenge'. Soon the heavier weights were on and with a big sigh, the young man began to lift the heavier weights. The strain on his face was evident as he used all his force to push the weights up. After a few push-ups, suddenly, with a loud bang he dropped the press on its metal frame as he stood up gasping for air. The noise was so loud that almost everyone in the gym looked to see. The young man had a triumphant look as he stood next to the machine struggling for air and looking into the mirror. His t-shirt was sweaty and clung to his body outlining the contours of his chest and shoulders. He moved close to the mirror and with one arm rubbed his pectoral muscles to feel the impact of his efforts and examined his face from side to side almost touching the mirror. His friend too came over and put his palms onto his friend's chest saying "its making (*ban*) brother, making".

As the men continued, I finished with the cycle and went to get a sip of water. The gym instructor, Ashok, was sitting with his legs spread open and arms resting on his knees on one of the machines near the water-cooler. He had just finished doing his evening prayers because there was a heavy scent

of freshly lit incense coming out of the wooden shrine above the water-cooler. I struck up a conversation with him confessing that I was feeling tired already. He smiled back at me and looked away. Then suddenly in a philosophical tone he said “Tiredness (*Thakan*) and pain (*dard*) are both good things”. He continued “If you want to make (*banana*) a good body, then you must bear (*sehan*) the pain”. I responded saying that I would never be able to have a like body his. Ashok took this as a compliment and said with a warm smile “Why can’t you make it, if you work-hard (*mehnat*), you can make it”.

As we chatted, Ratish arrived. He was wearing a sleeveless shirt with his thick muscular arms on display. I noticed him before he saw me. He had his biceps tense and held onto his gym-bag as he looked around the room. I waved and he responded with a nod and walked over towards us. He extended his hand to Ashok and said, “How are you Ashok Sir, all fine?” as they hugged. Ashok did not reply but simply nodded his head and smiled. Ratish then grabbed my hand muttering “How are you brother (*bhai*)”. I joked that I got there before him and Ratish responded with a warm smile. He then moved a few steps back and checked his gelled hair in the mirror saying to us “today we have to go for a wedding later and my family at home (*gharmale*) are making a lot of fuss” as he stuck part of his tongue out and fixed his hair. No one said anything but we just watched him arrange his hair. Then he spanked my stomach lightly with his hand saying “Come now” (*chal aajja*) as he walked to the benchpress.

A Young Man’s Body in a ‘New’ India

This vignette points to various important processes that are taking place on and around young men’s bodies in a ‘new’ India. Young men like Ratish use fairness creams and body hair removal products, they go to gyms to increase or decrease the size of particular parts of their bodies, they discuss abdominal ‘six-packs’ from images of Bollywood actors, take topless photos of themselves, have the latest ‘gym wear’, sports bags and shoes, and they take protein shakes and steroid injections for muscle growth (Bass 2016) . Similarly, Raj and Aditya who we met in the previous chapter also spend a lot of time and money on their grooming and self-representation. Raj explained that he personally spent an average of Rs600.00 per month on his grooming rituals which include a fashionable hair cut and two or three trips to the barbers for a ‘beard shaping’ a month. Aditya similarly also spent money on ‘beard

dyes' to maintain the correct colour for his facial hair and bought multicoloured contact lens to change the colour of his eyes. These are relatively new practices on and around the male middle class body which have emerged in a globalising 'new' India. When discussing these grooming practice with the Urban Smart Strivers, they often told me that they 'had to start doing these things' (*karna padta hai*). Aditya explained that first of all, young women in India were now very well put together and hence he felt that they expected men to be looking smart too. He feared that women would not go 'roaming' with him if his embodiment did not reflect his social status within the norms of a localised patriarchy and so he 'had to start' taking care of his embodiment.

Amongst Urban Smart Strivers, such practices of embodied grooming and consumption were conceptualised for them through the idea of literally 'making the body' (*body banana*). In this process the 'making the body' is an aspirational enterprise that requires self-motivated hard work and commitment, and also appropriate knowledge, consumption and access to commodified spaces. In various cultural context, the maintenance of body weight, thinness and muscularity for men have been studied as crucial elements for professional success (McDowell 1997) or markers of social status and value (Lukose 2009) as well as markers 'self-responsibilisation' projects (Patinak 2014). In the case of the Urban Smart Strivers too, such practices of 'making the body' involve a complex set of values which results in making the a modern masculine self and an appropriate embodied belonging in a changing 'new' India. Using this vignette as a point of departure, I demonstrate that for young men like Ratish, there is great pride and confidence in 'making' an appropriate 'masculine' body which is not linked to vanity per se, but rather a greater moral and social respectability within their culture of urban youth masculinity in neoliberal India. In theoretical terms there are parallels with Wacquant (1995) idea of 'bodily capital' developed with boxers in the US, although empirically very different, the body is a crucial site of labour, effort and masculinity.

For Ratish and the Urban Smart Strivers, the emphasis in partaking in these practices of the body, is on one hand to modify the physical appearance of their bodies. On the other hand it is to do with embodying, through the physical body, a new commodified masculinity that is culturally celebrated in

‘new’ India. In other words, for young men like Ratish, the gym as well as the broader work and consumption carried out in and through the body, are markers of being a new Indian man. Ratish explained this to me once when discussing why he joined the gym, “Now we Indians are also improving, we take care of ourselves”. Here Ratish’s emphasis on the ‘now’ is an important indicator of a shift in the social and cultural context of young Indian men’s perceptions about their bodies in neoliberal India. For Ratish, India’s move towards ‘modernising’ has meant that urban Indians are adopting ‘better’ ways and have ‘improved’ and are hence ‘taking care’. In his attempt to be this new Indian man, Ratish attempts to place himself within the dynamics of this new and improving India in and through his body.

Crucial to the process of ‘making’ an ideal or ‘better’ body is the importance of self-motivated ‘hard work’ as we see in the vignette. Linked to the ideas of an active and enterprising neoliberal self that grabs new opportunities with energy and passion that I explored in the previous chapter, the body and ‘work’ on the body also become tools to demonstrate a ‘modern’ masculine embodiment. Amongst Ratish and his friends for example, ‘hard work’ on the body are activities which make them ‘new’ Indian men who engage in bodily activities that mark their difference from ‘older’ forms of being. In this process, the body is an important tool to attain this ‘modernity’, as well as an object in itself that is made ‘modern’. In and through practices of the body, in the gym and beyond, Ratish attempts to demonstrate this modern masculinity. It is not that the body is a new site for consumption and masculinities (see Alter 1992, 2000, 2011 for historical examples), rather it is the qualitative shift in the way in which masculinities are embodied and presented which is important here. For Ratish, the idea of an ‘improving’ self and nation are marked on the body through a consumerist citizenship and its mode of creating ideal citizens. The new air-conditioned gyms in India, gym bags and ‘fitness’ wear, and gelled hair cuts are all markers of this commodified masculine body.

The rising concern and commodification of men’s bodies is reflected across the mediascape (Appadurai 1996) in contemporary India. Increasing number of daily advertisements and images show services and products for men using particular aesthetic arrangements around men’s faces, torsos, backs, and arms.

Large hoardings of men in underwear adverts and selling clothes line the streets of Delhi. Amongst the Urban Smart Striver, the encounter with such images is a daily experience. One such example is the image of Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh below (Fig 7) in a popular hangout space for the Urban Smart Strivers. In the full length cardboard cut out, Ranveer Singh is seen modelling a new phone with which he is taking a selfie. Along with the commodity that is marketed, it is the modern and stylised masculine body that is on full view which is important in my observation.



Fig. 7 Fullsize Print Advert, PVR Saket, Delhi, Philip 2016

As Stuart Hall (1997) explains, different people encounter such images and make meanings around them through their own cultural context hence creating different codes within the same image. For Ratish and the Urban Smart Strivers the encounter with the above image when out '*ghumna*' in the city serves as a space of learning and participation where they engage with the image as active readers. According to Ratish, Singh has a 'great' (*masi*) body and style and pose these in turn, he felt represent Singh's masculinity and his 'smart personality' (*smart banda hai*). Similarly, when talking about his own body, Ratish's encounter with such images of Ranveer Singh are important references for his own embodiment when he explains "you can learn how to wear the new styles and fashion and hair and all, I don't like all the new things, but Singh's personality is good, I like his things". Hence there is an exchange of meanings between the image and the viewer wherein from within their culture of urban youth masculinity, the Urban Smart Strivers value the figure of Singh and the social celebration around

his embodied masculinity. This parallels the arguments by Osella and Osella (2006, 170) on their studies of young South Indian men and filmic 'heroes' wherein images of such 'male stars' are "dense points of transfer, belief, self-affirmation and transformation" for young men.

The semiotics of such imagery and its meanings from within cultures of masculinity of the Urban Smart Strivers are further brought out by juxtaposing the above image with another image from public culture. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers and in popular media, Ranveer Singh is popularly referred to as an 'item-boy' given his mass appeal. It is significant that such a title was for a long time the domain only of female actors who could draw audiences through their sexual appeal as 'item-girls' (Dwyer 2010) but the fact that there are now 'item-boys' suggest the growing sexualised visibility of men's bodies in India (Dasgupta 2013). In Fig 8 we see the topless, muscular, oiled, carefully toned and manicured body of Singh dancing with his legs and arms wide open, a trimmed beard and with crowds of women taking photographs and cheering him on. In the song itself the camera "looks up" at Singh who takes off his shirt, flexes his muscles and moves his hands along his abdomen. The camera angles then allow the viewer to slither down Singh's large shoulders and then onto his chest muscles and gently bringing the gaze down his flat and defined stomach and navel. In contrast, women in the song are dressed in their 'traditional' Indian attire and use smartphones to record Singh's moves as he takes huge leaps and gyrates his hips towards the camera.



Fig. 8 Ram-Leela, Bhansali 2014 (Source: <http://erosplc.com/ramleela>)

In the image (Fig 8), the muscular gym-toned and manicured male body occupies centre stage. The 'work' on this body is demonstrated through the removal of body hair, gym built muscularity, groomed facial hair, low waisted jeans and a clean oily shine. Such work on the male body is not just being appreciated, but is given a visibility, legitimacy as well as social space and power. Given the 'work' on this body, before putting it on display to be celebrated, it becomes clear that this is not simply a 'male' body, but a body that represents social and culturally celebrated masculinity. The fact that Singh is one of India's highest paid male actors playing the lead role in some of the successful mainstream Hindi films points to his wide reach and appeal. Going back to the vignette for example, Singh's bodily movements in the image above are in their own way mimicked and stylised by Ratish during his 'entry' into the gym where he tenses his arms to make them look bigger and shapely. These as I discovered during the course of my fieldwork are self-aware practices of the body that young men would engage in to represent and enact stylised performances of masculinities they desired. It is also significant that the gym has several photographs of the muscular bodies of Singh and other men stuck on the mirrors. Ratish explained that these are often for 'inspiration' for 'hard work' (*mehnat*).

These processes indicate the legitimacy of men's commodified bodily practices, but they also make men's bodies an object to be viewed. In my observations, young men's bodies are going through a profound process of commodification, wherein the aesthetic display and 'look' of the body not just make it stand out as a gendered body, but also as an economic and classed body which is made respectable. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, the overwhelming concerns of looking and being respectable and smart men, requires an appropriate embodiment of this respectability. This confidence around the groomed body is reflected in the vignette when Ratish fixes his hair in the gym as the trainer and I look on. Similarly, there is a confidence with which the man working on his chest makes noise and gets noticed in the gym and has no problems with being viewed whilst looking at himself in the mirror after his 'hard work' on his body.

These shifting ideas and practices around men's bodies operate within the broader attempts of building a 'world-class' 'new' India on the cityscape. Whilst out '*ghumne*' with the Urban Smart Strivers, multiple

sites of ‘new’ India get tied together with each other not just physically and visually, but also symbolically to create and bring to life the idea of a ‘new’ India that celebrates a particular vision of masculinity. Ratish’s ideas of ‘hard-work’, ‘improvement’ and a ‘good life’ are seamlessly merged with other complementary ideas of consumption and participation in new world-class leisure. For example, at the Nehru Place metro station in South Delhi, an important hang-out zone for the Urban Smart Strivers, this seamless flow of meanings becomes clearly visible both spatially and symbolically. Here a popular chain of international gyms called Fitness First, is next to a Mediterranean restaurant called ‘Flying Saucers’, which is in-turn abutting the American fast-food chain ‘Burger King’ and a popular beer lounge called the ‘Lord of Drinks Forum’. There is a visual as well as a spatial and conceptual unity that is attempted to be created. The fact that all of these spaces operate and situate themselves within an important station of the Delhi Metro transport system is also significant. The arrangement of these sites and their symbology serves to connect the city space with ideas of commodified pleasure and consumption whilst defining the contours of a ‘new’ India.



Fig. 9 Nehru Place Metro Station, Delhi, Philip 2016

This continuity is also reflected in the two vignettes at the start of this and the previous chapter where music and the air-conditioning in the car and the club, are similar in experience to that of the gym. Hence the gym seems like an extension and an important part of the urban ‘leisure architecture’ (Broisus 2010) which creates a new way of being as well as new imaginaries and ideas

about a 'good life' in a new India. The sites are linked in what they offer the consumer, but there is also a coherence that is maintained by a similar demographic of people moving from one space to the other. With the Urban Smart Striver when out 'roaming', several hours are spent hanging-out at Nehru Place Metro station chatting, smoking and sometimes eating at the food outlets. Selfies are also taken here with a modern 'new' India as our backdrop. These spaces allow for the material emergence of a neoliberal and globalised national imaginary of a 'new' India and become spaces where Urban Smart Strivers feel they belong.

The attempt at creating a consumerist imaginary is further emphasised by the fact that the setting of the mall Epicuria (Fig 9) in which the gym and bar come together with a mass public transport system uses the tag "food for all". This attempt to claim the mall space as 'public' and 'for all' indicates the attempt at the socialisation of such spaces and their symbology as representatives of 'all'. The high financial costs of shopping or eating inside the mall, and the exclusive nature of the restaurants and gym membership, are deeply exclusionary and point to the tensions around this claim to represent "all". Nonetheless as scholars argue, the emblematic and hegemonic qualities of such urban processes means that they define the wishful image of a 'new' all inclusive India (Baviskar and Ray 2011).

The tensions becomes more evident by the fact that the metro, gym and bar all face the road and communal urban public space which are occupied by beggars, small street vendors, bus users and cycle rickshaw pullers who are prevented from sitting near the entrance of the mall or indeed entering it by body guards hired by owners of the businesses. Such policing is deemed essential by Ratish as because then "The riffraff (*aise waise*) are kept out" he felt. Furthermore, there is an attempt to structure and shape public space as the mall 'looks out' onto the communal urban spaces of the city and invites the gaze inwards into the cool air-conditioned and exclusive interiors of the mall. There is a social hierarchy of aspirational places and practices that is created, attempting to frame such spaces as legal, legitimate and desirable. For Ghetner (2015) such social ordering of space, or 'rule by aesthetics' as he puts it, attempts to obscure the politics of exclusion and inequality that underlie it. I will explore these themes further in Chapter Five A Smart and Masculine City.

Embodying Smartness

In the previous chapter, I explored how young men enact a ‘smartness’ as a marker of distinction. This ‘smartness’ however is crucially an embodied enactment. As Ratish explained to me, ‘smartness’ is something that has to come from ‘inside’ (*ander se*). In his understanding, consumption alone is not enough for young men, this smartness has to be enacted through their bodies and its appropriate classed and gendered embodiment. This embodied performance creates a sexually and socially desirable heterosexual young man from the perspective of young men who want to *look* and *be* ‘smart’. This sentiment of marking distinction through embodiment was further clarified by Ratish “Look, clothes anyone can wear, but smartness is such a thing, personality, that is inside (*ander se*), and that has to be shown, then only people look at you”. The embodiment of smartness for the Urban Smart Strivers was what made them, they felt, distinct from the other men in the city space.

In this context, grooming an appropriate masculine image and body, takes on dimensions much beyond simply ‘looking good’ for young men in urban India. As Ratish once told me, “My friends in college were a little ‘local’ type, if I had stayed with them, then I would not have been able to do all this” whilst moving hand across his muscular body, shirt, bag and shoes. In doing so, Ratish tried explain what he meant by “do all this” (*yeh sab*) through this embodied masculine self. His ‘made’ body is adorned and groomed in keeping with the dominant and circulating ideas around the body which allow Ratish to create a sense of distinction from other men and masculinities. Ratish compares himself to the ‘local type’ masculinities that are not desirable due to an ascribed lack of general ‘smartness’ and hence inappropriate for his social milieu. For young men like Ratish, marking distinction and distance from such masculinities through everyday embodied acts becomes important to define themselves and their ‘smartness’.

Similarly, in the vignette, both the trainer Ashok, aged 28, and the Urban Smart Striver Ratish, aged 24, fall under the broad and vast category of the ‘middle-classes’ (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2008). Yet, their bodies and their masculinities are marked in different social and cultural positions in relation to the space and each other. Ashok, the trainer, is a servile body that ‘works’ in the gym, but Ratish the

gym user is an Urban Smart Striver who consumes the gym for his pleasure. In essence, both men have muscular bodies, but they have different levels of ‘smartness’ from the perspective of the Urban Smart Strivers who try to ascribe a social and cultural inferiority to the trainers. For Ratish, because the gym is a valuable site of consumption and belonging, he enjoys taking selfies and socialising at the gym. But he also carefully draws boundaries between himself and the trainers in the space of the gym when he tells me “These trainers are all vaginaboys (*chutiye*), uneducated types (*unpad type*), they have made arms (*dole*) but they have no intellect (*akekal*)”. His comment touches upon not just the politics of a muscular male body but also how it is embodied and carried. The trainer may have the ideal physical body, but that does not mean that he has a celebrated masculinity or the ‘smartness’ required in ‘new’ India as Ratish understood it.

Similarly, the relationship between the spaces of consumption in ‘new’ India and various bodies is complex. Ratish goes to the gym and leaves in order to construct his body as a consumer of ‘new’ India and its various ideas. The trainer Ashok on the other hand, works at the gym and so it is a space where labour relations structure experiences for him. In the course of a long conversation Ashok explained to me that he wanted to become a professional footballer but has “ended up” at a gym, “I’m stuck (*phas*) here”. At the same time, Ashok and the other trainers command and legitimate their own sense of respect by regularly portraying a sense of superiority to the customers. They tell young men repeatedly how they are not doing the right exercises or have the wrong posture, often giving contradictory advice to men.

In doing so, the trainers portray an image of great knowledge and try to encourage an image of themselves as ‘respectable’ masculine men. This was further hinted to me when Ashok told me that he cannot afford to buy a motorbike, but that this was a good thing because it allows him to cycle to work and hence stay much more fit and active than customers like Ratish. On the other hand, Sanjeev, another trainer at the gym, came on a Royal Enfield motorbike which was largely regarded as the ‘best’ or most ‘macho’ bike because of its heavy weight and loud engine noise. He explained to me that for him the motorbike was his biggest “achievement” because he saved money and bought it for himself.

Sanjeev felt that most of their customers at the gym were ‘spoilt’ young men and so would never be able to have such an ‘achievement’ through ‘hard work’. Hence for the trainers, both the cycling and the bikes, represent different narratives of respectability that coexist in relation to others.

At the same time, we note in vignette that Ratish calls the trainer ‘Sir’ when entering the space. To me this is indicative of the hierarchies of respectability inverted in some homosocial contexts too. The gym space allows for conventional hierarchies between Ashok and Ratish for example to break down and new ones to be established wherein Ashok maintains authority as a provider of knowledge on the body and ‘making’ an appropriate body. Ratish for example has often also confessed to me about how he would like the ‘definition’ of one of the trainers at the gym. He always calls them ‘Sir’ because he feels he has a lot to learn in the realm of ‘making’ the body from them. What emerges is that the gym and the body become a charged sites for the enactment and politics of masculinities. The competition and contestations amongst performances of masculinity, also hints at the performed and relational nature of masculinities in and through practices of the body (Whitehead 2001).

One visual example of ‘smartness’ of the neoliberal masculine self that is embodied in a particular arrangement and aesthetic of masculinity is the Shera Gym Wear advertisement in Connaught Place. The advertisement uses the symbol of a lion and positions Bollywood actor Vivek Oberoi in a specially marketed ‘gym vest’ asking men in Hindi script to “Change your thinking lion, wear fitLine.” In the ad, Oberoi’s arm features a raised dumbbell representing an ‘active’ and muscular masculinity that gets things done. Similarly, the symbolism of the lion, is directly connected to a long history of overtly lionised masculinity from the Vedic periods in ancient India (Whitaker 2011) to more contemporary articulations of ‘alpha strength’ depicted in films (Davis 2016). The attempt here is not just to normalise gyms cultures for men, but this advert speaks to a broader attempt to tap into an embodied idea of the neoliberal enterprising masculine self.



Fig. 10 Shera Advert, Connaught Place, Delhi, Philip 2016

What is important to note here is that this enterprising male self has a material and physical embodiment. The ‘new’ approach to life and thinking (*soch*), mentioned in the advert are demonstrated through a ‘new’ body and a ‘new’ look. It is through Vivek Oberio’s commodified, hairless, muscular and active looking body that his allegedly new Indian masculinity emerges. So paradoxically, the idea of self-motivated ‘change in thinking’ is marked through work on the body. Furthermore, the instructional tone of the messaging, directs and informs young men how to be ‘smart’ and ‘respectable’ in a new India and how to demonstrate their new attitude in and through their bodies. What is also striking for me is that the specialist ‘gym vest’ is very similar to the vest that Ratish wears in the opening vignette when he enters the gym with his arms tensed. As Banks (2001, 2007) explains such ‘found’ images have a social context and it is important to ask why they exist in the ways and places that they do at the times that they do. Such adverts then, reveal dimensions of a ‘new’ India, wherein masculinities are framed as enterprising and commodified, as well as ‘manly’ and embodied.

Bodies and Borders

The A-Fitness Gym from the vignette, like many other gyms in Delhi, is located in a middle class neighbourhood and crammed between domestic dwellings. At the gym, young men can enjoy spending time with each other in a largely 'modern' setting where participation is through paid private membership. The charges usually at such gyms ranged from Rs 1500 a month to Rs 3000 (£15-30) depending upon the facilities the gym offered. At the entrance to the gym, the images of three muscular topless men and two scantily clad muscular women outside the gym mark its separation from the domestic. The potted plants, freshly washed laundry, nameplates on houses and other markers of middle-class Indian life are juxtaposed with the symbolically marked space of the gym.



Fig. 11 A-Fitness Zone Exterior, Delhi, Philip 2016

Attending the gym, like the afternoon parties described in the previous chapter, allowed for a space to be created outside the home and away from the authority of the family. It became an important and valuable social space for young men to spend time with each other. In the summer months for example, the air-conditioned interiors allowed us to spend time together whilst working out or simply 'sitting' at the machines. Ratish and other gym friends often spent several hours a day, almost five days a week at the gym after their office shifts and sometimes longer over the weekends. The gym itself was a social space and when other male friends arrived there was usually a large burst of energy and the new arrivals would go and shake the hands or hug all the other young men in the gym they knew as we saw

in the vignette. It had a membership of seventy four men at the time I was doing fieldwork and on most evenings when Ratish and I would go to the gym around thirty other men would also be there.

Within the homosocial and heteronormative bond of the gym and gym goers, there was a shared sense of a brotherhood. Conversations often about women, sex, smoking, drinking or bodily processes like masturbation, erections and sexual positions were topics that could be discussed loudly and legitimately. Swearing and staring at other men working-out was also common in the gym. When discussing our own bodies or each others bodies, there was also a great amount of ease with which comments were made, t-shirts were lifted, body parts were touched and felt in the gym. Such bodily practices and their underlying shared assumptions about bodies and sexualities made the gym a comfortable place for young men to be with each other, laughing, hugging and having fun with each other. I look at such homosocial touching and sexualities in more detail in the next chapter on Desexing A Masculine Body.

As a result of the ease with which men spent time with each other in the gym, it often became a de-facto all male space. The exclusivity made it an exciting space as Ratish explained whilst joking around in the gym “there is music also and friends also, there is no need to go to a club (laughing), we can be free”. To which another gym goer quickly responds “Just the girls are not there” whilst gyrating his hips to further laughter. Indeed, as noted in the vignette the presence of a young woman in the A-Fitness gym was rather unusual although there were no formal restrictions on the entry of women. As I discovered over the course of the fieldwork, earlier parts of the day when there was more natural light and fewer men, more women used the gym space. However by evening, when the Urban Smart Strivers usually attended the gym, there are no women who use the space. In this context, the comments of the men, reflected their imaginations as well as their experiences of the gym as a masculine space where women were exceptions.

As we see in the opening vignette, when women do use the gym, they do so in different ways to the way men use the space. In the vignette the young woman attempt to desexualise the space and her presence within it by calling the trainer ‘big brother’ instead of ‘sir’ or indeed by his name. This allows

her to situate herself within a 'safe' fictive kinship bond of 'brother-sister' wherein the 'older brother' is a protective and guiding figure (Iyer 2017). Similarly in the vignette we see that the young woman negotiates the space of the gym with a quiet presence, not shouting or trying to draw too much attention to herself. In contrast, men attempt to claim the gym space and make it theirs by walking around, making loud noises, loudly talking to each-other and having 'fun' even when there are women around as the vignette suggests. Such different embodied practices of men and women are what Lukose (2009) in her study of young people in South India identifies as the more 'closed' bodies of women and 'open' bodies of men that are dialogically disciplined and contribute in gendering spaces. Such gendering of spaces has important consequences for gender relations in the city as I explore in more detail in Chapter Five A Smart and Masculine City.

Similarly, when talking about the gym space, Raj once told me that although his parents lived quite close to the gym, they could never come and join it. He explained "They walk in the park only, the gym is not right for mummy and daddy". Raj explained that the general atmosphere or '*mahol*' (environment) of the gym was such that others would not be comfortable within it. He justified this further by explaining "Like we cannot eat chicken or beer at home, they can't come here". Practices like eating meat or drinking beer were often forbidden for him at home but were nonetheless part of a 'modern' India (Donner 2012), carrying out these practices in homosocial groups and spaces was the only way of participating in such displays of 'modernity'. Hence the space of the gym, due to its gendered and generational dynamic, was 'closed off' to various other bodies and was largely a space for young men.

'Masculine' Bodies of Men

The gendered conceptualisations of the body are visible in the regimes of exercises to 'make' such bodies. In the vignette that headed this chapter for example, the trainer Ashok discourages cardiovascular exercises for me, saying that nothing comes or 'changes' (*pharak*) from these exercises. There is a certain expectation and assumption about what exercises are deemed acceptable and desirable for men, and the desired outcome and 'changes' on their bodies along gendered lines. In the making of the masculine body, running or cycling were not seen as being of particular use in making

‘manly’ bodies. By implication, it is weights, benchpresses, chest and shoulder exercises which are going to show the important ‘changes’ on the body. In an empirically different context, Wacquant’s (1995) work with male boxers also points to a similar dismembering approach to men’s body where ideas of protection, fighting and strength get linked to the upper bodies of men as well as large arms and shoulders.

Similarly for the Urban Smart Strivers too, it is particularly the upper part of men’s bodies that is conceptualised as distinguishing factor between what a ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ body looked like for the Urban Smart Strivers. The young men were unanimous in their opinion that men’s chests and shoulders are larger than women’s and this ‘fact’ demonstrated a much more essential difference in gendered roles. This shared truth about men chests is bolstered by the media and popular images around them. Women’s bodies and their functions were assumed to be ‘naturally’ linked to their femininities wherein they were larger at the bottom to be able to carry children and as receivers of penetrative sex. This was in direct contrast, but complementary, to an imagined idea around men’s bodies which were thought as always being ‘bigger’ at the top. The words to describe this apparent bodily difference is also interesting to note. Men talk about themselves as being “wide from top” (*chanda*) or “open chests” (*chati kholna*). Whereas women’s larger lower frames were associated with a ‘heaviness’ which is passive and in contrast to the more active process of being ‘bigger’. Ratish crystallised this difference in masculine and feminine bodies telling me that men ‘make their bodies’ (*body bananna*) but women only ever try to lose weight, they never ‘build body’.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, a good body is more important than the face. Aman for example felt that with a good body, the assumption was that a good ‘personality’ and ‘smartness’ could be demonstrated. Aman felt that he had to body-build his way into modelling because that was the only thing that mattered. Having fair skin and beard are also important, but he felt that no one looks at the features of men. For example, men’s eyes are never commented upon he told me, but their bodies are eroticised and talked about he felt. Through this body, a set of associative meanings of being able to ‘get things done’ and have a ‘hard’ body that could endure pain and difficulties were valorised.

In this context, for young men like Ratish, working out in the gym or wearing clothes that were appropriately masculine, were 'normal' and everyday because they were seen as an extension of a naturalised and inherent 'masculinity'. Ratish for example loved wearing a biker jacket which had shoulder pads in them. He explained to me that the shoulder pads gave his chest a 'nice shape' and made it look bigger and so added to his 'naturally macho' body and personality. Here dress has quite literally an 'amplifying' quality on the social construction of body (Reilly and Cosbey, 2008) wherein purported 'inherent' masculine traits are reconfigured and strengthened. Hence men's bodies get situated materially through consumption into masculinities discourses which I explored in the previous chapters and create the effect of a coherent gendering of men's bodies within their cultural contexts. As a consequence, Ratish's personal efforts towards making and embodying such a discourse appear to be completely normal to him and justified. The 'hard-work' and 'pain' that he endures and puts his body through become desirable, rather than burdensome, because they allegedly 'bring out' what is already assumed to be there. As Cornwall et al (2016) explain, in commodity cultures, the production of muscular commodified bodies is carefully distinguished from self-harm, hence framing certain forms of bodily pain as 'hard work'.

The exclusionary nature of such 'beautified masculine bodies' also become evident in the gym space. One example is when Ratish had a conversation with me early on during my fieldwork when I had just joined the gym. One evening after using the treadmill, I got off the machine and stood next to it wiping the sweat on my face. Without knowing the many social and gendered codes of the gym at the time, I had made the 'mistake' of wearing a pair of running shorts to the gym. Ratish who had been walking around in the gym came over to start a conversation about my routine. He was leaning on the treadmill and looked at my thighs with a frown. Then with his hands pointing at my thighs he said "I too used to be like that only". He added with an expression of distaste on his face "When I was like you, I first lost weight, a lot of hard-work is required, then I brought it to normal and then I kept it there, and then I started making my body, you should do the same". Through his comments Ratish made it clear to me that my body could not easily be classed as a beautiful or 'masculine' body because it did not fit the cultural and social markers of what 'masculine' in his context meant. My thighs and

legs came to be commented upon because they were not appropriately masculine and hence it had to be disciplined and transformed through 'hard work'.

Such conceptualisations of the masculine body take on a classed dimension too. Amongst Urban Smart Strivers and their spaces of leisure and consumption, the visual and aesthetic dominance of commodified 'masculine bodies' meant that other men's bodies were made invisible. In my observations, bodies of poor men or migrant men, dark men or effeminate and non-normative masculinities were never displayed through positive visual representations in urban spaces of new India. Indeed, that does not mean that poor or dark or non-normative men were not present in such spaces or around them. However such visual invisibilisation of 'other' masculinities, hints at which bodies are deemed as 'not belonging' in 'new' India.

Several poor or working men may have thin or highly muscular frames owing to their work. However those men's bodies do not match the ideals of cultures of urban youth masculinities that the Smart Strivers belong to. Ratish for example is not just a new Indian man because his muscular body, but he is modern because of his commodified embodiment. The hair cuts and the gym clothes, the shaved under-arms and the physical location of the working-out regime indicates an appropriately gendered and classed manner in which to construct this body. Such a commodified masculinity allows for Ratish's body, like the representations of Bollywood actors discussed above, to be a celebration of 'new' India and a consumerist nationalism embedded within it. The shirtless torso of the new Indian man then is not an image of humiliation or poverty, it is rather a celebration. This is in direct contrast to the bare chests of poor and working men in public spaces. The social workings of 'taste' and distinction allow for such different social values to be ascribed to acts whilst feeding into a hierarchy (Bourdieu 2010).

In marking distinctions from poor bodies, the narrative of 'proper hygiene' are also used to try to justify and normalise exclusionary ideas of an appropriately 'masculine body'. At the gym young men freely talk about the need to spend money on products for body hair removal and hence "clean the body hair" or "clean the chest". In one conversation, Raj explained to me that he liked removing his

body hair because it looked ‘neater’ afterwards, “I don’t like chest hair at all, I’m disgusted (*ghin*) by it”. He adds in justification “and anyway, its very unhygienic”. Similarly for Ratish too, being modern required such body hair ‘hygiene’ and it gave him a ‘good feeling’. He explained to me that after removing body hair, various parts of the body become more clearly visible to him allowing him to “work on them better” as the “muscles are clean and clear”. In this narrative, the removal and grooming of men’s body hair from chest, backs, crotches and under-arms is rationalised and marks the bodies of the Urban Smart Strivers as ‘smarter’ than others who did not keep them ‘clean’. Ratish’s comments in particular about such bodily hygiene allowing for more ‘efficient work’ on the body attempts to make such consumption and practices of the body as moral acts (Säävälä 2010).

In this context of making a masculine body, it is interesting to note that amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, there is no conversation about the ‘insides’ of the body. It is the aesthetics and the ‘look’ that are most important. Young men did not engage in conversations about heart-rates or pulse or sugar levels in the body and to me these social silences are important in marking out the limits of what making a masculine body entails. The exercises and practices of making masculine bodies also reflect the primary desire to create a ‘look’ rather than health or fitness in the conventional sense. Similarly, given also the preoccupation with the top half of the body, the lower half of the body was not very important for young men. As Ratish explained to me “no one sees your legs, so there is no need to work it out too much”. During my time in the field, male gym users and trainers almost never wore shorts to the gym and always preferred to wear tracksuit bottoms or other sports trousers.

A Respectable Body

Young men’s desires and efforts to make a ‘masculinised’ body are linked to their desire for respect and a masculine respectability as they defined it for themselves. The Urban Smart Strivers used the English word ‘respect’ very often to talk about living lives and having bodies that were ‘respected’ in a ‘new’ India. When I asked them what they mean by ‘respect’ they would often say “to live life with honour (*izzat*) and hard-work (*mehnat*)” which resulted in getting due ‘respect’ from other people around them. In being ‘new’ Indian men, young men they had embodied a masculinity which could be respected

because it was ‘new’ and ‘better’ than older forms of being and living. The creation of such an embodied form of respectability became evident to me when once out with Aditya and Raj. The young men ended up in an heated argument with a parking attendant at a mall car park about where to park the car. The attendant smiled and took on a deferential role in-front of the men as he tried to convince them to move the car to a different location.

Aditya was not interested in having this conversation and so in response he tried to ‘open’ his chest by physically and symbolically pulling his shoulders wide apart to create the impression of a wider (*chauda*) chest. He then said to the attendant in a authoritative tone in Hindi, “oye, talk with respect” (oye *izzat se baat kar*). Aditya was not a gym going man but nonetheless, the ‘opening’ up of his chest accompanied his demand for ‘respect’. The parking attendant, who was clearly older than us, was not addressed as ‘brother’ or through the honourable pronoun of ‘*aap*’ usually used for older people. Here the aim in Aditya’s utterance is double edged because what he is demanding is actually deference which is couched as an attempt to gain ‘respect’ (*izzat*) through his class and gendered position as a ‘new’ Indian man. This masculine respectability, demonstrated by the utterance and the opening up of the chest, are classed and gendered acts to claim respect. Eventually, the parking attendant stopped pleading but continued to smile as Aditya triumphantly walked away leaving the car where it was. Aditya’s claim to an embodied form of respect successfully operated to privilege him as an Urban Smart Strivers in a context of social and economic inequality.

Such ideas of a gendered respectability around a commodified masculine body are depicted across the mediascape in Delhi giving legitimacy and sanction to young men’s embodied practices. This is well captured in an advertisement that was popular in Delhi during fieldwork. The Manyavar menswear posters of Indian cricketing icon Virat Kohli had hundreds of similar hoardings around Delhi (Fig 12). The adverts marketed a ‘celebrationwear’ range of ornate ‘traditional Indian clothes’ to be worn by men for ‘Indian celebrations’. Such orientalist ideas of ‘celebrationwear’ are linked to the ‘sartorial excess’ and commodified forms of ‘Indian decadence’ that Patricia Uberoi (2009) writes about. My informants and I would pass one of these posters on a regular basis when out ‘*ghumne*’ in various places across the city. In the photos, Kohli had different ‘traditional Indian clothes’ but maintained a similar

expression and messaging. The tagline accompanying Kohli's figure read "Wear your identity" (*Pehno Apni Pehchaan*). This was followed by the company's tag line in English which reads "Earn your Respect" (Fig 12). The solo figure of Kohli on a plain background puts him and his identity at the centre of the marketing message.



Fig. 12 Manyavar Advert, PVR Saket, Delhi, 2016

It is important to note here that the Hindi words for "Wear your identity" are written in the English alphabet on the image, requiring the knowledge of English to be able to read the Hindi words. This is an explicit attempt to mark out a particularly 'modern' version of a distinctly consumerist nationalist Indian masculinity. The Hindi words and ideas of respect, use local language and meaning, but are expressed in and through a globalised neoliberal medium. Kohli's pose is one of a controlled and pleasant facial expression, which is not explicitly smiling or laughing, attempting to create a powerful gaze similar to what we saw in the previous vignette in Ratish's brusque mannerisms. Young men here are encouraged to literally 'wear' a commodified masculine identities and 'earn' their respect and respectability through 'effort' and 'hard-work'.

In the image the codes of a 'modern' masculine respectability are so deeply embedded that Kohli's figure needs no other markers of showing how 'respect' is earned. Here, simply being the modern new Indian man, embodying a commodified Indian masculinity, allows his figure to confidently be on display as respectable and desirable. Indeed the semiotics of the image build on the figure of Kohli as a cricketing icon, but the more dominating message for young men who encounter this image is that of a consumerist masculinity on display through a commodified body rather than a sporting body per se. Mirroring what Bruke (1996) has argued about advertising masculinities in Zimbabwe, such images connect the material body visible is in plain sight, with the social body which is an artefact, through 'prior knowledge' that circulates within the context. In the context of this image, the fact that readers are encouraged to shop and wear their identities and 'earn' their respectability in and through the physical body, reveals how social values are bestowed through embodied consumption (*pehno*).

Indeed when I discussed the reception of this image of Kohli with the Urban Smart Strivers there is a general sense of reverence and aspiration towards the image. For example, on seeing the photo Sambit explained to me that Kohli's look here was 'hard' and that he was a 'confident' and 'true' son of India. But this image was not just 'hard', it was also refined and 'smart' suggesting a rational basis for such hardness. Sambit explained that "From the inside he has a good personality". This combination of hard and soft qualities made Kohli's image particularly appealing because it represented what a new Indian man ought to be. Similar to the fashioning of Varun Dhavan's image in that I explored in the previous chapter (Fig 5) here the ideas of masculinity revolve around a balance between toughness and aggression, but in controlled and 'smart' ways. This is not an uncontrollable masculinity, associated with the urban poor, rather it is an extremely controlled and measured masculinity that is on display and because of its careful balance in aggression and softness, it has earned its respect.

Young men like Ratish in the opening vignette or Raj in the car from the vignette that opened the previous chapter, try to emulate not just the classed but also the gendered markers of being such consuming and masculine men. The need to appear 'hard', not smiling too much, appearing to have a controlled manner of speech and laughter as well as limiting the movement of limbs and hips, cumulatively add to the creation of a masculine respectability. Because these embodied performances

of hardness are carried out with sophisticated consumption practices of a new Indian man, such a masculinity becomes respectable and celebrated within cultures of urban youth masculinities.

However it is also important to note that such respectability does not apply to all sections of the population and is not unchallenged. Ratish and Raj's attempts to create a respectable and smart body enjoys social sanction and can be carried out freely without any policing in the company of the Smart Strivers. These conversations do not easily transport into the context of the home, where often fathers of young men don't use such products or where men don't ascribe such values of respectability to these practices. As Ratish himself told me once "Papa does not understand only, he keeps telling me, why are you doing these girly things like getting ready and shaving body hair and all (laughs) sisterfucker". In this case, there is a generational mismatch in cultural competence and understandings of 'respect' and 'modernity' which scholars working on youth cultures have demonstrated in several regional contexts (De Neve 2004, Nayak and Kehily 2008). In the context of the Urban Smart Strivers, this generational mismatch, further marks out the importance of homosocial groups where similar values are culturally dominant within the group and hence allows for a shared sense of respect and belonging for young men.

For the Urban Smart Strivers, the making of their respectable bodies, is a site of great pleasure and control. As Aman explained once explained to me, "I get a lot of looks when I go out (*ghumne*) looking nice". For Aman "looking nice" means having been to the gym and worked out on his upper body to get a defined and 'hard' look, having a freshly bleached face to make himself look fair as well as having put on nice clothes which he claimed made him feel "good". When observing Aman going around the various sites of leisure and pleasure, what this 'personality' and 'smartness' translates into are stylised and beautified practices of a masculine body. As I note in the opening vignette, keeping arms stiff and on display when walking around, being confident about looking at one's self and publicly appreciating hair and general bodily presence are important to demonstrate this beautiful masculine body for the self and others. When having a cigarette around Connaught Place for example, Aman is very careful not to talk too much and scans the moving crowds whilst smoking with a stern and 'steely' look. Yet once we move 'off stage' and are standing or sitting by the bike-sheds away from 'public view' he

becomes gregarious and excitable again. He slouches, looks around carelessly, his arms relax and he smiles and laughs loudly.

Aman is candid about the positive reinforcements he receives around his socially valued embodiment. He explains “After joining the gym, just like that (*aise hi*) people stop me and ask, they also propose me”. To ‘propose’ or display romantic or sexual interests towards another person is usually an activity that men initiate towards women (see Lukose 2009 for example), however in Aman’s case the situation is reversed he feels. In his experience, performing to the demands of a beautified masculinity, results in women coming up to him and ‘proposing’ their interests. Hence looking ‘smart’ and ‘respectable’ opens up a realm of exciting opportunities for Aman when out ‘*ghumne*’. In self-reflexive ways young men like Aman get validation of being socially and sexually successful and ‘smart men’ when they embody an appropriately desired masculinity and produces a balance between displays of masculine hardness and modernness. This narrative allows for the great effort and constant performance to become “beautiful”, part of young men’s conceptions of “a good life” and “freedom”, rather than a burden.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how discourses of a ‘new’ Indian man are embodied and given a materiality for and by young men. There is a rising importance and visibility around men’s bodies in a ‘new’ India which has meant that the male body has become an important site for negotiating ideas around consumption, respectability as well as desire. More and more young men in India today spend resources, energy, effort and emotions in ‘making’ appropriate bodies which has profound consequences on their relationships with their own bodies as well as others. As this chapter shows, there is no ‘natural’ flow between men’s bodies and discourse of masculinities. Rather there is a desperate attempt by markets and sociocultural forces, as well as young men themselves, to create a coherent narrative around embodied performance of the self, in relation to commodified spaces and practices that surround them.

Chapter Five: Desexing a Masculine Body

Introduction

In this chapter I explore how sexualities are ascribed and embodied in and through men's bodies. I look how men's bodies are turned into 'protective' and 'public' bodies allowing them to belong in 'public' spaces of the city whilst maintaining gendered and sexual power, yet not be sexualised themselves. Through exploring the everyday workings of heteronormativity within the lives of the Urban Smart Strivers I unpack the processes which discipline men's bodies to be 'respectable', productive and heterosexist. At the same time, such process of 'de-sexing' men's bodies are fragile with several cracks and potential for 'breaches' as I will explore in the chapter.

This chapter begins with a vignette of Aman's heterosexist 'shamelessness' in the company of men and then contextualises this within the broader dynamics of young men's sexualities in a 'new' India. In the next section I explore how the Urban Smart Striver's homosociality cannot have homoeroticism which leads me to analytically look at how 'smartness' for them is compulsorily heterosexual in the following section. I then explore how such a sexualities discourse, in relation to urban space, allows men's bodies to become 'public bodies' and how men come to embody a 'manly hardness' when roaming around.

Shameless Men

Aman and I were in Connaught Place after his day at work. At around 5:30pm we sat at our usual spot on the benches near the Inner Circle of the A Block. Aman worked at a bank nearby and so this became our regular spot to meet for tea. That evening Aman had his orange lanyard around his neck with the English words 'Bank of Baroda' printed on it and his identification badge was loosely tucked into his buttoned shirt. As we were chatting Aman got a phone call from his girlfriend. He took a quick sip of his tea and picked up the call. They started a long conversation as she too had just finished work.

As they chatted, I decided to use the toilet in the meantime. I gently tapped Aman on his leg with my leg and nodded to indicate that I was going to the toilet just across the road. He did not respond but signalled that he understood by looking in the direction of the queue pouring out of the men's toilet.

So I walked over to join the queue. The toilet complex itself was a rectangular concrete box on the edge of two intersecting roads. It was divided into two parts, with signs in English and Hindi explaining one section for men and the other for women.

The door for the men's side was wide open with a constant flow of men coming in and out. In contrast, the door to the women's side was shut and had a more deserted look. Some men in the queue looked into the street as the crowds walked by, whilst others looked bored and yawned with their hands on their hips impatiently waiting for their turn. As the queue inched forward, I noticed that Aman stood up and began to hover close to me whilst continuing his phone conversation. "They should have told you" I heard him say into the phone loudly as he laughed and played with the straps of his lanyard.

As my turn approached, I moved closer to the toilet entrance and stood at the door. I waited for an older man to leave so that I could step in. The space inside the toilet was small. There was a mirror and a washbasin directly opposite the entrance and two urinals next to each other with no dividers between them. As I moved inside to use the urinal, there was a sudden shout "Oye, wait, I'm also coming". Before I could react or make sense of what was said, I noticed Aman jumping the queue and making his way into the toilet. He barged in laughing and said again "I'm also coming".

As I was trying to understand what he meant, Aman unzipped his trousers and moved towards the urinal that I was using. He said "Sisterfucker (*behnchod*) what is there to be shy about with boys" (*kya sharam karna*) and pulled out his penis and started urinating into the same urinal that I was using. Then with his hips, he gently pushed me aside to make more room for himself and put an arm around my shoulder as we urinated in unison. The suddenness of the whole moment shocked me. Not knowing what to do or say, I kept silent. Aman could perhaps sense my discomfort and so he carried on "it's not like there is anything to see, sisterfucker" (*kuch dekhne ko thodi hai*) and started laughing again. Unsure of how to react, I laughed nervously too. He then continued "It was my woman (*bandi*) on the phone, her family is troubling her again about her things" he told me.

As Aman continued telling me about his girlfriend, the queuing system too seemed to continue without any problems. The man using the other urinal next to us, finished and moved to wash his hands. The next man waiting in the queue at the entrance, entered the toilet and started using the empty urinal. The unexpectedness of Aman's actions did not seem to bother anyone apart from me at that point. To me the space suddenly felt crowded and uncomfortable, but everything continued just as it was. I withdrew myself from Aman's arms and moved to wash my hands. Aman continued talking in a louder tone so that I could carry on hearing him "I'm staying out of all her issues, otherwise she gets angry with me, what have I done in these things yaar, they don't understand only". I responded by simply nodding my head as I checked myself in the mirror. Soon Aman too moved over to the sink, washed his hands and arranged his shirt. I stood on the side and waited for him to finish. By this point another young man moved into the toilet and took Aman's place at the urinal as we stepped out. The orderly queuing system continued.

Young Men's Sexualities in 'New' India

This vignette provides some important insights into how sexualities are inscribed onto men's bodies in a 'new' India. Young men like Aman, who are educated, upwardly mobile young Urban Smart Strivers, enjoy various markers of social respectability and status in public spaces of urban India. In the vignette for example, the aesthetic arrangement of his lanyard and phone conversations with his girlfriend are embodied markers of being a 'new' Indian man. Aman is very proud of his 'good job' at a bank and likes the fact that he gets to wear 'formal clothes' during the weekdays when he has work. Like many such young men in urban India, Aman enjoys various forms of romantic and sexual relationships with his girlfriends, he has access to an increasing global pool of pornographic material from various sources, as well as new cultural formations around 'love' and 'dating' through popular culture in a 'new' India. The accessibility and scale of a public sexualities discourse for young people in contemporary India is one crucial reason for labelling this generation of young people as 'liberalisation's children' (Lukose 2009) or belonging to the 'sexual revolution' of India (Trivedi 2014).

For the Urban Smart Strivers like Aman being ‘smart’ required ‘having a girlfriend’ within their cultures of urban youth masculinity. As Aman explained to me “One must have a woman (*Bandi honi chahiye*) otherwise there is no fun in life”. Young men like Aman have enough pocket-money or salaries to take women out on dates, buy small presents like soft stuffed animals, flowers, chocolates and key chains. He explained to me that the competence in ‘dealing/being with women’ (*ladkiyon ke saath rehna*) marked him as different from other men who were ‘uneducated’ (*gamar type*) and not-smart. Hence an important marker of being ‘modern’ then is to have adequate knowledge and sophistication to interact with women, spend time with them hanging out and engage in public romances away from the home. This is in contrast to the brusque style of conversation that is adapted with other male friends, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, because a shared gendered identity allows for a sense of ease and marks interactions as ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ amongst men.

This ‘smartness’ in matters of performing a modern sexuality was pointed out to me through young men constant use of English terms like ‘dates’ and ‘girlfriends’ to explain their romantic and sexual lives and their attempts at trying to frame them as respectable activities of a new and modern young man. The use of English as the lingua franca of a ‘new’ India attempted to not just create distance from non-smart masculinities but was also the suave and non-crude way of talking to women. Aman would explain to me for example that he was going on a ‘date’ or had a ‘break-up’ to situate his experiences within the broader sexual respectability of a ‘modern’ India where such affective emotions and expressions are legitimated and used in and through the English language (Trivedi 2014) . Such use of English words is also documented by Keira Hall (2009) who shows a similar respectability attached to English language words amongst young people in Delhi to describe ‘modern’ sexual activity. At the same time, the use of Hindi words is reserved for swearing and is deemed as ‘too vulgar’ by the Urban Smart Strivers to use in speech when talking about their ‘modern’ sexual practices.

Against this valorising of ‘modern’ relationships with women, young men have older forms of obligation and expectations to be appropriately managed. Such ‘liberalised’ ideas of sex and sexuality cannot be easily turned into social practice in the realm of everyday life where Aman’s family keenly

looks for a bride for him in line with their caste and class background. Aman himself was not sure about having an arranged marriage, but also felt that he was not in a position to challenge the authority of his family, “I cannot talk about marriage with them, they will not understand only, I am the older one in the family, if I go astray and marry a random girl, then my brothers will all get a bad example. I don’t know what to do yaar”. Young men like Aman then, live and belong to these changing moral and social codes around discourse of sex and sexualities in a ‘new’ India however it required careful planning, coordination and management on his part. As we see in the vignette, Aman gets a call from his girlfriend who he met whilst they did a course on accounting at one of the private colleges in Delhi, and they had been dating ‘on-off’ for a few months. This is a ‘secretive’ affair that his family do not know about and only his male friends or ‘brothers’ are privy to it. He cannot pick up her calls when he is at home with his family and had saved his girlfriend number under a male name so as to give the impression that he was texting a male friend if he was ‘caught’ texting at home.

In this context, ‘dating’ women and exhibiting a ‘modern’ sexuality is an activity that young men carry out in the new spaces of urban leisure in Delhi. Aman for example, would often meet his girlfriend in Connaught Place because it was close to his work and there was enough of a ‘modern crowd’ he felt that allowed for them to be undisturbed and unnoticed. As Aman explained to me once ‘People look at us less here, and no one says anything (*Koi nahi dekhta/kehta*) in this area, but in other places they can say things or do things if you roam around with girls. So I prefer to come here for dates’. For Aman, like the use of English to express ‘respectable’ sexual desires, the commodified ‘new’ spaces too provide a safe and respectable place for sexual and romantic relationships to be carried out. According to Menon and Joshi (2014, 20) a similar sense of ‘sexual freedom’ is experienced by young women who work in malls in India because malls represent a freeing and globalised place allowing women to wear makeup and heels and be ‘free’ in a way they felt the ‘outside’ world did not permit them. The space of the mall itself is marked as a ‘good’ space which ‘changes’ people because as female employee explain, even ‘bad’ people that come to the mall have to behave well (ibid). In this way, the space itself is ascribed a positive quality that can ‘better’ people. For the Urban Smart Strivers and their girlfriends, such spaces being physically far away from homes and the watchful eyes of parents and relatives

allowed them anonymity and freedom to express their sexual and romantic desires publicly. Although such spaces make it easier for young men to have interactions with women, but as I demonstrate in the next chapter on A Smart and Masculine City, these spaces are also heavily gendered against women.

Nonetheless, this ‘sexual freedom’ in commodified spaces of ‘new’ India opens up interesting opportunities and challenges for young men and women. In the image below for example (Fig 13), a group of young men and women ‘hang-out’ and take selfies wearing ‘modern’ western clothes, on vehicles and within the vicinity of a space they value as representative of a ‘new’ India. This is also the same space discussed in the opening vignette where Aman and I sit and enjoy our tea breaks in the evening after his work. For young men in such spaces, interacting with women or even holding hands with women was an activity that they enjoyed a great deal, but these were never ‘accepted’ by ‘all of society’ they would tell me. So even in commodified spaces of leisure and consumption, the ‘sexual freedom’ they could enjoy was uneven and changing. The interactions amongst young unmarried men and women indicated a breach of the controlled heteronormativity which socially can only manifest itself in and through arranged marriages (John and Nair 2000). Hence a young heterosexual couple that looked unmarried, holding hands or walking together in Connaught Place represented this ‘breach’. However for the Urban Smart Strivers, operating within their cultures of urban youth masculinities, such ‘breaches’ also became a source for sexually and socially becoming ‘new’ Indian men.

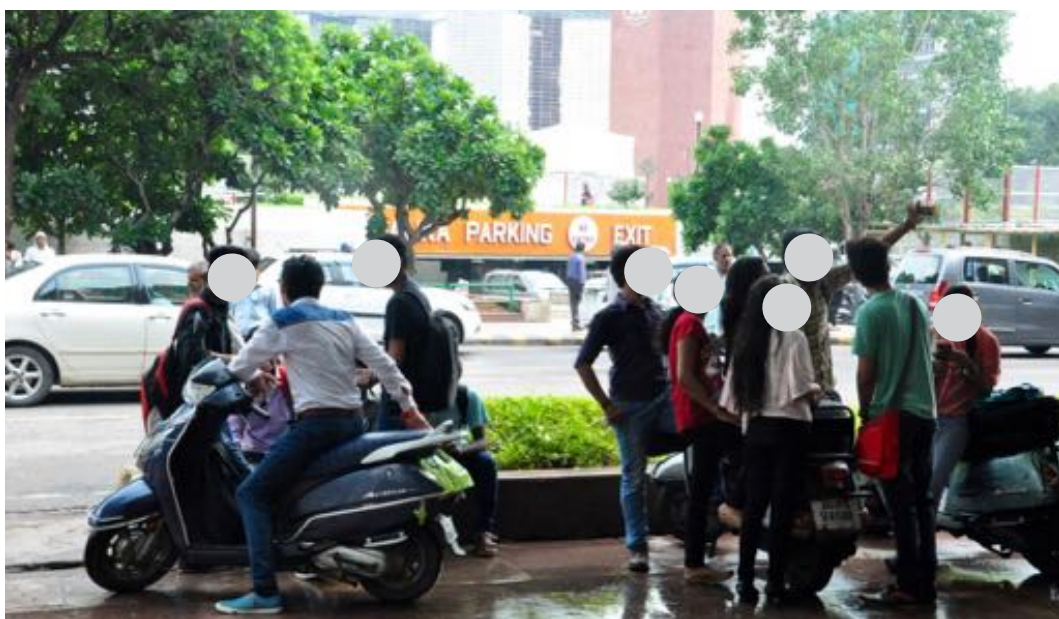


Fig. 13 Young men and women hanging out in Connaught Place, Delhi, Philip 2016

In contrast to the policing of young men and women for non-sanctioned heterosexual interactions, there is a complimentary ‘non-policing’ of men’s bodily interactions with other men. As we see in the opening vignette, men like Aman can display, and in practice do demonstrate, a much higher physical intimacy with other male friends. The deeply embedded nature of a heteronormative social and cultural world allow for such intimacy between masculine friends to be both institutionalised and socially celebrated. As the Osella and Osella (2006) explain, in the Indian context, the process of gendering and sexualising bodies cannot be separated from each other given the institutional arrangements and policing of young people’s sexuality. Hence for young men, ideas of their gendered identities are closely linked to how and what their sexual behaviour and identities ought to be within a localised heterosexual patriarchy. In this context, the Osella’s argue that being and becoming ‘masculine’ requires a compulsory heterosexuality to be appropriately gendered as a ‘man’ (ibid).

Yet at the same time, the cracks and limits of this heteronormative coding of space and bodies become evident when we consider the fact that these process of socially and spatially policing sexualities and bodies are never complete. For example, it is significant that in the image above of the young people taking selfies and interacting with each other (Fig 13), the physical space is outside the market Palika Bazar which is home to India’s largest sex toys and porn market (Das 2014) and serves as one of the most important sex sites for young men looking for sex with other men in Delhi (Seabrook 1999). Hence within this ‘new’ India of young men’s heterosexist dating and leisure practices, several complex phenomena are also taking place both spatially and symbolically close to each other.

Nonetheless, the power of a heteronormative social order in urban sites of leisure is so strong that as we see in the opening vignette, Aman can confidently break the queue and enter the toilet in full view of other men to use the same urinal as me. In doing so, the limits of such sexual policing and non-policing come to the fore. Aman and I being young men are allowed the ‘freedom’ to be physically intimate with each other without raising any ‘suspicion’ about breaching heteronormative social ordering. Aman is confident in and through an assumption that both he and I being appropriately gendered and sexualised in a heterosexual framework, have nothing to be shy about with each other.

The assumption here is that two young men need not have any shame or curiosity with each others bodies and can hence urinate simultaneously. The power of such a discourse operating in and through his embodied self is so great that the ability to share physical intimacy to the extent of urinating together is not a 'threat' to our masculinities but becomes a marker of our safely non-sexualised relationship with each other.

This allegedly 'de-sexed' nature of men's bodies in relation to other men is explained more clearly in Aman's rhetorical question in the vignette where he says 'what is there to be shy about in-front of boys'. The assumed obviousness of this statement, Aman suggests, does not need any further qualification and serves within his frame of operations as a commonsensical act amongst two heterosexual/masculine men because there is 'nothing' to see. The fact that the statement is uttered in a public toilet within a city space, also hints to the logics of how the space itself is gendered and sexualised. By being the confident 'new' Indian man and pissing with a fellow 'brother' there is seemingly no breach of any of the social and gendered codes of the space. Rather it reinforces the bond amongst men as non-sexual and attempts to make the space itself not a sexual space but a utilitarian and 'ordinary' public space for men who use it.

As Butler (2006) has argued, the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative manner to create and sustain heterosexuality and gendered bodily differences. In this context, Aman's statement about 'nothing to see' for two masculine men, desexes their bodies to each other because there is an assumption of a shared 'male sex' which only allows bodily and sexual difference for us to be seen in relation to women who are located firmly as binary opposites to our 'male sex'. Hence in the vignette, Aman and I are brought together as 'desexed' brothers operating within the regulatory norms of sex, and all forms of erotic desire and power is directed towards his girlfriend, hence forcefully sustaining a heteronormative social and gendered order.

Such deep and intimate homosocial bonds which Aman shares with other male 'brothers' are celebrated openly and freely with friends and family without any concerns precisely because they are seen as

desexualised bodies operating together in a desexualised relationship. Aman's parents in fact encourage him to have 'smart' male friends and considered me as a researcher from Oxford to be a 'positive' influence on him and hence encouraged our friendship. At the same time, the bond with his girlfriend, which is actively controlled in a localised heterosexist patriarchy, remain a 'hidden' practice that is done away from the gaze of patriarchal family because it was seen as a sexual relationship. Indeed some such 'brotherly' bonds can and do become sexual as I explore further in the chapter, but nonetheless the normative de-sexed nature of men's relationships with other men means the policing a male-female couple experiences, goes completely as unmarked in a male-male couple.

Another young informant Rahul who I met at the cigarette stand in Connaught Place told me that he had a 'girlfriend' that his male friends knew about but his family did not. Over the course of several conversations, as our relationship developed, he told me that he also enjoyed engaging in sex with men. He told me that "having a girlfriend is totally normal yaar, everyone has one, but sex with her is difficult because we both don't have place. So sometimes it's nice to go with guys, for that hotels also have no problem". Rahul told me that his girlfriend did not know he also had sex with men and he told me such sex was not something he could discuss with his male friends (*bahis*) either because he felt they would 'never understand'. These candid revelations became a source of our bonding during fieldwork, because he felt he could openly talk about his sexual practices with other men. In turn for me as a queer researcher, Rahul became one of my closest informants because with him I too could discuss my own sexual identity with ease in a way that I could never with Aman or any of my other key informants. Nonetheless, Rahul was clear that these sexual 'acts' could only take place within the cracks of a heterosexist patriarchy. He explained to me that "eventually I have to get married only, so when you are young this is all okay, its just that one should not make it a habit (*lat nahi lagni chahiya*)". In doing so, Rahul was always puzzled and challenged by my desire to "choose to be gay" as he put it. I will return to the discussion about Rahul and the several themes this brings up further in this chapter. At this stage I want to build on my arguments from the previous chapter about homosocial bonds between 'brothers'.

Bhai-Bhai Relationships

As I have already explored, the Urban Smart Strivers come to value their bonds with other men more than their relationships with women. In this context, various discourses about loving one's brothers in desexualised ways is portrayed as more important than sexualised forms of bonds with woman for the Urban Smart Strivers. These sentiment are echoed in a story shared widely on social media by the Urban Smart Strivers about the value of male friendships. It explains in Hindi "Why have friendships with women who will leave you in a moment (*pal bhar mein saath chod detin hain*), if you want to make friendship, then make friendship with men who will even after death carry you on their shoulders (*kandha dete hain*)". Here women are seen only as sexual beings, with little ritual, social and cultural power in a patriarchy which results in 'friendships' with women not being valuable. Because women are assumed to be only sexual and inferior, 'friendships' with women are also seen exclusively as sexual friendships. In contrast, men and the homosocial bond is implied to be the 'pure' form of friendship wherein they are so lasting that the support of male friends allows men to pass through life and even in death. This allows to position homosocial bonds as directly against and better than bonds with women.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, such collective overvaluing of homosocial bonds allows for various non-sexual discourses about economically and socially productivity of such brotherly bonds to also exist. An example of such a 'bhai-bhai' relationship is the image below where two young men, who look like my research pool of Urban Smart Strivers in their choice of bodily aesthetic and grooming, look into a laptop screen with a happy and excited expression on their faces. This image was located within the Delhi metro train platform and was an image that my informants and I encountered very often during our use of the metro. In the image, one of them has his arm resting on the shoulder of the other to indicate their intimacy and closeness. Both the young men are situated within a modern looking sparsely furnished room with several boxes that need to be opened. The suggestion of a 'new beginning' for the young men is explained through the Hindi terms written in English explaining "Unbox the Beginning, Unbox Life" (*Unbox shuruat, Unbox zindagi*).



Fig. 14 Advert at a metro station in Delhi, Philip 2016

When discussing this image with Raj as we were taking the metro to get back home one day, Raj was clear that the young men in the image were starting up a business “They are good friends (*bhais*) who know each other and they are starting up a joint venture” He explained further that “this is the start-up generation, they are starting their lives now”. In an enterprise culture of contemporary India, such images of men indicate the potential beginnings that several young men aspire for and hence Raj was confident about his reading of the image. In a different cultural context, the same ideas, symbology and physical intimacy between the two men ‘making a start’, could allow readers a message of a same-sex couple starting to live together or getting married. However the heterosexist masculinities discourse is so deeply embedded and normalised, that these meanings and symbolic references operate in accordance to the local cultural norms, not allowing any room for sexual ambiguity. As Butler (2006) explains, there is a heterosexual matrix in patriarchal societies that bring desire, bodies and gender together to only create flows in one direction that align men’s bodies and masculinities with a heteronormative framework. Hence the ‘bhai-bhai’ relationship on display is understood as a de-sexualised productive bond between two urbane and smart young men. Indeed, as Indian feminists have pointed out, in a localised patriarchy, within a system of patriarchies, the long history of productive homosociality allows Indian men to practice intimacy in ways that other contemporary patriarchies do not allow men in other cultural contexts (Menon, 2012). Hence several themes about

being a ‘new’ Indian man and his embodiment that I explored in the previous two chapters, come together here with a sexualities discourse through this image. Interestingly, Rahul who engages in non-normative sex with other men in Delhi also did not read the image above as anything but its desexualised neoliberal reading. When I suggested an alternative homosexual reading of the image, Rahul was clear that I was ‘wrong’ and that there was no chance that “they would show dirty messages like that”. I don’t know who Rahul refers to when he says ‘they’ here but I assume it to mean an imagined pool of image-makers and a wider social order. Hence the cultural work done by this image was to bolster aspiration and the importance of capitalist enterprise ventures through homosociality.

Interestingly, the fact that image was seen on the metro station is also a marker of how deep the desexed presences of two appropriately ‘masculine’ bodies became within spaces of the city. For example, young men like Rahul, who appropriately embody their new Indian masculinity as Urban Smart Strivers, would use the very space of the metro to engage in homosexual encounters. Rahul on his ‘adventures’ whilst roaming around the city through the metro would show me how to have ‘fun’ on the metro. He enjoyed being in the crowded metro during the rush hour after work or over weekend, and he would use it as a chance to touch other men and engage in sexual contact in the moving metro.

Through a skilled and but clandestine technique, Rahul would place his open palm on his hips once inside a crowded metro carriage. He would then try to make eye contact with other men who he felt could be potentially interested in sexual contact, or sometimes not even look up, and attempt to grope random men with his loosely placed palm. Often these would take the form of an ‘accidental’ grope, but occasionally they would be met by a ‘positive response’ and Rahul would proceed to masturbate the men as the metro moved. His ‘tricks’ included as he explained to me, using his back-pack as a shield, standing at the edge of the metro door to get good access and making eye contact as well as ‘smiling with his eyes’. Although there are not many studies that study such practices of men, I did find similar parallels in the context of the Kolkata metro (Bhattacharya 2016) and the metro in Mexico city (Graham, 2002)

What is significant is that in the space of the metro and more widely in a patriarchy, the de-sexed bond that men shared with each other meant that as long as bodies were appropriately gendered and in line with the normative framing of masculine bodies, non-normative sexual practices could take place with relative ease. As Rahul explained to me, when using the metro with his girlfriend, it is impossible for him to stand very close to her, or even touch her because their presence is marked as hyper sexed. He explained “If I go with her, then people think bad things only, they can never just let us be, they think we are doing only sex sex sex, people have only the wrong thinking when its a boy and girl together”. In this case then, such ‘wrong thinking’ does not take place when two appropriately gendered men stand close to each other or touch each other or indeed engage clandestinely in sexual activity in public. Rahul explained, “People think you are best friends or brothers maybe, its totally normal, there is no problem. But in the metro, even when its crowded, you cannot even accidentally touch a woman, she will start shouting rape rape and then you’re finished!”

In this setting, there is an unmarkedness around men and masculinities, they form the invisible gender and the ‘norm’ against which women’s place and spaces are marked clearly to indicate where they should and ought to belong. In this space, there is also a collective desexualisation of men and the policing of heterosexuality is the main organising factor of the space and discourse. Men are kept separate from women and women’s bodies which are the sexualised bodies. As I explore in the next chapter A Smart and Masculine City as well as the following chapter on a A Safe/Unsafe City, this particular sexualisation and desexualisation of bodies has important connotations on how we understand gendered violence in urban India. As a consequence of such desexualisation of men’s bodies in relation to other men’s bodies in public spaces, there is a collective desexualisation of men as sharing non-sexual homosocial which in turn bolsters the heteronormative framework of such a space.

In this context, young men touch each other all the time through the framing of a shared brotherhood and a ‘bhai-bhai’ relationship. In such relationships, homoeroticism has to be completely negated and a shared homophobia becomes a way of marking and desexing bonds amongst male friends (Osella and Osella 1998). Similarly in writing about black masculinity, Jackson (1994) explains that so much ‘black

culture' fixates on a homosocial culture, men in competition with men, creating a context wherein homoeroticism and homophobia coexist. Within bhai-bhai homosocial relationships, the bond has to be desexualised to make them homosocial whilst negating and often ridiculing the homosexual. The use of homophobic swear words and the display of a virile heterosexuality is crucial to Aman in the vignette so that the act of urinating together in public can be done confidently and by dispelling all 'threats' of being labeled or read as homoerotic. Particularly amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, the 'gay' public health and media discourse as I have explained in the previous chapter, is so common now that young men like Aman, use the English word 'gay' to as a term of reference to mark themselves as different from the 'gay'. This process of distancing is visible in the film ABCD 2 which I have analysed in the previous chapter wherein the main protagonist Varun Dhavan is shown in several scenes being topless and in bed with male friends and gyrating his hips towards them in powerful strokes that represent acts of penetrative sex facing each other. Yet these are never allowed to collapse into a homosexual narrative because of the presence of a hyper effeminate figure which is marked as 'a gay' in the film and acts as the 'joker' amongst the male friends.

Smart is Sexy

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, the idea of 'smartness' requires the reproduction of a active heteronormative masculinity that is valorised in 'new' India. As Rahul explained to me that although he enjoyed casual sexual encounters with other men, making such sexual activity into an identity was not appropriate. He memorably explained to me that, "Because I'm smart, I don't want to have a boyfriend, sex with men is okay, but to become gay is not right" For him, being 'smart' meant that he did not want to get into romantic relationships with men, but enjoy having sex with them under the realm of '*masti*' (fun) wherein it was just sexual practice and not part of a gendered or sexual identity. Nonetheless, Rahul and I spent hours talking about the men he 'loved' but he insisted that that these were passing phases that would 'go away' (*chale jange*). In our exchanges about the increasing public discussion on homosexuality in India, he often voiced his confusion and frustration at why certain

middle-class young men who 'have it all' would 'choose' to be gay "Yaar they have everything (*sab kuch*), meaning nice normal guys they are, phone, car, everything, but still they become gay (*gay ban jate hain*)".

For Rahul, 'choosing' a 'gay life' was an unwise decision because with it came not only social and economic complications, but also heartache. He explained to me that it is really difficult to socially exist in India if one 'chooses' to be gay, "Its better to avoid it only, what can you do with these things, no one wants to employ a gay, you can't go anywhere and even your own family will be ashamed of you, who wants that?" In expressing these social fears, in several other conversations he also confessed to me that he had 'loved' some men in the past, but these could not and did not lead anywhere. From such experiences he felt that he had learnt an important 'lesson' and would often warn me "I don't know why you would want to love a man, men will always leave you, but if you marry a women she will stay with you always". He explained to me that now he had no desire to even bring up the possibility of not having an arranged marriage because he could never 'trust' men. This was then couched under the bigger idea that his 'conservative' family would not understand these things anyway, so there was no point in talking about it. The sociopolitical context of homosexuality in the India (Narain and Bhan 2005) meant that Rahul felt justified in experiencing the 'gay life' as only full of problems and allowed to him make the 'smart' choice he felt of being 'straight' and 'respectable'.

Rahul felt that there were other more important things to look forward to. His idea of a 'good life' required being a striver who achieves financial and social status for himself and his family. He explained "I have a lot of responsibilities, and I want to live a proper normal life, not like this hiding in the park all the time". To him, being an Urban Smart Striver required him to act and be 'smart' in ways that are inline with themes explored in Chapter Three A New Indian Man and were socially celebrated and respected. Interestingly, the embodied idea of being and looking 'normal' was elaborated by Rahul when he talked about his great frustration and dislike for men he thought were effeminate. When hanging out in the 'gay park', Rahul would point to particular men and tell me how much he disliked them because he thought they were effeminate. He felt that they were 'strange' (*ajeeb*) people and were 'almost like women'. When hanging out in the 'gay park' he would try to avoid making any contact with

them and often be hostile towards them and tell me “Oh god, don’t look there, the limp movers and shakers (*hilne dulne*) have arrived”. Rahul was clear that he would never go with someone who was ‘effeminate’ and that he ‘hated’ them because they give all the men and the park a ‘bad name’.

The ‘effeminate’ young men were thought of by Rahul as not being ‘smart’, ‘normal’ or indeed ‘man’ enough and hence were socially avoided. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers like Rahul, the very idea of smartness is heterosexual and classed idea as I have explored already. Hence ‘choosing’ to be ‘effeminate’ was not a position that was not valuable and nor was it a ‘smart’ choice. The very articulation of ‘choosing’ to be smart rather than gay, suggests that a sexualities discourse that is so embedded within a heteronormative context, that it brings the politics of class and gender together in constructing the masculine subject. As a result, Rahul would often warn me to only wear ‘boy clothes’ which were ‘smart’ and avoid wearing long *kurtas* (loose fitting men’s tops) which I often preferred to wear because of the heat, because in *kurtas* I would not look ‘smart’ and hence could be mistaken to be ‘one of them’ (*unke jaisa*) in the park. Looking ‘effeminate’ or ‘gay’ brought no respectability according to Rahul and embodying any signs of this ‘gayness’ then starts to cause ‘gender trouble’ (Butler 2006).

In response to such marginalising attempts by Rahul and others in the park, some of the ‘effeminate’ men would deliberately start dancing and clapping in the park under the street lights, or make sudden and loud noises, to make themselves visible and to claim the space of the ‘gay park’. Such explicit attempts to gain visibility, would further anger Rahul who in reaction to such incidents in the park would explain how these people had no ‘honour’ (*izzat*) or concern for their families and others. He felt that the ‘effeminate’ men in the park were ‘acting like women’ and were hence not only not-smart, but also non-masculine. The idea that men are acting ‘almost’ like women is significant because it indicates that a man is moving downwards from a position of superior gendered power by acting like a woman. It is framed as an insult rather than an compliment or a neutral statement. The insult works on the deeply assumed difference between men and women in a patriarchal social order wherein women are individually and collectively devalued.

Amongst the ‘effeminate’ men in the park, there was a widely accepted idea that men like Rahul came from ‘good families’ and would live lives that were ‘lies’. They explained to me that young men like Rahul and other ‘smart’ men who came to the park, would come to the park even after they were married to women arranged through their families and hence were ‘unethical’. In turn the ‘effeminate’ young men, who were often from the lower middle class or working class, told me that they were the ‘brave’ ones, facing the brunt of society and its punishments for ‘being real’. In the company of the ‘effeminate’ men in the park, I also got great companionship during my fieldwork when Rahul or others were unavailable to meet. They younger ones affectionately called me ‘didi’ (older sister) and in turn encouraged me to call the other older men in their group as ‘didis’ which I did. In this symbolic sisterhood, a great amount of stories and food was shared, but when leaving the park and moving towards the metro station, the embodied performances of the young men would have to be ‘straightened up’ (*seedha chalna*) to some extent, in line with more normative performances of masculinities. Such self policing of embodied sexualities was crucial for the young men of the park to avoid violence in the form of ‘gaybashing’ or ‘genderbashing’ due to their perceived transgression of sex-gender relations (Namaste, 1996).

In this context, the park becomes the social space where as Butler (1996, 3) explains, ‘abject bodily beings’ that are at the margins of ‘bodily life’ exist. They occupy and populate social and physical spaces of the park, as in the case above, within the cracks of a heterosexist social order. As Butler (1996) explains, the ‘heterosexual regime’ is centrally implicated in this division of the field of bodies, into ‘bodies that matter’ and bodies that do not. Nonetheless what was striking for me was that the space of the park provided the young men a chance to congregate and build a ‘park community’ of familiar faces, away from the crowds of Connaught Place as well as the police. The increasingly public demands for LGBTQ rights meant that often the space was the park was optimistic and hopeful for a change in the legal framework. Frustrations at being on the margins also meant that the young men talked about ‘disturbing’ ordered society which kept trying to push them away. Their loud ‘clapping and singing’ they told me was one small step in ‘irritating’ the macho men (*mard type*) and is a theme I will return to in the next chapter on A Safe/Unsafe City.

A Public Body

The desexualised nature of heterosexual masculinities contributes to making men's bodies 'public' bodies in a social and cultural patriarchy. As has been well documented by feminist scholars in India, women's bodies are the 'private' bodies that are marked as gendered and sexual and hence in need of protection, respect and special treatment (Chakravarti 1993, John 2015). Whereas men's desexualised bodies are allowed to be in 'public' without the same types of protection and policing. This sentiment about the different sexualising and desexualising of bodies and their association with space is crucial as we shall see in Chapter Six and Seven around creating a gendered city space as well as marking which bodies are 'unsafe' in them.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, their own bodies are conceptualised as bodies that are 'active' and working to get things done. Their 'smart' masculinity, appropriately embodied, allows them to access various opportunities of a 'new' India scattered across the urban landscape. Their conditioning through various social discourses about men's role as breadwinners, adventurous as well as belonging outdoors helps establish and maintain this embodied discourse of masculinity. This connection between men as public and women as private is crucially maintained through a division between the realms of production and reproduction (McDowell 1983, 1999). As explored in the previous chapters, women's larger lower frames are seen by the Urban Smart Strivers as 'natural' links between their reproductive role. This narrative allows men to be 'hard' productive bodies who traverse the public, get things done and not crucially be sexualised or linked with reproductive duties in the way women's bodies get assigned.

As Aman once explained to me, "if men spend too much time in the house they get spoilt (*bigad jange*) and similarly if women spend too much time outside (*babar*) the house, they get spoilt". In this narrative women are 'naturally' associated with the domestic and the reproductive realm. Even when they traverse the public for work or leisure, their domestic responsibilities do not go away, often adding to the 'double burden' on women (McDowell, 1999). Srivastava (2007) also notes that men in

urban India, men talk about women in public spaces through domestic metaphors and hence further attempting to situate women in the private and domestic even when they are being discussed in the public. Hence the public is not a place with which women are associated. The idea that too much of ‘public’ exposure can ‘spoil’ women, hints to the allegedly ‘unnatural’ process the public presence of women. In contrast, as Aman’s comment suggest, men are required to spend time in ‘public’ places and away from the domestic realm in order to be appropriately masculine. Here the idea of men being ‘too involved’ in the domestic or the private is represented as playing a role in ‘spoiling’ men. Aman’s comment presupposes a ‘natural order’ of gendered roles and spaces which becomes disturbed if men spend too much time at home. As explored in the chapter on A New Indian Man, for young men like Raj, these ideas of men’s public roles are linked to the idea of learning and practicing ‘*dunyadari*’ (ways of the world). This is particularly important in a neoliberalising India where the neoliberal masculine self is responsible to ‘work-hard’ and be ‘self-motivated’ to go out and seize the alleged opportunities that are present in abundance. Similarly, as Nisbett (2009, 73) points out, even when young middle class men loose their jobs and don’t have particular places to go, they believe that “at this age it is not good to be at home” and hence spend time in various ways in public spaces.

This idea of men’s bodies as public and utilitarian bodies is demonstrated in a popular message that is sent around social media and Whatsapp during the time of fieldwork amongst the Urban Smart Strivers. In the image below the Hindi words explain the campaigns for women’s protection and contrast them with the role of men. The text reads ‘*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*’ (Save Daughters, Teach Daughters) in reference to the Government of India’s schemes around women’s education and female infanticide, both social development issues that are hugely political in India at the moment (Desai, 2016). These attempts at ‘protecting’ women and their interests by the State is rhetorically questioned by the masculinist narration protagonist who asks ‘and what about son?’ (*Aur Beta?*) As a response to the question the message is that men are instructed to “Get Coriander, Get Mint” (*Dhaniya Lao, Pudhina Lao*). There are several themes that come together in the message. On the one hand, young men’s position as facilitators and running errands is put forward as their source of difference from women’s more protectionist framing. However there is also a patriarchal backlash against the growing

efforts to create gender equality by undermining the inherently inequitable gendered relations and attempting to frame men and masculinities as the hardworking ‘victims’ here. This is a theme I take up in more detail in the next chapter on ‘A Masculine City’.



Fig. 15 Online Joke, (Source: Whatsapp Group)

At the same time what the message makes clear is that men's bodies are bodies that can and do move around freely in the city space to get various things done. In this narrative men are portrayed as the facilitators of domestic realm, the realm of the women, and it becomes their responsibility to navigate the 'public' to make the work of women in the home possible. I find it significant that in the message men are called upon as going to the market to get fresh groceries like mint and coriander which are staple items in middle-class Delhi households that the Urban Smart Strivers belong in. According to Raj, this 'joke' explains the plight of young men who have to do 'all the work'. Here men's desexualised and public roles are validated in and through this message, as much as they critique an alleged overemphasis on the protectionism towards women. This theme raises some important questions about women's vulnerability in the city space which I explore in A Safe/Unsafe City.

As I have already pointed out, amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, touching each other's bodies is an activity that is done with ease when out and about '*ghumne*' in the various sites of 'new' India. Such touching has relevance for the making of a 'public' body. At the mall for example or in CP, young men hold each other by the hips and put arms around each other's shoulders. Similarly at the gym, young men often move hands over pectoral muscles of other men or their own and in the process outlining them. There is no shame in touching these parts of the body amongst young men. There is a 'public' quality and ease about such touching that is a result of the way men's bodies are created within a masculinities discourse. Given that the erotic power is attempted to be removed from men's bodies, it allows for me to touch their chests or even their crotch in public places without these being 'marked' actions. On the other hand, if women touch their chests or spread their arms across chairs, they invite attention as their bodies are constructed for the male gaze. This process allows men's bodies to be on display in public spaces of 'new' India but they remain unmarked and 'ordinary'. However the same actions or embodied movements of women are sexualised and on display to be consumed.

As I show in the vignette, when I touch Aman's leg there is no sexuality that is ascribe to that act because physical contact amongst the Urban Smart Strivers is framed around nonsexual terms. When in the urinal, the embodiment of Aman's desexualised and largely 'public' masculinity is so deep, that he can confidently move around a city space, to the extent of urinating in the same urinal standing touching my body, without any fear of being thought of as 'gay' or 'non-masculine'. This is further enhanced by his comment about "nothing to see" (*dekhna*) whilst his penis is in full view of another man - here the gaze is explicitly framed as a heterosexual male gaze, which amongst two men does not work, under the assumption that their bodies are essentially 'public' to the other and hence there is nothing 'private' to gaze at. In the context of vignette, the idea of '*dekhna*' takes on dimensions there is in fact nothing to show as an actor and nothing to gaze on.

However the limits of such a discourse are also evident in the fact that a similar act for Rahul would result in something being 'on display' to be consumed within the framework of a heterosexual desires and practice. Similarly, the fact that the gay park where he engages with same sex activity with other

men is next door to this site reveals the limits of Aman's public and desexualised body that enjoys such unmarked power in a heterosexual space. When the space is structured for homoerotic desire, such bodies do become a sexed bodies and the gaze is a homoerotic gaze also consumed by men. This sexualising and desexualising of men's bodies touches upon the core of how 'Bhai-Bhai' relations are attempted to be created and maintained in a patriarchy which privileges men over women within a heterosexist social order. Hence heteronormativity or the discourses of masculinity are not hegemonic nor are they 'natural' or fixed. It is possible to trouble and unsettle heteronormativity by exploring the margins of its discourses.

In order to further state and make explicit his heterosexuality and belonging within a heteronormative social context, Aman swears using commonly used heterosexist swearwords around penetrating women, and in particular the tabooed bond of penetrating sisters who are to be protected, through the term 'sisterfucker' (*bhenchod*). In doing so, he is explicitly and publicly marking out his heterosexuality, which on his embodiment of being a 'new' Indian man in office-clothes and a respectable lanyard across his neck, makes him an entitled and confidently masculine body on display but not to be consumed as a sexed body. The speech act also hints to the fact that within this narrative, Aman is the active penetrator who initiates and actively practices sex on other bodies. The speech act of the heterosexist swearing, allows his embodiment to distance himself and his masculinity from 'questioning' of its masculine power and commitment while urinating together.

As Kira Hall (2009) points out, such swearing on sisters and mothers are generally considered men's swear words or '*mardana*' (macho) within a heterosexual social order and are words that women and transgender people avoid using in India. What is also important in the use of such swear words is the protective role of the brother. Insults like 'sisterfucker' get their power within their social context because the brother or 'Bhai' is suggested to have failed in his responsibility to protect his sister or '*behen*' from getting 'fucked'. Hence power of the swear word uses the challenge to both masculine honour linked to protecting, and also to women's honour and status as obedient nonsexually sisters. Sisters are linked to the 'private' space, contribute further in marking men out as 'public' and hence able

to utter the swear words. The term overemphasis women's domestic roles and is turned into a taboo to form a masculine insult. The protection of the sister and mother become prized possessions, and men's inability to do so, in these contexts, show the failure of a patriarchal masculinity to protect the private. This dynamic is linked to the idea I explored in the previous chapter where women in the gym call the trainer 'bhaiya' (*elder brother*) and hence attempt to create a symbolic protective bond.

Manly Hardness

The desexed and public nature of the masculine body is closely connected to how men understand and practice various forms of violence. For the Urban Smart Strivers, the city is a 'dangerous' place with a lot of risks involved in moving around it. From 'people trying to cheat you' to 'sitting on one's head' young men widely feel that a 'tough' attitude is required to navigate the city space as part of this narrative. Given that it is their role as young men to be desexed public bodies in the city spaces, acts of aggression and violence are attempted to be framed as a necessity and ordinary for men. In this process, men's bodies are disciplined to be 'tough' bodies that can successfully be the public bodies that the social ordering requires them to be. The 'hard exterior' of Varun Dhavan and his masculinised car that I explored in Chapter Three A New Indian Man, are a material dimension of this need to be 'hard' in public. Here being 'hard men' severs two simultaneous and reinforcing roles. On the one hand, the hard masculine male body is required for men to be masculine in the city and deal with the elements, and secondly this very 'hard body' is a tool to deter violence and violent conflict.

In pursuit of such 'manly hardness', several informants tried to encourage me to correct with my smiling which they thought was excessive. Aman for example, told me off for smiling too much and encouraged me to 'toughen up' a little bit. He felt that correcting my excessive smiling would allow me to live in Delhi with a little bit more ease, "for you only I'm saying this (*tere liya hi keh raha hun*) if you keep smiling and looking soft, people will come and sit on your head". Building on the insights from the previous sections and the opening vignette, in the dominant discourse of masculinities, smiling, becomes a trait that is not desirable for furthering and presenting a successful self image as a 'public' desexed man for the Urban Smart Strivers. This does not mean that they do not smile. Rather the point

is that in their cultural context, 'coolness' when meeting other men through overfamiliarity, confidence and a brusque style, as well as occupying space through a sense and display of size, entitlement and wealth, were crucial traits that defined their performances. Hence smiling was often at odds with their ideas of appropriate masculine embodiment.

The process of making the masculine body in the gym is also crucially dependent on this attempt to make a heterosexual masculine body which is 'hard'. The gym itself and the kinds of exercises that men engage in attempt to create a body that indicates a heterosexual masculinity. The building of chests and arms to be strong and hard, allows them to brush up against each-other in the metro or whilst moving around the city space. I noticed Ratish for example in the metro during rush hour hardening his body to 'protect' his girlfriend. In an elaborate ritual to demonstrate his 'manly hardness', when the metro train announces its arrival into a station, Ratish would tense his arms and he forces his feet down, looking at his girlfriend. When the doors open, people push on his arms and he literally acts like a shield against which the incoming passengers collide and move away. The passengers readjust themselves to accommodate the new passengers, but Ratish and girlfriend don't have to move because of the 'hard' shield he has created around them. Interestingly, Ratish's girlfriend enjoys this display of 'manly hardness' and often touches his biceps to 'test them' as he 'shields' her from the crowds.

The idea of such 'manly hardness' also takes on a heterosexist dimension for the Urban Smart Strivers. This was evident in a fight that Raj and Aditya got into when driving around Delhi in their car. As Raj was driving us back from an outing, another car driver lost control of his car and came and hit our car from the side. This minor traffic incident, one of many such incidents during my time in the field with my informants, descended into a fight with several swear words and aggressions being exchanged with the other driver. Most of the time such matters would be resolved with strong and aggressive badmouthing and eventually with a financial exchange however occasionally there would be a physical fight amongst the drivers. In this instance, the driver of the other car initially refused to pay money to end the matter claiming that it was not his fault. Raj aggressively told the driver "shut your mouth and pay or else 'I'll put my penis in your ass you sisterfucker (*loda dal dunga gand mein, behnchod*), if you don't

pay”. In analysing this comment, in light of the discussions so far, there are several connected themes around a desexed and ‘hard’ body that need unpacking.

Here through his utterance Raj attempts to desexualise the penis and make it an object of violence and deterrence. He threatens or attempts to threaten with and through his penis. The violation that the man is expected to experience in this case, is the fact that he is going to be penetrated and hence supposedly violated. First of all, such a narrative, frames gay sex as violent sex and perhaps that is the only context in which it is legitimate for the Urban Smart Strivers who constantly distance themselves from ‘the gays’. In this context however, for Raj, there is no shame attached in using the penis to insert into another man as an insult because it is an act of power. This removes any dimensions of pleasure or erotic power within penetrative activities and attempts to make such acts discursively as acts of violence and defeat on the part of the penetrated man.

Deborah Cameron’s (1992, 378) work on the linguistic terms for the penis in the United States, similarly found young men had over 100 different names for their penis, usually recounted as a person, an animal, a tool or a weapon. The metaphors she explains are cultural rather than ‘natural’ and reflect the realities of gendered power. From a masculinities perspective, the attempt at enacting a heterosexual identity and a properly masculinised body of the Urban Smart Strivers is rooted in a heteronormative, patriarchal framing of their bodies and subjectivities wherein the body is a tool for protection and demonstrating ‘hardness’ which are seen as inherent to men. Here Raj is clearly placing himself as a ‘modern’ and ‘well-groomed’ who belongs to a ‘new’ India, but who is markedly also the performer of certain types of bodily acts that ascribe and culturally make him intelligible as a man. The penis then is not a sexual organ but is turned into an object for violence and a weapon and this becomes the sole purpose of men’s public articulations and symbolic manifestations of the penis. Aman similarly once in a fight told a friend angrily and rhetorically “Why do you think I have a penis?” to indicate this sole role that the penis played in proving and fostering a sense of ‘hardness’ and the ability to take on violence. As a consequence of such narratives, the female vagina is assumed incapable of such violence and hardness.

Such ideas of masculine hardness through a desexed but violating penis, have important connections with the production of a muscular male body and the idea of gendered power in the contemporary context that I explored in the previous chapters on gym cultures. The masculine body is not just symbolically linked to power when in the gym through the language of the gym but the body also becomes a materiality of the power, and of gendered power particularly, that goes through physical hardship and training and careful grooming. These are indicated for the terms used to 'make the body' using metaphors of 'hitting the benchpress' or 'hitting the dumbbells' (*dumbell maar te hain*). The act of '*maar*' (hit) is crucial in creating a public, hard and appropriately masculinised body that can take on violence, or at least demonstrate the ability for such violence.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have explored how the bodies of men are made 'masculine' and 'public'. The sexualities discourse at play in constructing such a body allows for a heterosexist and patriarchal masculinity to pass its sexual and gendered power and privilege whilst marking and hyper sexualising women's bodies and their correspondingly constructed femininities. Furthermore, as I have explored in the chapter, the particular nature in which masculinities and their corresponding sexualities are organised in India, means that public spaces take on an important dimension. This 'new' India, becomes the site where a new masculinity is performed which it cannot in other spaces of the home for example. Yet at the same time, they have to be coherently 'masculine' to be recognised as such and have socially embodied forms of knowledge that need to be embodied in such performances.

Chapter Six: A Smart and Masculine City

Introduction

This chapter explores how Urban Smart Strivers attempt to order city spaces through a politics of gender and class. In particular it looks at how the narratives of ‘making’ a ‘smart’ man are mirrored in the project of ‘making’ cities ‘smart’ too. The beautification of the urban spaces pre-date neoliberal expansionism in India (see Chatterjee, 2003), however what is significant is the particular forms and aesthetics these processes now take, and the narratives built around them which represent the aspirations and anxieties of the middle classes in a ‘new’ India. In this context, young men attempt to make the city ‘theirs’, symbolically and materially, in an attempt to find a social role and a sense of belonging in a ‘smart’ and ‘masculine’ city.

The chapter begins with a vignette of Kartik in the Delhi metro rail system and his idea of a ‘fast life’ in a ‘fast city’ which is then contextualised with young men’s broader ideas about ‘roaming’ in the city. I then explore the anxieties around making a ‘smart’ city which leads me to look at the gendered and heterosexist nature of such a project in the next section. I then explore how ‘masculine respectability’ comes to be established in and through city spaces, and how this allows for a brotherhood of desexed men to emerge. Finally I look at how gendered inequalities are reproduced in a ‘new’ India.

Fast Life in a Fast City

“Now we have go faster and faster” (*jaldi jaldi*) said Kartik laughing as we rushed to change metro trains. “There is no time to sit around any more in life, even the metro people want us out” he continued laughingly as we dogged the crowds and rushed up the escalators. Whilst changing metro trains, Kartik and I were discussing the recent changes in the Delhi metro regulations where customers were only going to be allowed ninety minutes of travel time on a single ticket. This was being reduced from the hundred and seventy minutes we perviously had as commuters on a single ticket. Mimicking this new shorter travel time, Kartik decided to run through the metro station telling me I had to rush too “Bhai, now times are changing (*waqt badal raha hai*), if you don’t keep up, you will keep sitting only”.

When we finally reached the platform for the Yellow Line, we waited in an orderly queue and boarded the train from the ‘general compartments’ towards the back of the train.

As we got inside the metro, Kartik continued to explain to me “It’s good only that they are reducing the timing, otherwise people abuse the system”. Then quickly in a pensive tone he carried on, “But now yaar, we will have to go and sit outside with the dogs (*kutton ke saath bethna padega*), so that is not good, nobody wants to sit with the dogs!” and started laughing again. I simply smiled back at him as the doors of the metro shut and the cool air from the metro air conditioner intensified. A woman’s voice on the tannoy system explained that the next stop was “Patel Chowk” as the low electric hum of the metro propelled us forwards. Although there was no space for us to sit in the metro, the clean, cool and comfortable surroundings made the journey pleasurable. Kartik pulled out his phone to play some music and passed me one end of his headphones and put the other end into his ear.

Before Kartik could pick a song, the metro reached the next station. The doors opened and more people got in pushing us tighter. Kartik looked to glance at the entering crowd which happened to be a group of women. On seeing this, with a tone of irritation and a frown on his face Kartik said to me “Oh ho, the ladies compartment is empty, but they still come into our area”. He quickly followed this by making a puzzled question mark with his hands and then looked back down into his phone. The doors shut, another strong burst of cool air came through the vents and the metro moved forward.

A New Indian Man’s ‘Ghumna’

This vignette offers some important insights into how the Urban Smart Strivers conceptualise contemporary city spaces in a ‘new’ India. There are several themes that need unpacking. For young men, as I’ve explored previously, the idea of ‘*ghumna*’ is a pleasurable activity that takes place outside the home. However amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, not every place is worthy of going ‘ghumna’.

Particular sites and spaces in the city which have a prestige and symbolic value attached to them are seen as spaces worthy of spending time. In Delhi the many malls, newly beautified parks, metro stations, cinema multiplexes or gentrified leisure areas are, as I have explored, important sites for the

Urban Smart Strivers where a 'new' India can be most easily imagined and experienced. These spaces were worthy of 'roaming' and for simply 'being' for young men like Kartik.

In this context, the metro train and the metro stations are one such site for the Urban Smart Strivers to use for 'roaming'. The Delhi metro was not just used to move from one place to the other, but was also a space where young men like Kartik spent time 'hanging out', taking selfies, dating, meeting friends.

Hence the metro stations and the metro trains themselves had a far greater significance than just serving as a mode of transport. The shift in the Delhi metro policy (DMRC, 2016) to reduce the time validity of a single ticket was a real disappointment for Kartik and several of my informants in Delhi. Kartik for example, often made the most of the generous 190 min validity of a single ticket to spend time in the stations, away from the dust, dirt and pollution of the streets and public spaces to enjoy time after college and classes hanging out with other male friends or sometimes his girlfriends.

The Delhi metro also allowed easy and comfortable connectivity for young men to access other sites of leisure in Delhi. Kartik explained to me that "With the metro it is very easy now to go anywhere, it is cheap, clean, there is no '*chik-chik*' (irritants) with the metro, you can sit in the AC and enjoy the area". For him the metro was a well ordered and efficient system of public transport and became a marker of the 'development' of Delhi as a efficient and clean city space. He considered the physical infrastructure of the Delhi metro to be a spectacular display of India's modernity "You can see it from anywhere, it gives the city a nice look, big big pillars, like Singapore or London, no?". In this way, it becomes for Kartik a tangibly encounter with a 'new' India. The pride in having a metro rail system in the city, allowed Kartik to mark out not just the 'metro' as a modern space, but the city of Delhi itself as a cosmopolitan, world-class city inhabited only by an imagined pool of urban city dwelling smart people. He went on to explain that "Even in London you don't have such a good metro I heard on the news, our *bogies* (carriages) are all new and in some parts its above ground and other places its below ground. It connects every part of the city, its really amazing". This point about the impressive nature of the metro was further highlighted when he explained that if his relatives come to visit Delhi from the state

of Bihar in Northern India, he takes them on a joy ride of the metro, “We can get 15Rs tokens and they love going around in it, its really fun and value for money”.

In doing so, the ability to ‘correctly’ use the metro system, marked out for Kartik, people who were ‘really’ from Delhi and the others who were from ‘outside’ and hence not smart enough to use the metro system. Kartik explained to me that a lot of older people or people from ‘outside’ Delhi are ‘afraid’ of the metro, they don’t know how to read the signs or to use the tokens and cards on the turnstiles. In contrast, Kartik took great pride in being comfortable with the metro system and through regular use, he liked to think of himself as part of a metro using generation of young people. Kartik’s narration of the people who were ‘unfamiliar’ with the metro, contributed in bolstering his own idea of being an urban and smart young man. “If you get stuck behind these people unfamiliar with the metro, they slow you down” which becomes problematic in his desire to keep moving ‘fast’ in the fast city. Through such participation in the metro system, young men’s sense of belonging in their ‘modern’ city, allowed them a modern existence too. The metro and its users indicated for him a ‘real Delhi’ but paradoxically his ideas about the city, were tainted by the presence of various non-smart entities within the metro system. He told me that because of the metro, Delhi could be really called a ‘metro city’, but other Indian cities could not claim this title within India.

Kartik’s great pleasure in being part of the ‘metro generation’ and city emerges from the broader optimism about India’s development trajectory. This is reflected in Kartik’s comments in the opening vignette where the idea of moving faster and faster in the Delhi metro is symbolic of the fast pace of life as conceptualised by the Urban Smart Strivers in an India that is rapidly changing. The city in particular, is taken to be synonymous with India, and represents for young educated and upwardly mobile men like Kartik a land of new opportunities and new pleasures. Kartik’s comment that “times are changing” serves as an important indicator of this optimism. However what is also closely related to this optimism is the anxiety about being ‘left behind’ which, he is quick to add, can happen if one does not “move fast enough”. Given the uneven nature of economic development and changes in India, the fear of being ‘left behind’ is a tangible experience for the Urban Smart Strivers against the competition

they face for various social and economic resources (Jeffrey 2010). In the context of the metro, the presences of ‘outsiders’ using the system acts for Kartik as a reminder of the unequal nature and pace of ‘change’. Hence Kartik and men like him have to ‘keep up’ and keep moving ‘faster and faster’ without really a clear trajectory of how to move ‘faster’. As I explore further in this chapter, the realm of consumption provides one way to remedy this situation for young men allows them to create a sense of ‘moving’ for themselves.

Similarly Kartik’s comments in the opening vignette also point out how the space of the ‘outside’ is associated with ‘dogs’. Here the comment has a literal dimension of stray animals roaming around the streets, but also has a more pejorative double meaning about the ‘general’ population being outside. For Kartik, the metro station as well as the metro trains represented a clean and neat space which could be enjoyed without the environmental factors and the ‘less desirable’ population of the outside world because of a ticket entry system. There were no beggars and no one trying to hassle you to buy tea or snacks or cheap electronics which happens as soon as you step out of the metro station. In echoing this exclusivity of the space, Kartik memorably once told me that “the metro station is almost like a mall” indicting to the hierarchy of places within his sociocultural world. These conceptualisations of space have parallels with Lefebvre’s (2008, 104) work on the urban landscapes of Delhi where private five-star hospitals are built in and around the shopping malls and aim to reflect internal and exterior signs of consumerist aesthetics with no ‘medical’ smells and making hospitals feel almost like malls.

Similarly, the cool temperature of the metro, the clean and ordered nature of the space, allows for a particular imagination of an urbane and ‘smart’ lifestyle in the city. In close parallels to the insides of Raj’s car which are air-conditioned, perfumed and clean, these environmental and physical features are mirrored in the space of the metro trains as well as the malls and bars and cafes that young men desire spending time in. These factors, as my informants put it gave various spaces a ‘nice’ atmosphere (*mahol*). These spaces and visceral factors like cool air or aromatic scents often provide a sharp contrast to how young men experience the ‘outside’ world and their imaginations of a ‘old’ India held back by the lack of cleanliness, overcrowding and unwanted bodies and odours. Through being in the nice environs of

the car, the mall, the metro or even the gym, young men are able to carve out spaces that are ‘modern’ and in line with their imaginations of the self, their city, and nation. This processes contributes in creating a hierarchy of men and spaces which operate on classed terms and also shows how the sociocultural ideas of ‘smartness’ operate on multiple scales.

Kartik once explained to me that the mandatory security inspection and bag scan at the metro entrance in Delhi was an important part in making the metro ‘modern’. “The security people take care and keep things proper (*theek se*), they don’t allow any one to enter just like that (*aise hi*)”. He then went on to narrate a story about his journey on the metro that very day “Today only this guy in front of me in the metro queue had a huge bag (*thela*). He was carrying all sorts of random cleaning and gardening equipment, he had lots of dirty diggers etc and they (security staff) did not allow him to come inside the metro. He could do anything with those tools, who knows”. The physical exclusion of some people through narratives of ‘dirt and danger’, allowed the metro space to become a place which is modern, smart and worth hanging out for the Urban Smart Strivers. These sentiments are echoed in Voyce's (2007) work on neoliberalism and its dividing practices in India, where similar technologies and narratives for creating exclusions allow to draw boundaries and bolster middle class claims of space. His caricature of malls in India as ‘social fortresses that represent the dividing practices of neoliberalism’ (2007, 2055) is mirrored in the metro system which attempts to create a spatial purification of the space and of communities.

These sentiments were further emphasised by the fact that the metro required people to behave in a certain way, distinct from the ‘outside’. The process of queuing, lining up, tickets, standing behind lines created an ordered and systematic way of moving and being, regulated through instructive lines drawn on the ground and security officers with batons and whistles forcing people into orderly queues attempting to ‘train people’ according to Kartik. The restricted and controlled nature of the metro system demanded a social and physical compliance from users which in turn gives the Urban Smart Strivers a sense of a ‘new’ India that is ordered, disciplined and providing the ‘correct’ image of Delhi. In the metro system, exclusions and ‘security checks’ become naturalised and essential elements in

keeping ‘real Delhi’ and its ‘modern people’ safe and comfortable, away from the outsiders who try to infiltrate. This is similar to the idea of the mall as ‘sexually freeing’ that I explored in the previous chapter wherein the space of mall is given an independently positive quality which can allegedly ‘better’ ‘bad’ people. In this process, the city and its displays of efficiency and ‘modernity’, of cleanliness and development, are framed as the domain of civilised groups like the Urban Smart Strivers.

However, as I’ve explored in Chapter Three and Four, the embodied enactment of ‘smartness’ for young men, requires that they too make efforts on their bodies and selves to appear like they belong in spaces which they deem worthy of ‘roaming’. The Urban Smart Strivers are constantly anxious about not being treated like the ‘rif-raff’ that they want to keep outside of these spaces. An example of this is when Raj and I were chatting and making plans about where to go one weekend. He suggested a few iconic places like India Gate, Cyber Hub Mall in Gurgaon and a drinks lounge in Janpath as potential places we could go to ‘hang-out’. That evening as we were in Connaught Place and the drinks lounge he suggested in Janpath was rather close by, I excitedly said that we could go to the drinks lounge now. Raj quickly and sharply replied with some irritation “How can we go like this only (*aise hi*), we have to go properly” whilst rubbing his beard. Similar to Kartik’s idea that people could not ‘just like this’ (*aise hi*) enter the metro station, Raj too felt he could not go to ‘smart’ places ‘just like that’ either. He explained that he needs to groom his beard, wear appropriate clothes and have the correct look more broadly before he could go to ‘smart’ places. Hence these space require an appropriate embodiment of masculinity which the young men have to abide by. In an interesting and related social coding of spaces and bodies, Srivastava’s (2010) interviews with mall staff reveal that the urban poor in Delhi are now seemingly ‘self-selecting’ to not enter malls because the mall staff have ‘made it clear to them’ that they do not fit in and this message has ‘successfully’ reached its intended audience.

Such notions of who belongs where are marked in the discursive fields of urban India, visually, socially and on the physical landscape too. In Connaught Place for example, which is the most important interchanging station for the Delhi metro and a site for spending time going ‘ghumne’ amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, these ideas are encountered and take on an important materiality. In the Inner

Circle of Connaught Place, a full length image of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput and the 'modern' changes to the public spaces in the surrounding area below (Fig 16) reflect these connected and intertextual sociospatial dynamics.



Fig. 16 Large Print Advert, Connaught Place, Delhi, Philip 2016
Fig. 17 Sunglass installation, Connaught Place, Delhi, Philip 2016

In the first image (Fig 16) Sushant Singh Rajput poses for the men's clothing brand Flying Machine in fashionable clothes and sunglasses. In the advert he champions the idea of a 'fast life' where one has to 'live faster' as the *raison d'être* for social life and an appropriate urban existence. On the other hand, in the second image (Fig 17), during the course of my fieldwork, a new public installation in the shape of sunglasses was physically installed in Connaught Place, close to where the image of Sushant Singh Rajput is taken and where the Urban Smart Strivers liked spending time 'roaming'. The material changes to the landscape brought about by the sunglass installation attempt to imbue a commodified idea of 'smartness' and an urbane sensibility into the space, which in turn allows young men like Kartik to experience the space as worthy of spending time in. The ideas visually, discursively and spatially expressed in the two images, are mutually reinforcing each other to reveal a new aesthetic and moral order of the self and space through consumption of a particular form. The actor Sushant Singh

Rajput's embodied idea of a 'fast life' is suggested by his groomed and smart self, sunglasses, hairless chest, stylised hair, 'modern' jeans clothing and shoes and being in a 'smart' setting. What is striking here is that these ideas of being 'smart' are quite literally mapped onto the city space too. This is further brought out by the painted pots at the back of the sunglass installation which are distinctly 'modern' in their design against which the Urban Smart Strivers enjoyed posing for selfies. Unlike 'traditional' pots and a village scape, these are manifestations of a distinctly globalised 'smart' city aesthetic. However what is also evident from the second photograph are the limits of this 'smartness'. The presence of bodies that are 'non-smart' and the 'reality' which they represents hints to the fragility of men's attempts of imagining and belonging in an exclusively smart and ordered city space. Nonetheless, such privileged narratives about the social and moral order of space and selves, require young men like Kartik to keep moving 'faster and faster'.

Making of a 'Smart' City:

Such ideas of a 'fast' life for the Urban Smart Strivers take place in a context of a 'smart' city. There is a important social and spatial construction of the city space as 'smart' city space, in and through which the Urban Smart Strivers, think and come to be 'smart' masculine selves. However the city is not already a 'smart' place, but effort and 'development' are required to make it a 'smart' city for the Urban Smart Strivers. In this process of 'making' a smart city, the physical transformation of spaces are accompanied by various forces of the media, state and social and cultural forces act together to shore up the sense and image of 'change' and 'smartness'. Kaur's (2016) work explains that the goal of making a 'smart' city in India, creates changes for the outer display of the nation's image, as well as significant changes on the 'inside' too through a change in social relations and imaginaries. Kaur (2016) during her fieldwork came across the use of the word 'smart' very frequently amongst advertisers and state officials in their attempts to make a 'smart' India. She explains that the term is used to indicate a whole set of meanings associated with - quick wit, intelligence, neatness, efficiency, or success and always to paint a picture of 'impressiveness'. The need to create a 'smart' image of India is to create the image of a 'presentable' nation without any embarrassment to the 'outside world'.

This process of making and bringing to life a ‘smart’ city in a ‘new’ India, depends on the often forceful removal of several the ‘unwanted’ elements. As Kartik once explained to me when we were walking under a metro bridge in South Delhi how the process of removals and exclusions was crucial for the ‘smartness’ to emerge. Pointing to a group of informal huts built under the flyover he told me confidently “See, this is the problem, until all this is not moved, nothing is going to happen to India” (*yeab sab jab tak nahi hatega, kuch nahi hoga India ka*). Whilst saying this, he shook his head in an expression of shame and disgust whilst wrinkling his nose to make his displeasure evident. He then continued, “this is just *kachra* (garbage)...this is India’s *kachra* and we have to be move it (*hatana hai*)”. In saying this, what is striking is that, first of all Kartik conceptualised the poor and their spaces as ‘garbage’, but also important is the fact that he assumed the role on behalf of the State in suggesting that it was his job to remove this ‘garbage’. The poor represented for him, not just ‘garbage’ in the sense of worthless waste, but also that the poor were ‘India’s garbage’. In doing so a dichotomy of what is of value in India and what is worthless is clearly assumed. Suggesting a high value and status for himself in India which then allows him as an Urban Smart Striver to see and judge others and their value, playing the role of a valuator. What is also important here is that the city is seen and described from the eyes of someone who thinks of himself as a ‘modern’ and ‘concerned citizen’ who can legitimately instruct and guide the city space into the direction it should be going. Such a mode of narration is similar to Pinney’s (1997) idea that in contemporary India the city is rarely defined and exists on its own - it’s always in and through relations of power which shape how cities are imagined. Hence the idea of parts of the city as ‘*kachra*’ (garbage) comes to understood as commonsensical in the cultural domains of the Urban Smart Strivers and their shared valuations of spaces and people. This is further honed in by the fact that Kartik often rattles off several attempts by ‘governments’ to ‘help these people’ as well as popular campaigns to ‘clean the city’ and other bourgeois environmentalist narratives (Baviskar and Ray 2011) which are efforts to improve the city and make it ‘smart’.

An example of the forced removal of the urban poor from the ‘prestigious’ landscape worthy of going ‘ghumne’ for young men happened one evening when I was waking around Connaught Place with Aman. Outside the Handicrafts Emporium a truck from the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)

was gathering up the belongings of several street dwellers living near the Emporium entrance. As this chaotic scene ensued, several people, including Aman and I stopped on our walk to watch from across the street what was going on. Aman explained to me that the NDMC were removing the poor and that this was a 'daily occurrence' because they do not go away. He explained "They come all the time and move these people because they are trying to build a smart city" (*smart city bana rahe hain*). As he mentioned this, some of the street dwellers came rushing to the back of the truck, climbed into it and tried to retrieve their belongings whilst the NDMC officers were not looking. This scene somehow cemented the idea of the conniving poor for Aman, "Look, look, what they are doing, they are very '*chalu*' (shrewd/conniving) they keep taking their things out and coming back here again and again". Bored by this apparently 'everyday occurrence', Aman and I carried on our walk. When I tried to talk to him about the issue, he explained to me that it was right to remove the poor from Connaught Place and particularly from near the Handicrafts Emporium because "lots of tourists come here from Europe and Germany and all, that's why its good to keep these areas clean and safe yaar". It allowed for validation for such 'cleanliness' drives in the city. Furthermore, the external gaze of the 'white tourist' here, similar to the power accrued to 'white people' to 'authenticate' the club for Raj in the chapter on a New Indian Man, is a source of anxiety and validation wherein the image of the city and through it the nation, has to be made presentable. It also brings together Kaur's (2016) idea of 'smart' India attempting to alter both the internal and external surface of itself to create a 'smart' globalised image.

Such comments from the Urban Smart Strivers also reveal their great entitlement as 'new' Indian men to their smart city and a 'new' India. They mark out the others who did not belong and who are 'outsiders' to the space. Kartik's comment attempts to completely delegitimise any stake that the urban poor may have over the city space by equating them to waste. Similarly, Aman's justification to remove the poor, frames them as a tough and cunning eyesore, that refuses to go away. As several scholars working on India demonstrate, such attitudes amongst the urban middle classes point to their aspirations, anxieties and contestations over space. Ghertener's (2010, 2013) interviews with middle class residents in Delhi for example point to such ideas where one informant explained "Today Delhi does not look how it used to. In ten years, it won't look like it does today. Delhi is developing. It is cleaning

up. Only the best people will live in Delhi. Soon, there will be no slums here. All the deserving people will stay, but everyone else will have to go”. Similar to Kartik’s idea, the poor in this case are to be ‘cleaned up’ in order to make the city what it is imagined to be for the middle classes. Furthermore, what is important in Kartik’s attempt at making a ‘developed’ India is that it is not that poverty has to be ‘resolved’ but that the poor have to be *visibly* removed. Rather than wait for economic development to eventually ‘trickle down’, as is popularly believed in development discourse, here Kartik is clear the huts under the bridge have to be removed as a matter of urgency. When he explains that “nothing is going to happen to India” and “we have to move it” there is a powerful sense that the poor are a burden to India’s development who in fact thwart its economic potential.

The ‘removal’ of the poor is seen to be ‘freeing’ India and in part allows young men like Kartik to justify their limited access to various resources as an imbalance caused by these ‘underserving’ people who’s removal will allow ‘change’ and ‘development’. Mirroring Aman’s assessment of government efforts to ‘improve’ the nation failing because of the stubbornness of the poor, Kartik’s understanding of the persistence of the poor in urban areas for similar reasons. Kartik explained to me that “there is no point in constantly criticising the government, we have this bad habit of always seeing what is wrong with our country, without looking at all the development that is taking place, the poor now have to work hard and not expect to be taken care of always, we have done lots for them”. This narrative is explicitly echoed by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his political rhetoric who similarly frames the the poor as being a ‘burden on the middle classes’ which must be ‘lifted’ off their shoulders (Matthew, 2017). Hence attempts at creating ‘smart’ neoliberal subjects begins to frame the poor and the city spaces through such a lens.

Given that the ‘smart city’ does not exist and is constantly imagined, Kartik’s frustration at the inability to ‘make’ this smart city a reality are articulated in various ways. He explains that “We have the metro now and nice malls and shops and everything.... the city is growing fast, but these type of people are giving a bad name to the city and they are bringing India down”. He then continued, “Who would want to see them, if you are going around, its not nice”. Here there is anxiety about the image that is

presented of the city and of India for Kartik and his imagined 'smart' 'urbane' self, as well as for the nation being judged by the 'world'. As Kaur (2012) explains, the 'brand building' project of making a 'smart city' is closely related to neoliberal positioning and branding of India in relation to global markets. The aim of city planners, in close collaboration with private companies, advertisers and government officials, is to create a 'smart image' of India that would present India smartly in front of the world (Kaur 2016, 312). In this process, the human excess – the poor, the surplus labour, the vagabonds crowding the city sidewalks, the undisciplined classes are seen as superfluous to the neoliberal economy and hence are seen and framed as an aberration in the 'smart look' the image makers desire to portray (ibid). Kartik and Aman's great sense of embarrassment and outright declaration that no one desires to look at the poor and their habitation, clearly frames the poor as this affront to the 'smart image' in the background from which the viewer is distracted because of the presence of the poor. In such contexts, urban economic inequalities are framed as external to the project of economic development and urban transformation rather than a product of it (Harris, 2006).

For the Urban Smart Strivers like Kartik and Aman, there is a unity and shared visual frame through which spaces and the city are imagined as 'smart', regardless of their different position and backgrounds. Ghertener (2015) calls this the development of a 'shared intelligibility' in a neoliberal context, wherein a 'aesthetic governmentality' creates a moral and legal basis for urban spaces which gets marked as desirable or deplorable in reference to an emerging aesthetic normativity. Similar to the hierarchy of bodies in the gym or the club that I explored in the previous chapters, a socio-spatial hierarchy emerges for the Urban Smart Strivers where there is a common lens through which bodies and sites are understood. This is legitimated by the young men as their 'new' attitude to the city and a 'rational mindset' that seeks to get things done. Ghertener (2010, 187) similarly demonstrates that such new way of 'knowing and seeing' the city of Delhi are not just about the physical territory, but also includes a particular lens through which its people and the built environment are viewed and assessed.

Furthermore, the project of making the smart city externalises various 'nuisance activities' taking place in the city which are largely to be addressed through discourse of cleanliness and pollution. As Ghertener (2011, 2015) explains, ideas of such 'urban nuisances' for the middle classes include 'a dirty

'look' and poor environmental conditions, open defecation, overcrowded living conditions, children playing and 'taking over' the streets, stagnant water, municipal waste etc. In doing so, there is a cleansing of this 'modern' space and all 'negative' or 'old' problems are sanitised away from it to make spaces habitable and usable through the aesthetic demands of the middle classes in a 'new' India. Such aesthetic evaluations and normativity around spaces of the city legitimises ideas of urban restructuring and removal of the poor and their slums to make a 'smart' city as seen in the Indian context (ibid).

These attempts to make a 'smart city' are also linked to a specifically heterosexist and masculinist vision of urban space. One important example of this was the physical space of the 'gay park' in Connaught Place undergoing a transformation whilst I was carrying out fieldwork. During my time in Delhi, various parts of this park remained closed at different periods causing great distress to some of the young men who frequented the park in search of other men for sex and romance. Security guards at the 'gay park' told me that 'bad things' happen in the park and that is why the government was trying to 'improve' it now. Most importantly, these changes include the introduction of a 'closing time' for the park at 8:00pm. In order to enforce this rule, a new wall was built around the entire periphery of the park and was topped with barbed wires in case any one tried to jump-in. The park also saw the construction of a large shopping centre (Fig 18), which the NDMC manager explained to me "will have good shops only" in the future. In the park, close to this new shopping centre, work also began by the contractors to build a 'stage' to be used for public occasions. These, the NDMC manager felt were 'good changes' to 'improve' the park and rid it of its "bad behaviour".

Along with these large infrastructural changes, other more subtle but important changes included the introduction of streetlights throughout the park, the planting of small shrubs and flower beds, the construction of a defined walk-way and the removal of large old large plants and small trees that used to line the park's periphery. The removal of the large shrubs and trees was the most lamented loss amongst the young men who used the park because they provided some privacy and cover to engage in romantic and sexual encounters with other men. As Rahul explained to me "this is a malicious move, who removes trees yaar? They are trying to make it impossible for us to meet here". The removal of these trees was seen as a deliberate move to make life harder for the men who frequented the park to

meet other men and hence further strengthen the infrastructural changes in order to stamp out the ‘bad behaviour’. Queer scholars working on urban politics have demonstrated that such parks and green spaces are crucial in large metropolitan cities for men to meet, socialise and engage in sexual activity with other men (Narain and Bhan 2005, Graham 2002). This attempt to discourage sexual contact amongst men in the park was part of the broader attempt to rid the park of its dark corners and empty spaces so as to encourage more ‘respectable’ people.

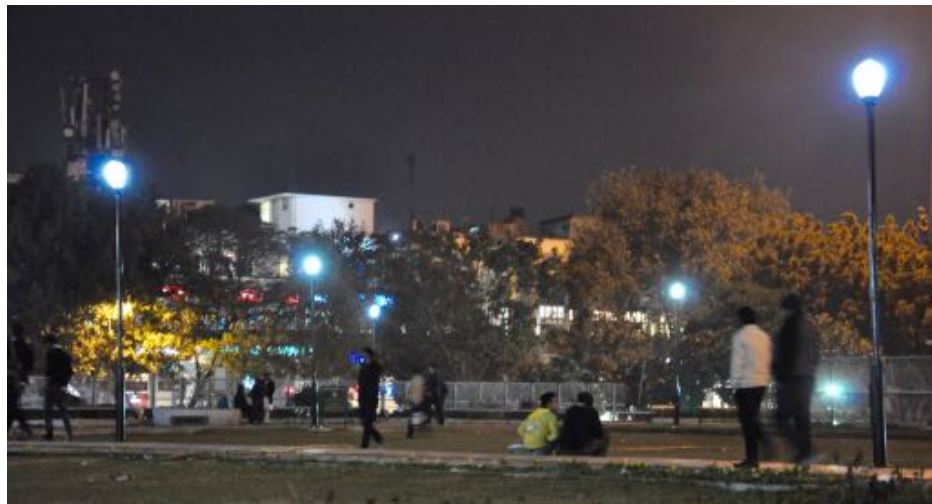


Fig. 18 Park under renovations, Palika Parking, Delhi, Philip 2016

Fig. 19 A renovated park in use, Palika Parking, Delhi, Philip 2016

The guard at the park often warned me saying “young men like you should not hang around this park too much, otherwise you can also catch bad habits (*lat lag jayegi aap ko*)”. He thought of me a respectable non-residential Indian who was serious about studies and would come for respite in the park when tired from working in Connaught Place and was unaware of it being a ‘gay park’. The guards

explained to me that measures like planting flowers, installing walkways and streetlights (Fig 19) were ‘improvements’ so that ‘good people can come to the park and sit here, not the bad types, but families and ladies can come now’.

The changes to the park, formed part of the wider process of urban expansionism and the attempts to build a ‘smart’ city for its ‘smart’ residents. This was hinted to me with several conversations with Rahul, who although was disappointed with the changes to the park, ultimately reconciled this as being a ‘good thing’. Rahul explained to me “The boys who come to the park have brought it upon themselves, the crowd is so cheap now, shouting and singing, no one will tolerate this, that is why they are improving the park to stop these types of boys”. Rahul felt that there was a changing demographic of park users because more elite men seeking sex with men using online applications to meet privately rather than coming to the park anymore. This he felt only left the ‘cheap boys’ and a ‘bad crowd’ in the park. As an Urban Smart Striver he wanted to disassociate himself from the ‘park boys’ and encouraged me to not spend much time with them too. Nonetheless, when hanging out with Rahul it became evident that although he could meet other striving and ‘smart’ men online, the park and its trees and ‘dark corners’ also allowed him to meet his online dates in the park and engage in various form of sexual contact. However now that the park was being made ‘smart’, these meetings had become more difficult for him. On leaving the ‘field’ at the end of my fieldwork the park and the area around Connaught Place underwent several further changes and I am curious about how they affected the lives of young men like Rahul and the many others who depended on the park.

Masculine Respectability in a Smart City

The ideas of socio-spatial restructuring of urban areas are closely linked to a commodified masculine respectability emerging in the ‘smart’ city. One important visual example of such a masculine respectability linked to an imagined idea of the city is Fig 20 that I encountered on the routine ‘ghumna’ with my informants. This was taken at the South Extension Metro station close to where Kartik studied and where we boarded the metro usually. The image explains in Hindi but using English words “Do something that/like...the world will want to become like you”. This is linguistically an

explicitly masculine claim which is directly addressed at young men. The message fits into the the broader idea of building 'active' 'enterprising' selves who have to prove themselves through hard work. What is interesting about this image is that it explicitly connects this to the idea of setting an example for the 'world' (*duniya*). This requires success not just in India, through appropriately Indian values, but also global recognition of such success.



Fig. 20 Print Advert Delhi Metro, Delhi, Philip 2016

The fact that this board is inside a metro station, hints at how the metro as a symbolic site attempts to instil an culture of enterprise whilst shoring up gendered neoliberal identities. In the image attention is specifically drawn to the results and the aspirational goal, not the often messy process of getting there. These are not images of communitarian living, but strongly individualised presences of a victorious and independent self, but which are tempered with ideas of the wider community as witness. The young man is depicted as playing the elite sport of golf, rather than other more popular sports in India, to mark out an aspiration sentiment, even when the product that is advertised itself is a mass produced edible tobacco. What is also striking is that this is not simply 'westernisation' or a static form of neoliberal expansionism, rather it is a hybrid and very particular form of establishing an enterprise culture in India. Given the complex social and cultural networks that surround young people's lives in India, this advert is coded with references to those processes to make it relevant and relatable. This is

also linked to Mazzarella's (2004) idea of the process of auto-referentiality through images wherein the consuming public is being constituted in part through the consumption of its own image via the media allowing for the removal of guilt and changes in attitudes towards money and individual success.

There are several features that are striking in this image in relation to Kartik's attempt at creating a 'respectable' urban masculinity. The image has been 'cleaned up', to borrow a framework for thinking through images in the way Kaur (2012) has done, to make them fit a neoliberal economic context of a 'new' India of luxury, abundance and 'smart' people. Here respect is both embodied and material, in that there is a confident smiling and active masculine body that wins and can demonstrate its success. In this 'cleaned' image, the competition and crowds are blurred to the background, almost suggesting that there is a supportive applauding community in the background rather than competition, and that the only thing which matters is winning. The image is relieved of the 'obstacles', 'nuisance' and '*kachra*' of the city that Kartik and I encounter and there is a close connection with world-class leisure through golf in an ordered and maintained city space. What is also clear from the message is that young men have to demonstrate their success to the world and are to be judged by others. Their embodiment and enactment of a respectable masculinity is judged by the world as the message implies and the ultimate testament to the winner's status is that others seek to copy and follow in his footsteps. What is also important is that, self-responsibilisation and its demonstrated achievements, become crucial in how young men are encouraged to think of themselves as having 'achieved' something. In this process, the consumer good being marketed also takes on ideas of being a 'achievement' that is attained through carefully chosen consumption practices. The tobacco is framed as a consumer good which is part of India's story of luxury, change and hard-work, encouraging and supporting its young consumer citizens to go forth and be the respectable consuming young men that a 'new' India requires. By extension, no one wants to be like the poor, who apart from being bad consumer citizens, do not offer anything for the world to be desired or inspired from. Hence ambition and striving for social and economic status gets legitimate social space and respectability in the smart city which also serves to visually and socially remove others who do not fit the bill.

For the Urban Smart Strivers, such ideas of being ‘judged by the world’ are crucial not just for a sense of themselves, but also their cities and the country. In this context, the practice of ‘ghumna’ in Connaught Place for example is a great opportunity to judge and be judged by this ‘world’ and demonstrate a smart self through consumption and appropriate masculine embodiment. This is part of the ‘erlebinskulture’ that Brosius (2010) explains as requiring an orchestrated performance of being seen and of seeing to indicate a sense of social and cultural belonging in a ‘new’ India. The sentiment of being ‘judged’ by the world in the image above also take on a materiality within the urban leisure architecture. For example, in Connaught Place concrete benches line the pedestrian boulevards with potted plants aesthetically arranged around them, inviting shoppers and walkers to sit on them facing the crowds. Aman and I really enjoyed sitting on these benches, as explored in the previous Chapter on Desexing the Masculine Body because as Aman put it one could “watch the world go by”. The placement of these benches according to him allowed not just for rest, but also to watch people with ease. The benches allowed for a ritualised seeing and being seen to take place with ease and contributes to what young men suggest are the feelings of being ‘judged’.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, these are spaces where there is a “good crowd” and hence watching them and also in turn being watched by them becomes an important test of one’s classed and gendered respectability. Brosius (2010) explains that in a context of great economic inequality in India, seeing and being seen in public and modern spaces of ‘new’ India are crucial for celebrations of the self as well as the broader politics of being middle-class. In the ‘smart’ city, such social characteristics are marked and visible on the built environment to turn spaces into places of demonstrating what one has ‘achieved’ to the world. Which is why, as I have already explored, amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, there is anxiety in going ‘ghumne’ to these places ‘just like that’ (*asie hi*). They feel they have to be appropriately groomed and presented to be seen and judged in appropriate ways.

It is also interesting to note that this embodied achievement of a celebrated masculinity operates tightly within a heteronormative framework. As I explored in the previous chapter, when young men like Rahul leave the park and into the ‘respectable’ or ‘normal’ part of the city, a heterosexist framework

requires them to alter their embodied gendered performances. The idea of 'straightening up' that I explored in the previous chapter, is operationalised in and through the body forcing young men to perform an appropriate masculine respectability marked by a heterosexist idea of the body and its gendered roles. As Rahul explained to me at the park "No one wants to be like the cheap gays, they only bring disrepute to their families and themselves". Hence their embodied performances of the self do not accrue a masculine respectability. However young Urban Smart Strivers like Rahul, carefully 'straighten up' when outside the park, once they are 'on-stage' to be judged as respectable young men, they don't transgress norms of gendered respectability in the smart city and hence can enjoy class and gendered privilege outside of the park too.

What is striking about this shift in gendered performances is that young men like Rahul, know and actively engage in this performance as subjects, rather than think of this as a 'natural' way of walking and talking. In subscribing to the norms of a masculine respectability within a 'new' India, Rahul's embodied performance also begins to reveal the limits and fragility of such a respectability.

Nonetheless the 'on-stage' and 'off-stage' practices of young men, create and feed a hierarchy of gendered and sexual acts wherein heterosexual patriarchal masculinities are celebrated and non-normative masculinities are marginalised structurally. Hence young men like Rahul begin to think of men who breach these ideas of normative masculine respectability outside the park as 'strange' (*ajeeb*).

Yet within the park, they themselves often actively take part in playing with these ideas of masculine respectability and enjoy breaching its norms. Hence the very idea of 'being' 'smart' in a 'smart' city worked relationally through the men, their spaces and their embodied performances. This is in contrast to V Geetha's (2007, 150) claim that men don't have to worry about the consequences of 'being a certain way' in public. Rather, men are very concerned about being seen in the 'correct' ways otherwise their public presences is problematic. She further discusses 'honour' as only applicable linked to women's bodies in relation to public spaces, however as I have tried to demonstrate men's bodies too have discourses of honour and respectability attached to themselves that operate socio-spatially.

Brothers in the city

As I have explored in the previous chapters, a homosocial brotherhood has discursive and sexual dimensions. In this section I explore how such ‘brotherhoods’ operate in relation to city spaces. The discourses of men’s respectability in a ‘smart’ city are linked to men’s specific social roles in the context of a localised patriarchy where relations with women are devalued for young men, but homosocial relations with other men are prized. In a popular conversation shared amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, this idea of an urban brotherhood, along with its conceptualisations of space come together very clearly. In the message below, bonds of young men are contrasted against the ‘weaknesses’ of women. The message states that a male protagonist tells his friends that he has gotten into a fight (*ek panga ho gaya hai*). To this comment, his various male friends explain how they are going to support him. The first male friend states “Just tell me brother (*bhai*), how many men (*bande*) should I call?”. The second male friend replies “I’ll cut up the assholes (*saalon*), you just tell me their names brother”. The third male friend replies is “Oye get the car out” (followed by a symbolic representation of thirty six cars) indicating a gang of men to support the brother in trouble. The fourth friend explains “Brother you just say what has to be done, I’ll do it, I don’t give a damn about the world”.



Fig. 21 Social Media Joke (Source: Whatsapp Group)

The moral ‘teaching’ at the end of the message is explained as “Men can be rascals but they always give full support (*pura saath dete hain*)”. The message then continues to explain that there is no point in having ‘relationships’ with women who never give support and leave men in times of difficulties. This

provides the sharp contrast to male relationships with ‘brothers’ who are allegedly willing to fight, kill, obey all orders and gather resources together to help a brother in adversity. Here the message in the image is clear that the men who are part of a brotherhood share a wide social network of other ‘hard’ and ‘public’ bodies of men who can be summoned to help another brother. Similarly access to a car is an indication of an economic similarity amongst this group of men. It also reaffirms ideas of a masculine respectability and the need to employ violence or be prepared for it (Connell 2003, 2005).

What is striking from a socio-spatial perspective is that through such messages men demonstrate the ability and mastery over all spaces and bodies - “Just tell me where to come” or “Just tell me the name” hints that within men’s gendered and classed group where this message operates, any space or person can be ‘dealt with’ for a ‘brother’. The use of force, violence and aggression are legitimate forms of ‘support’ for ‘brothers’ who get into a fight. Not only is the idea of men getting into fights normalised, but its response with further masculine violence is presented as respectable. Within the idea of *‘dunyadari’* (ways of the world) that I explored earlier, the Urban Smart Strivers have to learn to ‘deal with the world’ wherein dealing with such violence and conflict are seen as part of men’s learning to be and live as men in a city. Here men provide no explicit emotional support, but their ability to fight or ‘cut up’ other people for a ‘brother’ is a marker of a strong emotional and social bond amongst men within a shared brotherhood.

As I have explained in the previous chapter on Desexing a Masculine Body, men’s bodies are made into ‘public’ bodies that can traverse ‘public’ spaces without any concern. Similarly, such narratives of a collective brotherhood point to the individual and more collective social constructions of men’s bodies as public. These narratives further highlight the limited and exclusive nature of who a ‘brother’ is along classed and gendered lines. It is relevant that in my personal relationship with the Urban Smart Strivers, the mark of our ‘brotherhood’ often took the form of a public declaration by the young men to explain to me that we had reached a point in our relationship that I was “now their brother”. Such claims at being a ‘brother’ then meant that we had to commit to ‘support’ (*saath dena*) and also take part in various types of violence on behalf the group. As I explore in the next chapter on ‘A Safe/Unsafe City’

such a brotherhood and claims over space and bodies meant that taking part with brothers in ‘innocent fun’ with girls on the street was also tied with ‘brotherly duties’. What is also striking in the context of urban class politics is that this brotherhood is something migrant men in Delhi don’t have, wherein there are not enough ‘brothers’ with power, influence, status and wealth, who can come and fight or gather resources for each other. Hence such a brotherhood in the city, further serves in cementing the power of individual Urban Smart Strivers and their various ‘brotherhoods’ as legitimate managers of space, people and resources in the city.

Ideas of such a brotherhood are crucial to young men’s undervaluing of their girlfriends and women more broadly. Osella and Osella (2006) have argued that the affective and emotional support given by young male Indian friends means that the rigid matrix of heterosexual restrictions on relationships with women can be managed and negotiated amongst men. In the case of the Urban Smart Strivers too, this homosocial bond of brothers, allowed young men to manage most social roles with limited involvement of women or their girlfriends. In some instances, I noticed how Raj or Aditya would suggest that there was no need for women all together, when one has ‘brothers’. Raj once explained “Whats the point *yaar*, wasting time and money on girls, nothing comes of it anyway, better to spend time with ‘*bhai log*’ (brothers). It’s more fun and you get support also”.

In practical terms, young men did get enough support from each other that they did not need the affection of women, which given their generational position, was precarious to manage anyway. Raj talking about this dilemma added that “For women its so difficult to get out of the house to meet us for dates, so what help can they give if there was a real emergency, they can’t do anything”. The restrictions on women’s mobilities (Ranade 2007), which greatly limit their access to public spaces in India, become a source for devaluing women as not ‘helpful’ to young men and their various fights and problems. Their girlfriends ‘inabilities’ to support and help them like their brothers can, become legitimising reasons to collectively valuing bonds of brotherhoods over friendships with women in the city spaces. Further, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, young men’s ideas of the ‘protection’ of women, which serves to maintain control over them, also analytically brings together ‘support’ and

‘protection’ as something provided by other men and brothers, and protection as something always received by women.

What is also striking is that men also act to ‘protect’ their brothers from women themselves. Raj for example, often spotted girlfriends of one of his ‘brothers’ roaming the malls with different men and he felt it was his responsibility as a ‘brother’ to tell his ‘brother’ that his girlfriend was spotted with another man. In one case, Raj called up his friend and explained to him that his girlfriend was out roaming with another man but his ‘brother’ did not believe him. So Raj clandestinely took photos of the women and her male companion and sent them to his ‘brother’ as ‘proof’ leading to several fights amongst the couple and their eventual breakup.

Gendering ‘Modern’ Spaces

Gendered relations are taking new forms in cities of ‘new’ India. Various narratives of ‘gendered equality’ and ‘women’s empowerment’ in contemporary India mean that these play an important role in creating discourses of gendered parity amongst men and women. As Raj once explained to me at a party “Now we are different, there is a change in attitudes, I believe in equality of all types, we should not be doing up and down, better and worse”. It is particularly in the modern spaces of ‘new’ India, that Raj feels this new ‘equality’ of India is most visible, “See, you have to accept that things in big cities are very good for women, they can roam around freely, study, work, anything they want. In the rural they are more dominating and its more difficult, women have to cover their heads (*ghunghat*) but in our place its not a problem”. His ideas of making a ‘smart’ city and a developed imagination of India, help connect the modern narratives of equality as an integral part of what defines them as ‘modern’ spaces and modern ‘new Indian men’. However he is also clear that this does not mean that all people are the same “of course there are differences, education makes a lot of differences, and men and women are also not the same”. This idea of difference is then materialised into the city space where women and men can consume together as but different at the same time.



Fig. 22 Food Court, Epicuria Mall, Nehru Place, Philip 2016

Such ideas of gendered parity but difference are manifest in many of the spaces of urban leisure that young men frequent for 'ghumna'. One example is a photo from the food court at the Nehru Place Metro Station shopping mall called Epicuria which was an important hang-out zone for young men and I have already briefly looked at in Chapter Three A Masculine Body. In the image below from the mall, the sketch of a young man is depicted as drinking a beer with froth coming out of the edges of the glass and the sketch of the woman on the other hand is drinking a cocktail with a straw from a much more delicate and angular glass. They are depicted and positioned relationally not just drinking what appear to be qualitatively different drinks, but they are drinking together and consuming in appropriately gendered ways.

These qualities are expected to represent the qualities that 'smart' young men, and relationally positioned smart women, are to embody in modern spaces of a 'new' India. Through such images there is an attempt to create a new shared sociality amongst men and women, however the codes for such a sociality have to be literally represented for them to be correctly adopted in gendered ways. As Liechty (2005, 25) in his ethnography on Kathmandu shows, the increasingly middle classed nature of the public sphere, has reframed conventional hierarchies of caste purity and gendered consumption of

food and drinks along classed lines through the rise of restaurants and their public commodification across South Asia. It represents what Liechty (2005) calls the 'commensality of class' wherein a new classed pattern of consuming has become the norm which repackages older forms of socialising.

In everyday interactions in such spaces, these representations take on a materiality amongst the Urban Smart Strivers too. For example, Raj when ordering drinks for us, when in mixed groups with women around, asks the waiter confidently "What drinks do you have for the ladies? (*Ladies ke liya konsi drinks*)". Or sometimes more specially asking "what are the sweet ones?". These gender specific drink are seen to depict the gendered traits inherently possessed by men and women. This fact was further emphasised by the fact that sometimes when we were with with young women, Raj and Aditya would get great kicks in telling the young women how 'strong' and 'bitter' their drinks were. Such claim about the 'bitterness' of the 'men's drinks' then promoted the young men to encourage the girls to try taking a sip to see for themselves. On taking a sip of the drink, the young women would almost always make a strained face and make it clear that they thought the drink was 'too strong' and hence not enjoyable at all. They would cause Raj and Aditya to look at each other and laugh in delight because it bolstered the young men's sense of their own drinks as 'strong and bitter' and furthered their ability to be able to 'enjoy' these 'hard drinks'. At the same time, such exercises allowed the women to further their sense of being 'feminine' and 'delicate' women who, given their 'delicate disposition', could not enjoy these tastes. The Osella's (2006) have found similar narratives that men create about the all male Shabrimala pilgrimages in Kerala as being extremely 'arduous' and 'difficult' to justify women's ritual and social exclusion for partaking in such journeys.

As I discovered during the early days of hanging out with Raj and Aditya that these gendered boundaries in modern spaces cannot be breached very easily. Once when out spending time with Raj and Aditya, we decided to get a bottle of whisky to share amongst our group of men. After great deliberation about which brand and chipping in money, we brought a local Indian brand of whisky and proceeded to drive to the back of a shopping area where we planned to drink it. Whilst chatting I made the mistake of thoughtlessly confessing to them how my mother enjoyed drinking whisky rather than

wine. Given that we were drinking whisky clandestinely this comment did not go down well. Raj and Aditya, with their displeasure at my comment quite evident, kept staring at me, not knowing how to react to my statement because my accidental comment challenged the various assumptions about the kinds of drinks men and women are supposed to enjoy. Because I was new to the group at the time, this ‘mistake’ was excused, yet at other times, such masculine breaches on the part of any of the ‘brothers’ were not well tolerated by the group. For example, at the mall when buying beer, Kartik was once told off by his mutual friends who I was meeting for the first time. Kartik politely asked the shopkeeper if there was any discount he could give us on the beer.

On being asked this question, the shopkeeper declined to give us a discount and indicated some displeasure at the request. There was a brief silence in the group as we stood with our arms perched on the counter whilst the shopkeeper scanned our beer. Immediately one of Kartik’s friends broke the ice with by mocking Kartik saying “What, are you buying some onions and potatoes that you are asking for a discount? (*alluu pyaj kharid raba hai?*) . Kartik looked embarrassed and gave his friend a curt smile and looked away at the packing of the beer. In this context, what is spoken about and what is not are managed through nuanced codes amongst men. The attempt was to embarrass Kartik by supposedly equating what he had said to an inferior and domesticated dynamic of asking for discounts and buying vegetables. By joking about it, the other young men of the group tried to distance themselves from this effeminacy and affirm their ability to speak, act and consume like men by quickly correcting Kartik’s ‘error’. What is striking is that there is a spatial and gendered distinction that is brought out in the comment through not just an appeal to a space that is domestic but chores that are assigned to that space. Hence the comment operates as a ‘joke’ and an ‘insult’ at the same time to correct such ‘mistakes’ in the everyday.

Nonetheless, in the gendered co-performance of ‘hard men’ and ‘delicate women’ occupying modern spaces, new avenues and opportunities for interaction are also being created. As I explained in the Chapter on a New Indian Man, young men and women partake in modern spaces of leisure in gendered and complimentary ways to recreate patriarchal gendered roles and identities within a modern

and consumerist fold. Yet these new spaces and new practices of consumption require young men to 'learn' how to socialise with women and often how to allow them to talk and express themselves. As Raj explained to me, "In our parents generation, all these things were not there, they were much more afraid. Now we have to know how to be with women and be nice otherwise no girls will like you". Hence new spaces and practices legitimately allowed young men to think of themselves as 'modern' and 'smart' because they interacted with women in highly exclusionary and gendered spaces as 'new' Indian men.

Similarly, in urging academics to move beyond and complicate ideas of the 'exclusionary city' Duncan McDuie-Ra (2013) argues that adequate attention also needs to be focused on the 'new opportunities' that are created for different groups through neoliberalism. His long term ethnography in Delhi amongst North-Eastern Indian migrants reveals how they have seen a huge increase in economic opportunities and employment in the consumer and leisure spaces of 'new' India which have never existed for them before. He argues that North-Eastern migrants, within the safety of the mall or the beauty parlour, are no longer seen as a tribal or a violent frontier community, but rather as a racialised and orinetalised labour force, wherein they are a desirable and important pool of labour in neoliberal spaces of conspicuous consumption. He explains that outside such spaces, North-Eastern migrants face rampant racism, discrimination and harassment in Delhi. Rather than advocating for neoliberalism, the author is careful to point out to its unevenness and the varied effects as they manifests in the everyday and within specific sites. Similarly, for the Urban Smart Strivers, although interaction with women takes places in sexist exchanges, these are opportunities of communication and interaction that are greatly curtailed by their families and wider communities given their generational position as youth.

Masculinising a Smart City

The above process of gendering spaces also operates on a larger scale by gendering cities of 'new' India as masculine spaces. The gendering of the 'smart' city operates through the hypersexualisaztion of women by men, whilst men themselves try to be the 'hard' 'public' bodies that I have already explored in this chapter. Men's entitlement and control over public spaces means that men also control the gaze

of who is sexualised and which bodies get marked. For example, Osella and Osella (1988: 191) identify the practice of '*vaya nokkam*' (open mouth staring) in Kerala which involves young men simply wandering around looking at girls without any useful or predefined purpose or aim. It is simply to consume with one's eyes. Similarly, Nibsett's (2009, 77) study of young men in Bangalore malls shows that young men intently stare at women whilst walking around the malls on their days off from their jobs. As I explored in the previous chapter, men's de-sexed presence means that they control the gaze and attempt to discipline the sexual gaze as unidirectional.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers this became evident to me when a young woman at a shopping mall, came out with several bags in her hand. She was looking directly towards Aditya and me, as we stood outside the mall. Without saying anything, Aditya simply pulled Raj and me by our shoulders to direct our eyes towards the woman. He then went on to say, "Look brothers, look, sisterfucker, (*bhenchod*) look how she is staring with her eye wide open (*phad phad ke*)". On sensing that we were talking about her, the young woman averted her eyes and looked away. Aditya's comment made it clear that the space of mall, although allowed young women the chance to gaze and look at men too, this was not without its complications. Gendered appropriateness of the power to gaze in the smart city meant that for Aditya the gaze had to be unidirectional and that by staring at a group of men the woman was gazing greedily and inappropriately. The idea of looking '*phad phad ke*' (wide open) is significant because it was not just a woman's quick glance or an accidental meeting of the eyes, this was seen as an excessive form of watching by the woman, that only men are entitled to engage in. She shows no shame or delicate femininity which in turn disrupts the order these men seek to impose on the space. In this case, it is almost as if the woman has become 'public' like men are socially constructed to be and hence attempting to be in public, confidently and in an unmarked manner. However at the same time, Raj and Aditya, in their limited capacity, attempt to 'put her in her place' by discursively marking her out as a deviant and staring back to point out this 'error'. The 'public' woman has long established connotations with sex workers soliciting sex in South Asia and more broadly (Radhakrishnan, 2011). In this case too, such associations soon followed amongst the group as Raj explained that girls like her "would go with anyone" and that "she was staring because she was looking for her next victim". Such socio-spatial

boundaries of sexualised and desexualised bodies taking place in the context of a mall are significant because often for young men these represent sites of a 'smart' city that they seek to be associated with as 'new' Indian men.

Similarly, another important site is the Delhi metro where the legitimate space for femininities and women are marked both socially and spatially . As we note in the opening vignette, women entering the carriage in which Kartik and I are travelling become characterised in particular ways. Women in the Delhi metro have specially allocated space on the platform as well as the front of the train which are demarcated as only for women. As the image below demonstrates (Fig 23), all the metro stations have arrows and markings on the ground to direct women to the 'spaces' that are supposed to occupy within the metro platform. Similarly, there are regular announcements and markings on the trains themselves which explain that no men can enter the 'women's carriage' which is located in the front of every metro train. On the one hand, such practices gives women a defined and visible place within a system and marks their presences as valid and required. As Feminists in India have argued, when women's presence is not accounted for it renders women in-visible and de-legitimises their presences in public spaces (Phadke, Khan & Ranade 2011, 45) hence from that prescriptive this is an important move to mark women's presence.

These spaces are seen by the Urban Smart Strivers as 'good' measures that allow a 'safe' place for women in the metro. The fact that Kartik and other young men use and respect such 'safe' spaces for women gives them the sense of being modern and equitable young men. Particularly for young Urban Smart Strivers like Kartik, the idea of a 'modern' metro in a 'smart' city is fundamentally built on the idea that there is a segregation of women. He felt that these 'facilities' for women were yet another indicator of the virtuous metro system that 'took care' of women too. Kartik told me that it was 'obvious' that women's presences and access to the same spaces requires these measures. In the queue for the security bags to be checked for example, men have a separate queue where the security officer would scan men's bodies 'in the open'. However women entering the metro station formed a separate queue next to the men's queue and were scanned by other women security officers inside a covered

wooden box structure which had curtains on both ends that women would enter and exit from. When I asked if such ‘facilities’ were necessary for women, Kartik was puzzled and said “Obviously! Otherwise what, they will check women just like that in the open?!”

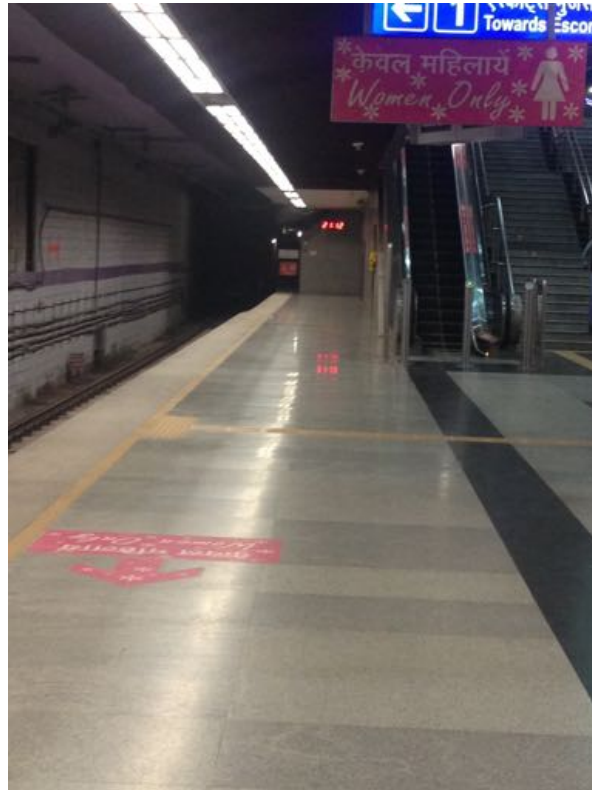


Fig. 23 Delhi Metro Station, Delhi, Philip 2016

As we see in the vignette, the space of the train itself is then divided into a ‘general area’ and ‘general compartments’ that we as men travel in and the ‘women’s compartment’ and their spaces on the metro stations. For young men like Kartik then, women’s use of limited space in the ‘general compartment’ instead of the ‘women’s compartment’ became an act that is seen as over stepping their mark.

Women’s entry into the ‘general compartment’ becomes problematic for Kartik because this is not their defined space. Their bodies become ‘out of place’ because their presences is marked and expected to be limited to the confines of their gendered entitlements within the ‘smart’ infrastructure. Kartik’s comment in the opening vignette frame women as ungrateful for the benevolence shown to them, by demonstrating his smartness and egalitarian values to indicate a sentiment suggesting ‘look how much we have done for you, but still you are intruding’. Through this process, Kartik attempts to shore up his own self-perception of being modern and benevolent and framing women as ‘ungrateful’ and testing his patience. Women are left in such masculinist narrative, not as entitled users of public space

and infrastructure, but rather marked and private bodies who are calling for a patriarchal backlash against the 'graces' shown to them by men.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, several such narratives of 'breaches' are freely exchanged amongst 'brothers'. Young men for example explain numerous stories about how women 'don't even get the right ticket' for the metro, or deliberately come into the 'general compartment' because there are usually seats which they can 'forcefully' ask men to vacate for them. Once when standing in a long queue with other men to enter the metro security checks, several women walked past us to join their much shorter queue in the women's security section. Rather than seeing this as the low numbers of women in public spaces, Aman remarked to me "Look even in the metro line women are ahead of us" with a tone of irritation in his voice. Yet at the same time, the presences of women through out the Delhi metro system, often at all times of the day, as well as their broader participation in the city space, becomes a sharp challenge to men's attempt at colonising all spaces as theirs.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have explored how class and gender operate dialogical in and through city spaces to create a 'smart' and 'masculine' city. The Urban Smart Strivers mark out spaces that are 'modern' and others that are not worthy of going 'roaming' which in turn create forms of belongings and exclusions. In classed terms, 'smart' men and women legitimately belong in the 'smart' places and attempt to imagine themselves in a 'smart' city by removing the poor and other unwanted elements from their imaginary and spatial frameworks of the city. Similarly in gendered terms, men and their unmarked bodies get linked to the public spaces of 'new' India whereas women's bodies are visibly marked in the smart and masculine city space. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, this marked nature of women's presence in their city becomes a sign of their own 'smartness' as well as the 'modern' nature of the city which is framed as 'accommodating' women. Although these hierarchies are powerful, they are not fixed and the cracks in the heteronormativity of the city reveal several gaps in the processes.

Chapter Seven: A Safe/Unsafe City

Introduction

In this chapter, I look at how young men understand the city spaces of Delhi as ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ and how such narratives shape and legitimise their embodied gender performances. In the context of a growing public and academic debate about women’s ‘safety’ in Indian cities and building ‘safe’ cities, I try to understand how cities are made ‘unsafe’ or ‘safe’ in the first place by exploring men’s power and privilege in urban India. Yet at the same time, I reveal the imperfections in men’s entitled claims over bodies and spaces by exploring how other bodies trouble and challenge men’s authority.

The chapter begins with a vignette of young men ‘roaming’ and having ‘innocent fun’ within their homosocial group by ‘teasing’ young women who are accessing public spaces in the city. Through this vignette, I look at the similar ways in which Urban Smart Strivers contribute in making an ‘unsafe’ city space. Yet at the same time, I explore how young men are acutely sensitive to Delhi’s image as the ‘rape capital of India’ and its gendered violence discourse which causes them great embarrassment as ‘new’ Indian men. As a response, Urban Smart Strivers try to become ‘protectors’ of women and this allows me to reveal their entitlements and anxieties in the next section. Finally I offer some conclusions.

Men’s ‘Innocent’ Fun

As I was walking home from the Lajpat Nagar metro station, a young woman was walking to the metro station. It was around 8:00pm and the market area around the station was bustling. She had earphones in her ear and was wearing a t-shirt and jeans. My mind was full of thoughts from a day in the field as I walked around the traffic to get home in time for dinner. The young woman and I were about to cross each other when a car driving along the road suddenly pulled up close towards us. It was a white sedan and I could see four young men sitting in the car. As the car came closer towards us, a slow thump of music poured out from it. I noticed the music getting louder as the front passenger window of the car started to lower. The events that followed happened quickly and lasted a mere 10 to 15 seconds.

Initially unfazed by the car, I thought that it was a driver trying to park his car or navigate the crowded streets of the busy market area. But a sudden loud horn from the car punctured the air close to us and got both the young woman and I looking at it. By this point, the young woman and I had come to a standstill, as had the car. From the front screen of the car, I could see the young male driver leaning forward on the steering wheel staring at the young woman. The driver then stretched out one of his hands towards the passenger side window, across the chest of his young male friend sitting on the passenger seat. With his outstretched arm, the driver clicked his fingers at the young woman and waved at her with a smile. I could see both the driver and the young male passenger looking at the woman and waiting for her to respond.

At that point, the young woman cautiously moved her hand to clutch the strap of her handbag. With the other hand, she took off her headphones and bent her body forwards to peer into the car window from a distance. I wondered if the young men perhaps wanted directions or some help. But then I heard the driver say to the young woman in English “Hiiii... hello”. The young woman did not respond. The driver then continued in Hindi “Shall we drop you (*chodd dein*) somewhere ma’am?”. Before the young woman could respond, one of the other young men sitting in the back of the car quickly quipped in “Yes....shall we fuck you (*chhod dein*) ma’am?”. To this comment there was a sharp and exaggerated burst of laughter from the four young men in the car.

In a swift response, the woman took two steps back and moved away from the car. She had heard enough. At that same moment, the driver too swiftly and forcefully turned the steering wheel of the car back towards the road. The passenger window began to rise, the sound of men’s laughter and music began to fade as the car moved away to join the traffic. The young woman replaced her earphone into her ear and flicked her hair back, moving her hands across her handbag a few times. Given how busy the market was, the car moved barely six feet to join the traffic queue. The woman carried on her walk to the metro station. I noticed that she slowed her pace so that she did not have to cross the car again.

Making an 'Unsafe' City

This vignette provides some important insights into how cultures of urban youth masculinity contribute in gendering city spaces of a 'new' India. There are several themes that need unpacking. Firstly, for young affluent Indian men in Delhi, 'roaming' around in cars and on bikes forms an important and pleasurable part of their social lives. Similar to the young men in the vignette, the Urban Smart Strivers took me on several trips 'roaming' or '*ghumne*' around the city on similar adventures. With Raj and Aditya for example, catcalling women from the car, trying to 'touch' them whilst driving around, slowing the car down to get a 'better glimpse' of young women and giving them 'flying kisses' from the window were often sources of great laughter, fun and excitement for them. These formed an integral part of not just the act of going '*ghumna*' but also contributed in the way in which the city space was imagined, experienced and occupied by the Urban Smart Strivers.

The use of car by the young men is significant in the vignette. The car, as I've demonstrated for the Urban Smart Strivers, holds great symbolic and classed connotations in India which allows young men to mark their distinction from others. When going '*ghumne*', the car serves to create an appropriately classed image of the young men as 'new' Indian men of a 'new' India. Like I demonstrate in the vignette, the Urban Smart Strivers too drive around the city in expensive cars, listen to loud music and don't seem to have a particular purpose for their drives. The 'purposeless' nature of their '*ghumna*' means that for the young men, in a socioeconomic context of great income inequality, being in a car and appearing to be leisured consumers serves as an indicator of their economic, social and gendered power. Building on the arguments from Chapter Five and Six, for the Urban Smart Strivers the desexed and classed nature of their bodies means that the very act of such '*ghumna*' does not require a purpose, they are public masculine bodies that legitimately belong and roam across city spaces.

Similarly, the use of the English word 'ma'am' is significant in the vignette to indicate the 'smart' subjectivity that the young men attempt to present. This is a term that the Urban Smart Strivers also use and enjoy because it connotes for them a sophisticated and globalised form of address in a formal consumption economy. The men in the car do not address the young woman through explicitly

derogatory words, but rather through using a term of 'respect' like 'ma'am'. Through this the young men seek to present themselves as 'polished' men who have refined tastes and sensibilities in line with the broader 'refinements' of a 'new' India and hence they present themselves as having the knowhow of interacting with women with respect. However the fact that this term of respect is quickly collapsed into an aggressive and one-sided joke hints to the sexualised nature of a contemporary patriarchy in 'new' India which takes on more sophisticated and 'modern' forms. In the local Indian context, because the word 'ma'am' is most commonly encountered in a commercial setting of shopping malls or leisure based services like cinema complexes, the use of the term has clear neoliberal and contemporary salience within this exchange. This attempt at being and appearing like 'smart' men in the vignette is also connected to the fact that the young woman addressed as 'ma'am' wears 'modern' clothes and occupies a space in Delhi which is loaded with symbolic meaning of being 'smart'. She is in many ways a 'ma'am' because she appears to be a 'new Indian woman' (Rajan 2003, Bijapurkar 2008).

In the vignette it is striking that this 'incident' takes place in a space that the Urban Smart Strivers would define as 'modern' and part of their collectively imagined idea of 'new' India. As the photograph of the physical space where the vignette is set demonstrates below (Fig 24), this 'modern' space is classed as 'modern' for young men through its built urban architecture on the one hand, but also the symbolic meanings attached to it as an upmarket shopping and consuming urban destination populated with big global branded shops, large cars, English speaking people, a huge cinema multiplex, ordered roads and bright well lit streets. What is also immediately evident from the photograph is that this space is also populated by the not so 'smart' elements of an economically unequal India. The presence of the street vendors selling various eatables and drinks, small scale individual sellers selling cheap clothes like t-shirts and socks also occupy the same space. It is against these groups that the Urban Smart Strivers define themselves and create a 'smart' masculine self.



Fig. 24 Lajpat Nagar Metro Station Area at 8:00pm, Philip 2016

In the vignette, the young men enjoy the freedom of ‘moving around’ and ‘roaming’ the city given their patriarchal position as masculine and ‘public’, which legitimises their initial comment about ‘dropping’ the young woman. Here the comment is framed as a question, almost a request or an offer for help. Young men as desexualised and ‘public’ bodies, carry out their masculinist roles of traversing and occupying public spaces which they deem are inappropriate for women’s bodies. Within this context, the young men try to claim control over space and bodies, by trying to exerting their power over the young woman by approaching her and making an unwarranted offer of ‘help’. So on the one hand their social roles as ‘droppers’ of women allows the opening comment to seem like a harmless masculine expression of offering ‘help’ to the young woman and ‘dropping’ her. This if further marked as a polite and respectable opening line, given that men are ‘respectfully’ asking for the smart woman (*ma’am*) to be dropped off somewhere.

From the perspective of the men, such an act is well within their defined classed, gendered and socio-spatial duty as ‘new’ Indian men. Here there is an assumption that the young woman is not or will not simply be in public spaces, but is rather travelling to a given destination. As various human geographers explain, within hostile patriarchal contexts, young women only move from one place to the other with purpose, they do not linger or ‘loiter’ for fear of being seen as ‘loose’ or ‘public women’ (Lukose 2009, Padhke 2007, 2013). In this way, young men feel they are ‘helping’ women attain or maintain their

appropriate gendered roles and in turn fulfilling their masculine duties. In an interesting study of gendered online interactions, Nisbett's (2009) ethnography also demonstrate that women's online presences in India also exposes them to unwarranted and uninvited messages from men constantly. According to Nisbett, such aggressive and hyper-sexualised messages from men to women operate on the assumption that women's online presence, similar to their 'real world' presences is 'public' and hence approachable by men.

In the vignette, as the 'joke' progresses, this 'harmless' offer to fulfil a masculinist role is strengthened further by drawing on a heterosexist discourse. In the second quip from the young man in the back of the car, the young man again use the modern term of respect by calling the young woman 'ma'am', but this time, rhetorically asking her if they can fuck her. It is significant that they use the words '*chhod dein*' which literally translates to 'fuck you' instead of a more consensual statement about initiating sexual contact. This difference between various ways of sexual contact between men and women was brought to my attention by Aman when he explained to me that his girlfriend, who he deems as a 'good girl' (previous chapter) enjoys sex with him "my girlfriend also enjoys sex, so she also wants it" which is different to how he imagines a lot of 'sluts' (*randiyan*) actively seek sex from men, "They only want that some one fucks them (*chhod dein*), they are like that only, cheap types and Delhi is full of them so you have to be careful". In this context then, the young men in the vignette are not requesting consensual sex from the woman on the street, they are asking if that young woman would like to 'get fucked'. Hence the joke in the vignette operates on the level that such a young woman enjoys getting fucked like a 'slut' rather than like Aman's girlfriend who 'enjoys sex'. Analytically then, the gendered framing of young women as 'good girls' or 'sluts' allows young men to conceptualise them differently and engage in some 'frank' conversations with girls they view as 'sluts'.

As I discovered through the course of my field work, often the unaccompanied nature of young women is one of the main reasons for her classification as a 'slut' in this context because she fractures the attempts of masculinising the space. Kartik's comment about women entering men's metro space in the previous chapter, is similar to the young woman in the opening vignette of this chapter occupying a

masculine space. Because she is in 'men's space' there is a sense of entitlement through which the woman can be approached. In this narrative and vision of urban spaces, women's presences in 'public spaces' become hypersexualised for and by men.

The difference between 'sluts' and 'good girls' operates on a shifting meter with great ambiguity for young men. This ambiguity is further brought out in the word play between '*chhod dein*' (fuck you) and '*chod dein*' (drop you) in the vignette. Both acts here are framed as heteronormative masculine roles operating through space and bodies in relation to women - the act of dropping women and penetrating them. What is crucial however is the fact that such ambiguity between the 'good woman' who needs to be 'dropped' and the 'slut' who needs to be 'fucked' are both roles that affirm masculine ways of being and acting. As I have explored earlier in Chapter Five *Desexing a Masculine Body*, the public construction of men's bodies, allow them to be at ease in public spaces and not requiring to be 'dropped off' anywhere. Such constructions also privilege their bodies as being facilitators of who enters and exits the public space and how. In the vignette the young men assume that they can take the woman wherever she needs to go - which is a sentiment often reflected by the Urban Smart Strivers who feel they must accompany the women in their lives like mothers, sisters or girlfriends, to various places on various errands in the city because they allegedly cannot manage them on their own. Such power to facilitate the movements of a young woman stem from unequal relations of power in urban spaces where the encounter takes place. In the opening vignette, this differential power dynamic between the young men and the women, are further amplified by the fact that the young men are in a expensive car and the woman is walking on the street. Hence adding to a further sense of classed and economic superiority amongst the young men.

Furthermore, the men in the car, like the Urban Smart Strivers, share amongst themselves a bond which connects them symbolically and physically with each other, and at the same time creates the young woman to be a legitimate hypersexualised object of their collective gaze and acts. As I have already explored, the intense homosocial bond, particularly whilst going out '*ghumne*' is repeated here again in the fact that it was only young men in the car out 'roaming' and enjoying time away from

home. The fact that the driver physically stretched over and across the body of his male friend sitting on the passenger seat is embedded within the cultures of middle class youth masculinities where intense forms of homosocial bodily contact are desexed and indicators of the powerful heteronormativity at play where such contact amongst men is non-sexual. In this way, the young men in the car form a collective male body of sorts because their bodies, chests and arms are desexed for each other and their sexualised gaze is collectively directed towards the body of the woman on the street outside the car and the homosocial bond. The 'joke' too is collectively shared amongst the young men, the woman is the discursive and physical field through which the joke materialises, but she has only a particular objectified position within it. The young woman is excluded from the joke itself and occupies a masculinist position of being the body to be gazed and consumed.

An example of such collective masculine gendering of spaces and bodies amongst the Urban Smart Strivers becomes clear when roaming with Raj and Aditya. Whilst out 'ghumne' they would often pull me or each other by the shoulders or by our t-shirts and without saying or explaining anything physically turn their bodies to look at a woman passing by. In doing so there is no need to discuss who or what the object to be consumed and watched usually was. The embodied masculinities discourse, working collectively through our bodies, only allows space for a heteronormative way of 'looking' and being for young men which can be collectively and publicly shared. Indeed, as I've already explored young men also engage in non-heterosexual activity, however this is not publicly celebrated or given social space within their cultures and appropriate ways of being a man.

In such contexts, the Urban Smart Strivers explain the need to be 'active' and 'smart' about making contact with women. As Aditya explained to me "Men have to make the first move always, you have to send friend request, or start talking, they always say no, but there are many ways of saying no". Here he suggests not just that men are to make initial contact with women through various opening remarks online and offline, but that a certain degree of persistence is also required. For Aditya, without acknowledging the gendered inequalities in his sociocultural context the idea that women 'always say no' is legitimised because of the way femininities in India operate require women to enact their

sexuality. Krishanan (2014b) for example finds that young Indian women have to 'distance' themselves from sexual talk and practices whilst feigning no interest, even when they deeply desire and fantasise about such sexual contact, because otherwise they lose credibility as 'good women'. Hence this appropriate way of 'being a woman', is part of the way in which young men feel the terms of gendered relationships and interactions also ought to take place. Aditya for example, anticipating various forms of initial rejections from women, has his personal arbitrary conceptualisation of which types of 'no's' from women 'really mean no', and which forms of rejections suggest space for further coaxing and cajoling. Hence in this context, a lot of the 'fun' young men often have in trying to touch women from their cars and bikes, trying to talk to them or making jokes about them, are assumed to be part of the very terms of making contact with women. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, such assumption about women as passive sexual beings that need to be approached, coaxed and encouraged into romantic and sexual relationships of various types, means that young men view such 'frank' talk about dropping women or asking if they want lifts as legitimate opening gestures in making contact.

Through such gendered norms around interacting with women, young men when away from the watchful eyes of their families engage in various forms of '*masti*' (fun). Such '*masti*' or 'fun' that young men partake in can take on different forms, but what analytically connects them is the fact that they are not socially approved ways of being and acting. For example, Lawrence Cohen (1996) studies '*masti*' as homosexual activity that young men engage in with other men under the framework of being 'casual' or 'for passing time' and away from the gaze of their families. Similarly, in the context of the Urban Smart Strivers and going 'ghumne', such 'frank' or 'aggressive' interactions with women were seen as forming part of the '*masti*' that boys had when they were together, rather than anything more serious than that. When out doing such '*masti*' the Urban Smart Strivers did not feel that they were breaching or causing any 'violence' per se. Their actions to them seemed liked they were coming from positions of having some boyish 'fun'. Such 'fun' was expected to have little consequences and was seen as part of the 'ordinary' or 'normal' realm of life, rather than anything that was deviant. As Walle's (2004) work on Pakistani masculinities in Lahore demonstrates, young men within their homosocial groups often rupture moral and social codes, wherein outside the group they are moral and good Muslim men, but

within male-male groups, these codes can be abandoned. Similarly with the Urban Smart Strivers in Delhi, 'innocent fun' takes place in the context of their male-male group, but within a different context, such fun would not be fun at all, they would be disapproved.

In contrast to the arguments above, the street and public spaces are more generally are also places of sexual possibilities and 'fun' for young people in India (Phadke 2013, Krishnan 2014b). The anticipation or excitement of meeting someone new, mild flirtation, titillation and even brief and fleeting sexual encounters or even exchanging glances of sexual attraction without acting on anything is an experience that makes 'roaming' special and exciting for young men. As Osella and Osella (2006) are careful in pointing out, the tendency to collapse such 'frank' or 'aggressive' talk of young men as violence is too simplistic and problematic in the South Asian context. In their careful ethnography, they reveal that the often provocative remarks young men make to young women at bus stops or street corners in Kerala are practices that form part of a broader repertoire of courtship patterns for young people and are attempts to break social distance rather than straightforward 'violence'. They point out that young men in Kerala show both artistic capabilities to woo girls by learning filmic songs and dialogues as well as taking part in aggressive harassment in public spaces like bus stops and outside colleges. However as they point out, these gendered roles and hierarchies are never fixed and constantly negotiated and remain ambiguous, making it difficult to draw out neat binaries between love and hurt, aggression and flirting etc amongst young people in India (ibid). Similarly in the context of Delhi, the Urban Smart Strivers always thought of their actions such as trying to 'touch women' from their cars or catcalling them as always an ambiguous combination of flirtatiousness, aggression and 'fun' when out and about in the city space.

Given these debates, in this thesis I choose not to define the complex notion of 'gendered violence' towards women, but rather keep my focus on the gendering of public spaces within the city and its relationship with men and masculinities. This is important in the Indian context because feminists have long pointed out that women do feel safe in various public spaces and have a constant sense of anxiety whilst moving around the city (John and Nair 2000). The fact that the young woman carries on walking,

albeit with a slower pace, is what feminists call the ‘hardiness’ of Indian women to keep going in hostile gendered contexts (ibid). As Veena Das (2004) explains, gendered agency is not always direct resistance or confrontation, but rather the ability to “lead a normal life within a framework of violence”. In this way, she suggests that violence gets normalised and part of the terms through which the everyday is negotiated, experienced and made sense of in India. Building on this idea, as we see in the vignette, the young woman moves away to the side and slows her pace. She is seemingly able to negotiate the terms of access to urban space. The very idea of the ‘closed’ body posture (Lukose 2005) is an extension of this framework where women learn bodily techniques on inhabiting public spaces which are dominated by masculine control. In this context, for good girls to traverse the public, they have to be suitably private in doing so.

Delhi: ‘Rape Capital’ of India

In December 2012, the gang rape and eventual death of a Jyoti Singh on a moving bus in New Delhi struck a powerful cord nationally and internationally. The case dubbed as ‘Nirbhaya’ (fearless one) has received much scholarly and public cultural analysis (see for example Kaur, 2017). Following the incident, the media has labeled Delhi as the ‘rape capital of India’ given the high number of reported crimes against women from stalking to harassment and rape (Brosius 2017). In this context, whilst doing fieldwork in Delhi amongst young men, discussion about ‘Delhi as the rape capital’ were an important point of conversation amongst the Urban Smart Strivers and their wider sociocultural worlds. As I discovered for the Urban Smart Strivers, this whole discussion was framed not through the idea of ‘gendered violence’ but rather through the concept of ‘women’s protection’ or *‘mahila surksha’* in Hindi. This idea of ‘women’s protection’ was a term being thrown around in the media and newsrooms, it was also the theme of various university projects for the Urban Smart Strivers, and as an extension of ‘women’s protection’ their offices often held ‘women safety’ day at work. During our routine ‘roaming’ too we had frequent encounters with billboards and adverts explaining ‘women’s safety’ and ‘women’s protection’ in the metro stations, inside shopping malls and dotted around various sites where young people hung out (see Fig 25 for example). Interestingly, several films that I watched with my informants also took up the theme of ‘women’s protection’ during my time there (Brosius

2017). Hence amongst the Urban Smart Strivers and their cultural worlds there was a high sensitivity to discussions about ‘women’s safety/protection’ and in particular the city of Delhi as a ‘unsafe’ place for women.



Fig. 25 Poster on 'women's protection' in Delhi Metro, Philip 2016

As a result of this highly charged media discussions, whenever I brought up conversations about the broader idea of ‘gender’ amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, I found that young men quickly collapsed it into a conversation about ‘women’s protection’. It was almost as if there was no other issue around gender that could be discussed. Indeed, as Phadke (2013) correctly writes such ‘safety conversations’ become the only language to talk about gender and as they add this does ‘nothing to add to women’s rights to access public spaces’. In light of these conceptualisation and public sensitivity, two glaring contradictions are important here as many feminists have pointed out: that most forms of violence towards women take place in the private sphere of the home in India. And secondly, in public spaces it is men who are regularly exposed to violence of other men (Menon 2012). Nonetheless, the discussion amongst the Urban Smart Strivers and in the broader public cultural debates has been about women’s safety in public spaces, rather than the home, as well as addressing spatially ‘unsafe’ cities to make them ‘safer’ through technical and infrastructural development (Brosius 2017). This raises some interesting questions about what and where this discussion about gendered violence is focused and skewed.

One answer lies in the attempts at building a ‘smart’ city and the difficult tensions that arise in the process. For example, one of the major initiatives of the Delhi Municipal Government in partnership with UN Women is the “Delhi Safe City Program” campaign and its corresponding policy report (Jagori, 2016). This is one important campaign that I choose to focus on because it has the largest influence, scope and funding within the context of Delhi and is largely considered as the most important multisectoral initiative in making a ‘safe Delhi’ (Jagori 2016). The report explains the various factors that make the Delhi unsafe are: a poor built environment, lack of signage, dark and deserted areas, empty streets, poor public transport (ibid). Their main suggestions are to improve training for police, increase services and drop in centres for women who are victims of violence, improve urban infrastructure through lighting, maintaining parks and pavements. These aims are matched closely with the agenda of building a ‘smart’ city which I’ve explored in the previous chapter. In many ways, the idea of building a ‘safe’ city parallels the idea of building a ‘smart’ city. What is also striking is that the thrust of ‘making’ these cities, is largely seen as a technical apolitical project which is taking place on ‘neutral’ ground. These attempts at building a ‘smarter’ and ‘safer’ city, are in line with what scholars have suggested to be India’s attempts at rectifying its ‘image deficit’ as a nation held back and burdened by social and economic barriers (Kaur 2012). Although the last suggestions on the Jagori report (2016) is to address ‘macho culture’ there is no attempt to explain how or what exactly this means in policy terms and how it can be operationalised.

The report concludes by inviting readers to join in a ‘safety audit’ where the city is to be mapped through a application for mobile phones called the ‘SafteyPin App’. Here smartphone users are required to make a of map of ‘safe’ spaces in the city and also mark out ‘unsafe’ spaces through entering their geographical data and experience of ‘safety’ in the spot. This ‘ safety audit’ makes clear that it is specifically focused on low income neighbourhoods and the report explains the setting up of ‘safety centres’ in these low income neighbourhoods as one of its biggest achievements (Jagori 2016, 4). Such narratives legitimise a spatilaised and segregated view of gendered violence in the urban context, with the ‘smart’ spaces of the city being branded as ‘safe’ and the ‘unsmart’ spaces being labeled as ‘unsafe’. Furthermore it legitimises a classed narrative of ‘women’s saftey’ wherein women with access

to apps and technology of 'new' India can mark and identify 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces. As I will explore, this view then comes to become commonsensical amongst the middle classes and the Urban Smart Strivers think of certain spaces in Delhi as 'obviously unsafe'. Given this context, it is significant that the opening vignette takes place in a part of 'upmarket' South Delhi which would not be considered in such 'safety audits' or imaginations as being an 'unsafe place'.

Within such policy and public cultural narratives in Delhi, gendered violence has come to be framed as largely conceptualised as an 'urban' phenomenon. It is also seen as a largely 'public' issue. This was evidenced by the fact that most campaigning and messaging for 'women's safety' in the city has been about women's safe entry and exit to work or educational institutions as well as the more 'spectacular' forms of urban violence (Kabeer 2012). As feminist activist Ratna Kapur (2007) points out, the sole concern for the complex and contradictory 'safety conversations' in Delhi only allow for a narrow and shortsighted framing of gendered violence. The deeper and much more difficult to address issues of patriarchal social norms and a sociocultural shift have been completely left out of the discussion. Padhke (2007, 2013) builds on this to explain that in this process, a narrative of 'cities as hostile' skews and obscures the causes of violence through various forms of urban biases and labels.

As Dutta (2016) explains after the 'Nirbhaya' incident, and following several highly publicised rape cases in India, an urban/slum divide in India has intensified wherein actions of the rapists are associated with their immediate built environment and its conditions. The slum is now firmly seen as the seedbed of gendered misogyny and the connection between a material "lack" amongst poorer men as the central cause of violence towards women in Indian cities. Dutta (2016) is clear that the misguided idea of a 'slum free city' cannot bring gendered violence and rape to an end in India, which has largely been the media and policy conceptualisation in addressing violence towards women in India. What is striking in this context is that the poor themselves, as Dutta demonstrates, often articulate violence as caused by a 'material lack' as a political utterance to mirror middle class sentiments in the hope of securing a sense of an urban citizenship. As I have already explored in the previous chapters, through a consumer citizenship that is emerging in 'new' India, the poor are largely denied a social and

cultural citizenship. Hence these narratives about the poor as violent, tie up well with my arguments about the political erasure of the poor and their spaces, only to be framed as ‘garbage’ (*kachra*).

Within this context of a skewed public understanding of an ‘unsafe’ Delhi, for the Urban Smart Strivers this image of Delhi as a violent place is a source of great embarrassment. As Raj explained to me “In Bombay and other cities there are not so many problems, only in Delhi yaar, its a big problem, it gives the city a bad name.” This inhospitable image of was the reason he felt that he was unable to find jobs in the city easily “No jobs are coming here, all the jobs are going to Bangalore and all because of this only, people don’t want to send their girls and families here”. This anxiety about the image of Delhi as the ‘rape capital’ in turn had consequences for the image of India for him. He felt that because Delhi was receiving so much bad publicity, this in turn made “India itself has become the rape capital of the world, tourists are getting attacked and they are scared about coming”. In light of such frustrations, when thinking about how to improve this image of the city, Raj was clear that “these motherfuckers should be shot dead, they should all be hung or I say cut off their penises”. He had an extreme understanding of how to make the city safer by removing the elements that threaten it. In this context, ‘rape’ was seen for him as an act of great deviance by a person who was deviant. This person then crucially represented someone who was ‘not normal’ and clearly ‘not smart’.

In a relationally positioned contrast to such ‘deviant’ men who are violent, the Urban Smart Strivers are young men who are ‘modern’ and demonstrate their ‘modernity’ by using the discourse of creating ‘safe’ cities and removing ‘unsafeness’ for women. For example, not one informant ever said that ‘violence’ towards women is correct or acceptable. In the normative framework, for young urban youth, such violence has now become a mark of dishonour. It is reminiscent of a global embarrassment and a sense of being backwards. Narrative of social justice and correcting the wrongs of society is something that ‘modern’ India has made an important part and manifestation of itself. This is now as I have shown a part of how young masculinities try to create and present their modern selves. Yet what is inbuilt into this sense of being ‘modern’ is the paradoxical relationship with an essentialised idea of ‘tradition’. It is in the balance between this attempt to be modern whilst at the same time, remain

rooted in things accepted as ‘normal’ that a sense of entitlement amongst men over women becomes accepted.

In the image below for example the idea of a modern masculinity represented by a specific motorbike is juxtaposed against the goal of women’s protection in Connaught Place in New Delhi. This mural which emerged after the December 2012 incident in Delhi is located very close to where Aman and I have tea regularly after his day in the office in Chapter Five Desexing a Masculine Body. The image which is endorsed by the New Delhi Municipal Council with their logo on the right hand corner of the image is part of a wider urban art project called ‘Delhi Street Art’ (Varma 2015) which promotes public art. Aman and I discussed the image as well as a few other images on the walls around Connaught Place at great length. He explained to me that he loved this image “Its powerful yaar and the message is very good, its very important. Specially in Delhi where we have so much problem, this things must be encouraged”. Given the popular idea that Delhi was the ‘rape capital’ of India because of the high number of reported incidents, Aman believed that these posters were required here. The fact that ‘fight violence’ is written in English and the ‘art’ appears in an upmarket area of Delhi is indicative of the class based preoccupation and focus of this discourse. It also frames the place, not just the shops and brands, as a consumable place that has ‘modern’ values.



Fig. 26 Wall art behind motorbike in Connaught Place, Delhi, Philip 2016

However the unproblematic subsuming of a gendered equality and anti-violence discourse with contemporary masculinities is brought out by the parked motorbike in-front of the image. Incidentally the motorbike is a TVS Apache RTR widely considered by my informants as one of the 'fastest' bikes in India at the moment and largely a 'men's motorbike' according to them. The moto of the bike is "its now or never" which echoes several of the themes of opportunistic 'fun' that young men have in Delhi often in their all male groups. What is striking in the image above is the uncomplicated and unproblematic coexistence of two seemingly oppositional symbolic discourses: of masculine 'fun' on the one hand, and women's safety on the other hand. The fact that the bike is parked under the mural, hints to the ordinariness and everyday nature of young men's participation in activities that are defined as 'masculine' within their cultures of urban youth masculinity and desire to 'live in the moment' by driving around on their fast bikes and cars, whilst engaging in 'innocent' fun by teasing women and making sexual advances at them. Yet on the other hand, they are vocal about 'respect' for women within a normative shift that accepts violence towards women as wrong. As I noted in the opening vignette, often homosocial 'fun' whilst driving around on cars and bikes allow forms of aggression to be built into the social codes of gendered interactions, rather than as external practices creating a contradictory field of messages and practices.

Safe/Unsafe Bodies and Spaces

Given the wide ranging discourse about 'women's protection' the Urban Smart Strivers engage with these in interesting ways. For my informants poverty and violence have a causal and clear link. They were clear that violence was something that poor men did because of their socioeconomic situation. Raj for example explained to me "Poor people are very dangerous, in fact I think poverty can make even good people dangerous, it can make people do bad things". The lack of wealth was linked to a negative and uncontrolled forms of individualised bad behaviour, rather than a structural and economic inequality. What Raj's narrative also simultaneously assumed was that wealth and money created positive behaviour. This was constantly hinted at, as I explored in the previous chapter, by the idea of 'good people' (*acche log*) that the Urban Smart Strivers had of who they wanted to interact with and be around in the 'smart' places of new India.

In such a context, for young men like Raj, poverty was used synonymously with the idea of being 'backward'. Raj explained to me that "When these people from small town areas come to Delhi, they become shocked, they have never seen anything like this". Similar to the incompetence in knowing how to be 'smart' and urbane, there is an assumption amongst the Urban Smart Strivers that rural and poor men migrating from various parts of India to the capital are 'shocked' at the 'modernity' of Delhi and hence react in unpredictable ways. Through this narrative, there is an attempt to create a hierarchy of masculinities and spaces - the move from rural to urban India is marked as an aspiration and largely positive move to a space that is considered better. However this claim also attempts to destabilise any claims migrant or poor men who move to the city could try and make on it as urban residents of the city space. They are framed as culturally and socially 'outsiders' not belonging to the space.

This idea of the 'outsiders' is given a material dimension often when moving around the city space and observing various groups of men from various parts of the country. As Kartik once explained to me when in South Delhi "Delhi is you know the capital of India, here everyone comes, this is the heart, that is why there are so many problems here, the real Delhi (*asli dilliwale*) people like me are no longer here, its all the outsiders (*baharwale*) who come and do these things". In this narrative Kartik positions himself as someone who belongs in Delhi, the 'real' (*asli*) person from Delhi, and hence the most committed and trustworthy ambassador for the city and its politics.

In claiming such a 'real Delhi' person identity, he attempts to mark himself as truly urbane and sophisticated and attempts to frame the city itself as a sophisticated space which is temporarily populated by 'outsiders'. By marking the 'outsiders' as not belonging to the city space, he attempts to cleanse the image of the city space from not just the 'outsiders' but also the backwardness that they represent. In doing so, the image of Delhi as the 'rape capital of India' can be corrected through the removal of such outsiders, who are assumed to be the primary cause of such an image in the first place. For Kartik, Delhi then is imagined as the space where 'modernity' and a global cosmopolitanism thrives and are 'natural' to it. What his narrative attempts to frame as 'unnatural' or outside the city space is the violence and 'problems' of an old order.

In this context, the discourse of violence being largely a urban and public issue also get legitimised for the Urban Smart Strivers. For example Raj and Kartik both start to see and come to think of violence as a consequence of the lack of 'modernity' in urban spaces. Addressing the poor and migrant men as sources of this violence mirrors and legitimise the widely circulating ideas of making Delhi a safe city through urban projects that are technical and infrastructural rather than deeper cultural and structural issues. The central thrust of public discussion on gendered violence meant that this narrative about making spaces 'safe' stands in for making spaces 'modern' and 'developed'. Discussions about 'marital rape' or the statistically much higher reported prevalence of domestic violence (John 2015) are excluded from this discourse of 'a safe/unsafe' city for the Urban Smart Strivers.

The Urban Smart Strivers were unanimous that there were certain spaces and times that were inappropriate for women. These were largely spaces occupied by poor and migrant residents in the poorest parts of the city. These spaces Kartik felt were 'obviously unsafe'. What is interesting is that although such spatialised ideas of violence existed, young men also conceptualised violence towards women as random and possible at all times and in all spaces. There is an interesting tension where on the one hand violence is linked closely to 'unsafe' spaces that Urban Smart Strivers identity, yet at the same time, women are constantly at threat and their sexuality is always in danger. This has important consequences for how young men understand masculine protection as I explore further in the chapter. Kartik for example felt that any place that did not have 'street-lights', 'proper roads', 'protection' or were 'deserted' or had 'too many people' were 'unsafe' for women. Similarly the contradictory conditions involved darkness, being alone, crowded spaces, isolated places, poor men, migrant men, thugs and local gangs, parking lots, parks, alleys as well as metros, buses, taxis, trains as also being 'unsafe' for women. This diverse list of spaces deemed 'unsafe' by the Urban Smart Strivers, has qualitatively different spaces and conditions that work together to make unsafe spaces for women within their narrative of safe/unsafe Delhi. This tension remained unresolved for young men themselves when Raj whilst discussing the December 2012 incident expressed his confusion saying "I was totally shocked yaar, even in South Delhi this is happening now, at Select City Walk! Really, this city is unsafe now, the problems are increasing I think". His idea of Select City Walk, a mall that we

frequent during our roaming would largely be considered as 'safe' but in the December 2012 context this proved not to be the case. Similarly when discussing an incident of mass molestation in Bangalore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka in December 2016, Kartik felt that Bangalore as a city had a 'good crowd' because it is a major IT hub in India. He explained "In Bangalore its a good crowd yaar, its very modern there, totally safe for women, this has to be people from outside only who are going to Bangalore". Hence the presences of the 'outsider' other is framed as the reason for such 'unsmartness'.

Such narratives about the random and constant threat that women experienced, is contrasted by the conceptualisation of threat and unsafeness that men experience in the city. Raj explained to me that "men are usually fine around the city and they can go around alone, its not a problem". In contrast, given the randomness of violence towards women, they needed protection and security at all times. Raj clarified his thoughts about men's safety and explained that "at night time I would avoid certain places, or I'll go with other friends so that I'm not alone, but otherwise its okay". Here he hints at the vulnerabilities and experiences of unsafeness that men also have in the city but these are not the same or as random and frequent in the conceptualisation of the Urban Smart Strivers for men as they are for women. There is an assumption that men can usually take care of themselves and fight if they end up in some problem. Iyer (2017) found similarly that young boys in school in Delhi viewed the city as largely safe space for themselves. Interestingly, their female classmates and school teachers also thought the school boys were safer in the city because they could 'take a beating' and were capable of 'fighting back'. This ties up with the very idea of embodying a 'hard' masculinity and the intimate role of violence in the construction of an idealised 'public' and 'masculine' body that I've explored in Chapters Four and Five.

Given such imagination of a constant threat to women, the Urban Smart Strivers felt that spaces where the poor were excluded were largely 'safer' for women. Raj told me that he only 'allowed' his sister to go to good malls and nice cafes because these were at least 'decent' places he felt. Raj explained that "No where is safe these days yaar, but I allow my sisters to go to the mall, it is at least a decent place and decent people only go inside. And there is proper security too". He felt that if "something were to

happen there, at least they could do something”. He explained that the fact that such spaces often had screened entry, CCTV camera that these factors worked as deterrent for men. This was over and above the fact that most working poor or beggars would not be allowed into the space to begin with, hence adding to its ‘safeness’. Such technological and classed ‘solutions’ around gendered violence allow for comfortable ways in which patriarchal masculinities continue on the project of building ‘smart’ selves and ‘safe’ cities whilst restricting women’s mobility. The extent of such ideas was so great amongst the Urban Smart Strivers that Raj suggested to me that “the young woman from the December 2012 incident had taken a ‘cab’ (private taxi) home, these things would not have happened to her”. He explained “She took the bus from the mall yaar, late at night, its not safe at all, if she took a proper cab, she could have shared her details with her parents and there would have been a proper driver to pick her up and drop her. And you know they track the car too, so its much better”. He added that he never allowed his sister to take the bus, the metro was fine and car travel was fine, but never a bus. “From the mall my sister always takes Uber or I have to pick her up, but never bus yaar, who travels in bus anymore anyway!”.

Similarly, unlike the ‘sophisticated’ leisure and pleasure practices of the Urban Smart Striver, the ‘bad habits’ of the poor was another important reason for making Delhi unsafe. Kartik explained at length that he would never enter slums because they were dangerous “you can’t even go near some areas, behind Nizamuddin station or Jailohar area, they are really bad, the men there don’t know anything, they drink cheap local alcohol (*desi darru*) and then they come out and do all these bad things, even near their homes they are fighting and beating their women, its really bad situation”. For Kartik these were ‘obviously unsafe’ areas given the kinds of people that populate them.

In Kartik’s narrative, apart from the spatial distinctions, there are several things that the ‘poor’ do differently and incorrectly - first of all they drink the wrong kinds of alcohol because they are imagined as consuming cheaper domestic and local spirits (*desi darru*) which in this context is an insult and an indicator of the uncouthness of the poor. In contrast, as I explored in Chapter Two, the idea of a ‘Desi Cocktail Bar’ frequented by the Urban Smart Strivers is a sophisticated contrast to the ‘*desi darru*’. The

use of the term '*desi*' literally meaning 'local' is used to ascribe indigenous and particular characteristics to the different spaces and styles of consuming alcohol. The Desi Cocktail Bar in the film *Pyar Ka PUNCH* (Ranjan 2015) becomes a site of India's globalised consumption and leisure spaces which are legal, safe and most importantly desirable and 'smart'. However the '*desi*' alcohol in Kartik's narrative about the poor is a pejorative comment about the poor Indian man who is imagined as stuck in his old 'bad habits' which are at odds with a 'new' India and hence causing violence of various kinds. In this context, there emerges a tangible way of young men to 'sort out' the image of Delhi to their suitability by removing the poor from it.

In contrast to the poor and their habits, the Urban Smart Strivers become 'smart' and 'new' Indian men by protecting middle class women from the poor and their habits. In the process they create a respectable and 'smart' masculinity which attempts to present itself as distinct from the poor and the older cultures of masculinity. Sampat explained this to me succinctly "It is wrong to beat women or to make jokes about them. Now there is different attitude amongst us. Now we think that men and women are different but they are equal now and that is good, there has to be an equal balance. Society is changing". In this discourse gender difference between men and women are naturalised and taken as the starting point. The very idea of being a 'modern' and 'smart' man is linked to a normative incompatibility with 'violence'. Crucially, for young men like Sampat, such a shift in attitudes marks a point of departure from a conventional patriarchal discourse and points to the new repackaging and presentation of patriarchal masculinities. What is also evident from Sampat's comment is that the 'gender order' is changing but at the same time requires a 'balance' which must be 'respected' and adhered to.

Similarly, as Raj's earlier comments point out, the preoccupation is with protecting fellow middle class women on their trips from the malls or college or work and back. There is no discussion about the 'safety' of poor or working class women who traverse the public spaces much more frequently in pursuit of informal work or daily chores (Datta 2016a). The rule-making for which bodies are 'safe' and 'unsafe' in certain spaces, is linked to the imbalanced sexualities discourse that creates and sexualises

and classed bodies that need protecting and ‘safety’ in public spaces. These rules and rule-making are seldom visible or evident. As Gettha (1998, 167) explains, they are built into the very forms of speech and expression, desire and appear like they are linked to the individual body, seemingly instinctive and spontaneous and disengaged and hidden from their own social, historical and economic contexts. Hence in building on my points at the marked nature of ‘smart’ women in the previous chapter, it is similarly the safety of such ‘smart’ women who are sexualised or socially visible in the lives of the Urban Smart Strivers that deserve or require ‘protection’ and ‘safety’.

A New Indian Man’s Protection:

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, this idea of ‘protecting’ women is an important aspect of being and becoming a smart ‘new’ Indian man. Raj for example went to great lengths to tell me how it was his ‘duty’ to look after his mother and his sister. He felt that the general ‘atmosphere’ (*mahol*) in Delhi was not ‘safe’ for them. “In Delhi there are so many problems for ladies yaar, its very unsafe this city, they are having problems everywhere, so we have to be careful and protect them”. In this discussion, the idea of ‘we have to be careful’ appeals to a wider collective patriarchal protection of women that is required of men. As feminist have long argued, this ‘protection’ is an often an extension of the wider need to control and limit women’s sexuality (Menon 2012). However amongst young men like Raj, who lived and were surrounded in a political and social context with a high level of discussion around gendered violence in the media and the public sphere, this idea of ‘threat’ to women really felt to them as a material danger to the lives and bodies of women.

As I have explored, none of the Urban Smart Strivers ever suggested that violence towards women of any kind was acceptable. Nonetheless, they felt that violence does persist. Their job, they often felt, was to mitigate this violence and ‘protect’ women. In doing so, they thought of themselves as being ‘modern’ young men who were more sensitive and thoughtful than a previous generation of men could or would have been. As Raj explained to, “In older times things were really bad, my dad and all are really old fashioned yaar, they don’t know how things are now”. For him being an Urban Smart Striver required not just being positive and optimistic about India’s economic development trajectory, but such

protective sentiments and preoccupations towards women was another marker of the changing face of Indian masculinities in contemporary India. As Raj explained to me, he desired to 'protect' the women in his life because he 'cared' for them. "I really love my sister, I don't want her to be in problems, same with my girlfriend yaar, I really care for her too, I don't want her to have any problems, in the TV everyday some story or the other is coming about these things".

Through such 'good intentions' to 'protect women', young men were often presenting contradictory ideas of on the one hand 'allowing' women 'freedoms' that they did not previous have, yet at the same time, the 'rape capital status of Delhi' made their need to 'protect' women legitimately seem like 'care' and 'affection'. In his research with young men, Romit Chowdhury (2013) explains that it is precisely this idea of care and affection that makes patriarchy is so powerful and patriarchal scripts so difficult to break away from in India because it does not operate on domination alone. He concurs that amongst men, on an everyday level, the context of love and care normalises, perhaps even desirable for men to be successfully patriarchal. From a development practitioner's point of view, he adds that had patriarchal scripts been only oppressive and dominating, they would have been much easier to dismantle. Within this broader social order, Iyer (2018) in her research on young girls and women found that women are closely implicated in such narratives of men's protection and care. In her ethnography with middle-class young women in Delhi, Iyer found that a similar discourse is internalised by women of being 'protected' by families and hence allowing increasing surveillance and monitoring by family members under the rational that they 'care' for them. In this context, young women hesitate to call their families 'backwards' or 'conservative' for placing restrictions and curfews on them. Similarly, for the Urban Smart Strivers, 'protecting' the various women in their lives became a sign of their 'modernity' rather than their 'backwardness'.

As feminist scholars have long demonstrated, a patriarchal masculinities discourse controls women and femininity through a logic of 'protection' and deep-rooted naturalisation of gendered differences (Whitehead, 2001). This means that women become dependent and obedient subjects in the household and as members of the community who get/need 'protection' (ibid). This logic is also extended to a

‘masculinist state’ which becomes a further site in which masculinities also operate under the guise of ‘protection’ (Young, 2003). Building on Butler’s (1999) points from the earlier section on gendered intelligibility, an intelligible ‘woman’ in this context has to create and maintain coherence and continuity between her gender and sexual practice. Institutions like marriage and monogamy are presented as the only legitimate domains for ‘being’ a woman; and her sexuality is supposed to be expressed within these settings (ibid). As Young (2003) demonstrates, ‘good’ women in patriarchies accept male protection. However when a woman refuses or goes against this idea of ‘protection’, she is understood as threat to patriarchal masculinities. In context of contemporary India, Nandy (1998) explains that these ‘threats’ to Indian women are posed not just to women, but also to the nation-state which requires a ‘strong’ masculine response to ‘protect’ women and the nation. These threats have taken different forms during various points in history however in contemporary India. As I have explored, in the contemporary context, the very idea of being and becoming a ‘new’ Indian man required for this narrative around the safety of women and the nation safety to become an integral part of the masculinities discourse for the Urban Smart Strivers in commodified ways.

This link between commodity cultures and the ‘protection’ of women is visible in the market and media based attempts to masculinise consumption and create ‘protection’ as an important aspect of such commodify masculinities. Through the idea of ‘manly shopping’ that I explored for the Urban Smart Strivers in Chapter Three for example, the realm of consumption itself emerges as an important axis through which gendered difference and superiority are repackaged and marketed for the Indian male consumer citizen. Similarly, to counter and correct the image of the ‘rape capital’, consumption again provides avenues for young men to engage with their ‘protective’ roles. To explain this point further, I pick two examples from the cultural worlds of the Urban Smart Strivers which were important to them personally. The HE deodorants advert, which as I explored in Chapter Three (Fig 27) played an important role for Aditya’s self-presentation as a ‘new’ Indian man also sheds light on the ‘safety’ discourse. As I already explored, HE deodorants marketed by Bollywood icon Hrithik Roshan brand themselves as products for ‘active men’ which forms an important part of a ‘active’ and energetic masculine selfhood. In a related advert for the same product, Roshan is seen again, as an ‘active’ confident young man looking into the camera (Fig 27), with the tag line ‘real men respect women’ (*asli*

men respect women). First of all it is striking here that only the word ‘asli’ (real) is in Hindi and the words ‘men’ ‘respect’ and ‘women’ are in English.

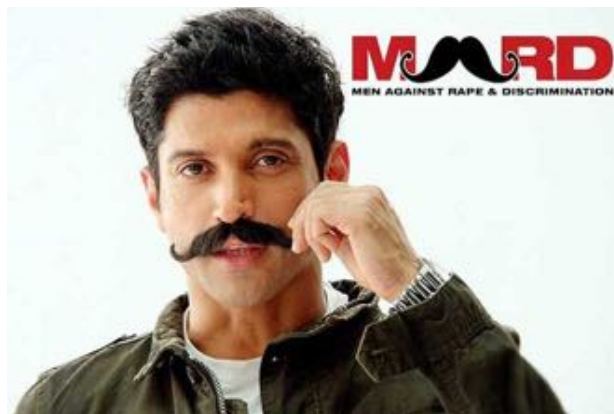


Fig. 27 Advert, HE Deodorants (Source: HEbeinteresting.com)

Fig. 28 MARD Campaign (Source: magicbus.org)

The attempt here is to simultaneously appeal to an indigenous ‘real’ (asli) masculinity whilst at the same time making all the global narratives of being a ‘man’ ‘woman’ and ‘respecting’ also available along side. In line with the embarrassment young men face with Delhi’s image as the ‘rape capital of India’ and often the ‘world’, such a discourse with global and local symbolism attempts to create a distance from such acts of violence to create a more ‘cleansed’ image of indigenous (*asli*/real) masculinities in and through commodity cultures. Further, for Aditya who uses this deodorant, the image of Roshan and his ‘real’ masculinity allow to create a source of distinction and superiority from other local masculinities through the appropriate consumption of such goods.

What is also striking is that in a context of neoliberal enterprise culture of urban India, there is an attempt at combining ideas around an ‘active’ masculinity and a ‘real’ masculinity through this discourse of respecting women. In the process, other masculinities are framed as ‘not real’ or more sharply ‘not real men’. There is an exclusion that is attempted to be created through consumption which assumes a neutral status. Similar to the image of the ‘food for all’ at the Epicuria mall that I explored (Fig 9), here too there is an attempt to present consumption as value free and apolitical and allegedly available for all.

This attempts to hide the deeply political process of creating neoliberal subjectivities and the limits and unequal nature of such a process. Roshan's narrative of 'respecting' women is a narrative echoed by the Urban Smart Strivers who as consumer citizens seek to mark out their version of a 'new' India and within it their 'smart' masculine selves by protecting women. These appeal to what Kaur (2017, 968) explains as a 'chivalric chauvinism' wherein men claim a higher moral and heroic masculinity associated with saving the damsel in distress.

Similarly, in a different but related campaign on 'unsafe' cities, actor Farhan Akhtar initiated the 'mard' campaign in Fig 28 above. The word 'mard' in Hindi literally translates to 'man' and the symbolic use of a upturned moustache as the alphabet 'a' in the word 'mard' makes this link to a masculinity visceral and embodied. The fact that the ends of the moustache look like men's biceps, tensed in a show of strength seems deliberate to fit within the broader message of the campaign around a masculine 'toughness'. In the widely popular TV campaign for Mard, Akhtar rattles of various 'alarming' statistics about women's assault rates and their average age of getting married in India being 16 years old. Such figures are then contrasted and compared randomly but symbolically to countries like the United Kingdom. Similar to Akhtar's pose in Fig X, in the video too it is significant that he sports a moustache and a t-shirt with a stern expression on his face, without smiling and looking directly into the camera. At the end of the clip, he folds his arms, lifts his head and demands other men to follow him if they are 'Mard' or 'Men'. The next scene explains that Mard stands for 'Men against rape and discrimination'. Hence the advert ends by questioning the masculinities of men and challenges them to follow Akhtar's lead if they are '*mard*' or man. Here the anxiety about the image of India and Delhi in relation to the economic superpowers like the UK in it's record for 'women's issues' parallels the aspirational anxieties of the Urban Smart Strivers going to 'Club London' in Chapter Three. What is also striking here is that the challenge to live up to this 'new' Indian man of a 'new' India image, young men are directly challenged to act upon. This challenge is clear in that the failure to rise and be a 'mard' (*man*), results in the failure to achieve a masculine status. The etymology of the word 'mard' is crucial because the inability to protect women allows for a fundamental breakdown in being a patriarchal man and hence becoming a 'namard' (non-masculine being)

This narrative about masculine protection and the failure to achieve masculine status by not providing this ‘protection’ has significance in how young men themselves reference and think about ‘correcting’ the image of Delhi and with it India. As Raj explained to me once that “lifting your hand on a woman is unmanly activity, it is *namardgiri* (unmanly)”. Here his use of the word, ‘namard’ or unmanly/impotent was typical for how the Urban Smart Strivers conceptualised gendered violence in their subjective positions as new Indian men of a ‘new’ India - often through using similar emasculating words like ‘*chakagiri*’ (acts of a transperson) or ‘*gandu*’ (effeminate man) to describe violence towards women as something only ‘unsmart’ or ‘unmanly’ men would do. Such ‘unmanly’ actions of men, are in direct opposition to the idea of ‘mard’ or the ‘real man’ articulated in the two ad campaigns. In contrast to conventional academic and policy thinking (Messerschmidt 2000), in this discourse violence towards women is not a site for demonstrating masculine power for the Urban Smart Strivers. Rather it now presented as the site for emasculation and demonstrating a lack of masculine power normatively.

What is also important to note is that gendered difference and inequality are not addressed systemically in such narratives. Rather the preoccupation is with masculine status and respectability in and through the control and status of women. This process has important parallels with the ‘reform’ movements in colonial India wherein that status of women and their ‘upliftment’ became the major prerogative of Indian men (Gupta 2002, 2011). Similarly during the India-Pakistan partition violence, Srivastava (2012) explains that violence towards women had similarly come to be framed as the inability of men to protect ‘their women’. Hence the framing of gendered violence amongst the Urban Smart Strivers as emasculating has to be considered within its sociopolitical context, rather than as a celebration of a more ‘inclusive masculinity’ (Anderson 2009) or to make generalised developmental and policy claims about ‘engaging’ men and boys for ‘gender justice’ (Cornwall, Edström & Greig, 2011). Indeed Nivedita Menon (2001, 156) has long pointed out, that the meaning of rape and violence in India have to be understood thoroughly before jumping to conclusions because ‘rape as violation’ is not only a feminist understanding but it can be perfectly compatible with patriarchal, nationalist and sexist notions of women’s bodies and sexualities as demonstrated by the Urban Smart Striver’s discourse.

A New Indian Man's Entitlements

Although gendered violence has a public and political discourse around it, as I have demonstrated modern patriarchal masculinities are moulding discourses of being a respectable man around them. In this context, there is no fundamental challenge to patriarchal positioning and power of men, but a rearrangement in how such gendered inequalities are framed and practiced. As Raj once explained to me whilst in the metro “Friend, you know it is not right to lift your hand on women, but a little bit you have to keep them under control, otherwise they get out of hand (*control mein rakhna padta hai*). He went further to explain to me that “Girls can be very immature, they don’t know the ways of the world (*dunyadari*), you can’t listen to them all the time, you have to guide them a little bit”. The essential element of Raj’s narrative about women’s presumed lack of maturity in ways of the world, stemmed from women’s gendered positioning as dependent on men.

Such display of power and control over women, as well as other bodies and spaces, is central to how the Urban Smart Strivers cultivate and maintain a sense of control over urban space. One example of this process of trying to demonstrate control and power was when Aman tried to teach me how to display some ‘akkad’ (arrogance). Aman and I were out on his motorbike and decided to stop at a street stall to order some fast food. When the waiter came over to our motorbike, I was getting off the bike he looked at me so I smiled and asked him how he was in an attempt to make pleasantries. The young male waiter not knowing how to respond did not say anything and passed us the battered menus smiling. Aman was irritated at my attempt at talking to the waiter and in front of the waiter told me “you should talk with a bit more hardness and don’t talk so much to everyone”. Then without looking at the young waiter he continued to peer into the menu and asked the waiter “what will we get fast” in a deeper than usual tone of voice. The lesson for me was complete through this demonstration of how I had was supposed to behave. After we had placed our order, Aman continued the conversation “with these types of people you have to be a bit hard, you have to keep people a little afraid, don’t show all your cards (*sare pate mat dikha*)”. This was also part of the wider process of teaching me ‘*dunyadari*’ (ways of world) to allegedly make things easier for me whilst in Delhi, as various informant told me. I was supposed to accept these as valuable tips and ways of navigating the city. Through

embodying a masculinity that shows '*akkad*' and has the ability to 'instil fear' the aim is to demonstrate social standing and power and through that get privileges. Talking with '*akkad*' is crucial to demonstrate superiority and the fact that young men are urban and strivers rather than lower middle class or not well connected. Similar to the idea of being '*chauda*' (wide) that I explored in Chapter Four, one of the aim of creating a 'wide body' for men through the gym was to create an image of masculine respectability by demonstrating the power to be violent.

These masculine entitlements over 'ignorant' women or 'types of people' like waiters are not natural or fixed. But they are performed by men in ways that a localised patriarchy operates. The fact that Aman can 'teach' me these ways of demonstrating my classed and gendered entitlements hints to the process of 'learning' and 'performing' such entitlements within a social context where such practices can bring young men great dividends in different forms. As feminists in India have long pointed out, masculine power operates in and through class and gendered relationships rather than outside of them (Chakravarti 1993).

For young men like Raj, this sense of entitlement over women and other bodies is bolstered by their entitlement over space and the nation owing to their position as consumer citizens. There is a sense of great 'injustice' that they experience when they feel 'disobeyed' particularly by women. There is a disturbance of a seemingly natural order and this warrants a response. As I noticed, within the relationship these dynamics are much more complex and men are not powerful beings and there is great levels of communication and compromise that is required. Yet, normatively, within the gender this balance in the way men understand it, has to be maintained for them.

Men's potential for violence and the embodiment of power is something the Urban Smart Strivers felt also attracted women to them. Raj explained to me that because girls were 'immature' they needed guidance. This 'fact' was legitimised for him by the fact that, he felt, young women often wanted him to make decisions about what they should wear, what colour suited them the best, how to do 'difficult things' etc. In this case, the performance of an appropriately 'delicate' femininity on the part of

women, meant that Raj's own idea of a 'macho' and 'tough' embodiment were positively received, if not required. Raj once candidly told me "If you can't protect your girlfriend, if you can't fight for her, then why will she pick you? No girl wants a man who can't fight". In this case, the eroticised and glamourised image of a muscular body that has the power to be violent, meant that young men too had to demonstrate such power to be classed as 'new' Indian men. Hence the very idea of masculine entitlement and power over women required a careful co-performance of corresponding femininities that validate and encourage such masculine performances (Bulter 2006).

At other times, Raj also resorted to more frustrated measures. When spending time with a young woman who Raj was trying to woo, he made sure to dress well and spent money trying to entice the young woman with movie dates and sweet talk. However when the relationship did not progress as Raj would have liked, he was quick to tell me that "she is like this only" and called her a "girja" which is a derogatory term for a sex worker. This framing of her as a woman who was not 'moral', it became more intense with him blocking her from Facebook and refusing to take down a photo that they had taken together. Raj told me "why should I take it down, it's my Facebook she can't tell me what to do" and proceeded to leave the image on public view. At one point, Raj 'unblocked' the young woman in the vain hope of reinstating conversation and the young woman wrote publicly on his Facebook wall how she did not want her image to remain public and Raj wrote back telling her that he was not going to take it down. Eventually, the young woman ended up blocking Raj and he was furious to have been blocked by her, when he felt he had extended a hand of friendship by 'unblocking' her. In conversation with me Raj explained several times that he "knew where she lived" and that he would tell "people" "the truth" about her.

In Honey Singh's hugely successful pop song called 'Four Bottles of Vodka' (Char Bottle Vodka) several themes around a modern Indian vision of leisure and self along with entitlements over women and space come together. The song itself has former pornstar turned actress Sunny Leone as the main female protagonist who Honey Singh adores. The song forms part of the less commercially successful film *Ragini MMS 2* (Dubey 2014) however the catchy beats of the song made it popular amongst

most sections and spaces, unlike the film. The image of the song has Leone laying on a bar with ‘modern’ looking alcohol bottles and lights behind her and the rapper Singh looking away from the camera and onto Leone’s legs. Apart from the ‘modern’ surroundings, Leone’s non-vertical pose has parallels to analysis of women’s sexual objectification and a masculine visual narrative in various cultural contexts (see for example McDowell 1997, Uberoi 2006). His lyrics further explain this masculine entitlement “Drink as much as your stomach can hold, go to anyone’s woman and say hello, hello baby, how do you do?” (*Kisi ki bandi ko bhi hello, hello baby, how do you do?*). Honey’s other popular songs entitled ‘Cunt’ (*Choot*) and ‘I’m a Rapist’ (*Mein Hoon Balatkari*) have made him a controversial singer, but have not greatly dented his mass popularity and presence in India because at the time of fieldwork, Honey Singh remained India’s most downloaded and highest paid singer.



Fig. 29 Four Bottles of Vodka, Singh (Source: Dubey 2014)

However a breach on the part of women, from their particular types of masculinist positioning, brings to light the sense of entitlement and control the Urban Smart Strivers try to enforce. Once when Aman and I were enjoying our usual tea, a group of young women was walking past the tea stall. There were a few bars in the A Block of Connaught Place where music was coming out onto the street in an attempt to attract customers. As the young women heard the catchy beat, one of them responded by breaking away from her group of female friends and briefly dancing to the tune of the song. She moved her shoulders and her head to match the rhythm of the song and pressed her lips together tightly to create an exaggerated expression as she bobbed her head in sync with her shoulders. This spontaneous burst

of dance resulted in the group of girls laughing and egging their friend on and came to a quick end when the dancer ran back to the group with great laughter and they walked forward.

Responding to this scene from our seats on the wall, Aman in an amused and quick gesture looked at me and said “Sisterfucker (*bebnchod*) she’s moving her head like this like this” whilst mimicking her actions. Once he finished the step he too burst out laughing and gestured for me to put my palm out for him to clap it with his palm. He then said “Sisterfucker, these girls yaar” and sat back down on the wall. Through this incident and Aman’s response he attempted to mark and point out the breach that the young woman’s actions in public had caused. First of all by the very fact that Aman had to comment on this ‘dance’ which lasted a mere few seconds hints to the marked nature of women’s presence in public spaces. It also hints at the way women are expected to move and be noticeable in public spaces, and the response they can elicit if they do not follow these social and gendered codes. The fact that the young woman moved her body freely and took on an active embodied subjectivity in an urban public space meant that she breached the masculinist codes with which women are supposed and expected to access public space. This was a deviation from the ‘closed’ body posture that women are supposed to have. This deviation is commented upon with disapproval and a sense of amazement as Aman finds it difficult to articulate what exactly is breached here. The swearing followed by the comment of “these girls” points to the gendered disorder taking place in the context. His reaction is similar to Raj’s idea of ‘what girls have become’ about such gendered disorder in contemporary society.

As I demonstrated in a previous chapter, the privilege and sense of entitlement that Aman’s body has in Connaught Place is so great that he can urinate and display his penis to another man without any sense of shame. However the actions of a young woman in that same space hints to her shamelessness which is not allowed or accepted. This marks out not just men’s entitlement to space and the sexualisation and desexualisation of bodies, but also hints at the active attempt to discipline women’s actions and bodies in public spaces. Similarly, Aman and I on several occasions also witnessed the movements of young ‘effeminate’ men coming in and out of the ‘gay park’ with various male companions which was within close quarters of our tea spot. Mirroring many of Rahul’s comments that I explored in the previous

chapters, Aman too would tell to me when one of these young men would pass by “Look here, the lady-types (*behnji's*) are here” and burst out laughing. For him, similar to the anxieties Rahul expressed, such men were not really ‘real men’ and their entry into the public space became marked for their deviance in ways that were similar to the marked nature of the young woman’s ‘dancing’.

The fragility of men’s attempt to claim a sense of entitlement and control over space and bodies becomes evident in the everyday occupation of the space by various bodies and performances of gender. The young ‘effeminate’ men in the park near Connaught Place often took great pleasure in demonstrating and playing with this fragile respectability. They would deliberately go to cigarette stands in groups and stare at men, often laughing at the ‘straight men’ and trying to intimidate them. One young man called Narayan who was very tall and thin, hence striking in his own way, would take great pleasure in demonstrating to me how his presence could be marked and hence create ‘gender trouble’ (Butler 2006). He would grab me by the arm and tell me “Come, let’s make them look, just look at their faces”. Having said this Narayan would pull me along as he would sashay through the crowds, confidently and ostentatiously but always in a relaxed and controlled manner. He would press his lips together, in the same way the young woman who danced in the street did, and glare confidently at the many middle-class shoppers roaming around Connaught Place.

In response, as I observed whilst being pulled along with Narayan, his presences and embodied movements were noticed disapprovingly by most people. Young men would often tap each other to point out Narayan and they would snigger or sometimes openly laugh and ridicule him. Married older women shopping with their children or husbands would also stare disapprovingly and make nosies with their tongues to express their displeasure. For Narayan breaching and confidently moving through such a space required a concerted effort and often support. I became a friend he would enjoy doing such ‘mischief’ with as he put it, but similar to the themes I explored in Chapter Four on Desexing the Body, often such ‘fun’ would have to be curbed and replaced with a more respectable form of masculine embodiment when roaming around the city space. Nonetheless, the very fact that a young man like Narayan, or indeed the young woman dancer, occupy public space and do breach the norms of their

gendered subjectivities, hints to the inherent fragility of men's attempts to lay claims over the same space. Indeed as Massey (1994) might argue, the very fact that young men like Narayan or the young 'dancing' women are deemed as being 'out of place' hints to how such a 'place' is constructed and who is within it and who is outside. However these practices of place making are not fixed and are constantly being negotiated. Nonetheless, through men's practices and attempts at maintaining masculine respectability through such a practices there is a stabilisation of patriarchal heteronormativity where in it is attempted to be stabilised and begins to appears as the norm (Rao 2013).

The Urban Smart Strivers like Aman are anxious of such breach to the boundaries of place making and attempt to discipline and control it through their swearing, mockery and aggression towards these 'troubling' bodies. Aman for example is openly hostile towards any 'effeminate' people who come to the tea stand for tea or buying single cigarettes given that these were all spaces located close to each other. As an ethnographer who spent a long time in the field and frequenting these various sites systematically, being 'caught out' was a constant anxiety for me as I negotiated moving between the spaces and their particular cultures. On several occasions, I had to give elaborate explanations to various informants as to how or what I was doing when I bumped into them at non designated times. Nonetheless, the idea of me having just come out 'ghumne' without purpose often seemed to suffice as justification. However a painful experience for political and personal reasons was when spending time with my key informants I had to deliberately ignore friends and acquaintances from the park. As a politically engaged queer person, it always bothered me that I evaded acknowledging my friends and their 'troubling' masculinities because it would compromise my position as a researcher who was largely interested in studying heteronormative masculinities and its operations.

At the same time what I discovered was that not only were the 'effeminate' young men of the park brave and playful in their attempts to challenge heteronormativity, but they were always more understanding. Narayan for example one evening having spotted me and Aman at the tea stall and came over to the stand to buy some tea for himself. As soon as I noticed him at the tea stall, I became uncomfortable about the possibility of getting 'outed' myself in front of Aman. However having

sensed my nervousness and self-conscious attempts at avoiding eye contact with Narayan, he did not come over to Aman and me to talk with me. When Narayan did not approach us, I was both very glad but also perplexed. Later in conversation with Narayan in the week I discovered that his sensitivity and quick thinking meant that he did not come over to say hello even though he would have liked to. Narayan explained to me “yeah yeah I saw you but I thought you were with a colleague or a cousin or something, that’s why I did not come to talk, its totally normal”. Given my discussion of how young men have to socially manage their ‘dating’ away from their families or the ‘public’, such management was something that ‘effeminate’ young men in the park had also come to do. Apart from often ‘straightening up’ on leaving the park and going home, young men had come to manage their non-normative sexual relationships within the folds of a powerful heteronormativity. Young men from the park know and understand that often other ‘park friends’ (Seabrook 1999) would be out shopping with mothers, fathers or colleagues in front of whom the facade of heteronormative masculine respectability would have to be kept up. Within this context, young men like Narayan had become adept at reading signs of nervousness or discomfort, like the ones I was displaying, as markers of when causing ‘gender trouble’ was not appropriate.

Conclusions:

In this chapter, I have explored how the Urban Smart Strivers go around having ‘innocent’ fun in various part of the city through their gendered and classed entailments over spaces and bodies. At the same time, the young men are sensitive about the image of Delhi as the ‘rape capital’ and attempt to address it by externalising blame onto poor and migrant men in the city. Through this they try to become ‘modern’ ‘desexed’ and ‘public’ men who ‘protect’ women and urban spaces within a heteronormative masculinities discourse against the imagined violence of the poor. Such attempts however are challenged and troubled by the presence of various ‘non-smart’ masculinities which begin to challenge the ordering of spaces and bodies and have to be disciplined to maintain the heteronormative and patriarchal social ordering of public spaces.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the key themes from the empirical chapters to explore how urban youth masculinities come together with the politics of space, age and class to create a gendered city space. The chapter aims to answer the main research question and offer some concluding remarks. It begins by exploring what being an Urban Smart Striver means for the young men and what it tells us about how socioeconomic shifts are changing social relations in contemporary India. I then move on to understand how the city itself is ‘remapped’ by young men to show the gendered and classed nature of this process and then in the next section look at what such a remapping tells us about a ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ India. I then explore the fragilities of masculinities and end with unpacking the significance of the title of this thesis *A City of Men*?

Being Urban Smart Strivers

I began this thesis with the opening lines of the film *3 Idiots* which was a huge commercial success in India particularly amongst urban youth. As we might recall from that opening scene, three young men discuss the lives their parents envisage for them and contrast this with their own plans and desires on leading a ‘good life’. The obedient son with well-oiled hair who has an arranged marriage, is pitted against an outgoing, fun and energetic young man who enjoys a ‘good life’ full of consumer goods, friends and a great sense of social and sexual ‘freedom’. This latter representation of a ‘modern’ male self, provided an ‘inspiration’ for the young men I worked with on how they could lead a life that is more ‘open’ and morally superior in a changing India. As I have shown in this thesis, the Urban Smart Strivers put in great effort to mirror many such ideas of a ‘good life’ in their everyday social worlds.

The paradox however is that young men cannot fully or always live this life because they are not free floating agents. They are bound deeply within relationships of obligations and kinships networks which they cannot so easily abandon. In this process, young men try their best, to strike a balance and to lead a life that they deem as valuable. As I explored in Chapter Three *A New Indian Man*, young men create

an inner social world of their own where they live and build a life ‘good life’ which they value. It is in and through this inner social world, away from the authority of their families, that I have approached and probed young Indian masculinities.

The Urban Smart Strivers lead compartmentalised lives where on the one hand they try to appease their parents by appearing to be obedient sons who do not partake in the ‘taboo’ behaviours of drinking, smoking, sexual activities or parties. Yet, these ‘taboo’ behaviours are extremely valuable and desirous practices within their cultures of urban youth masculinity, which are bolstered and encouraged by media forces and the changes to the urban leisure architecture as new ways of enjoying a ‘free’ life and ‘new’ thinking. It is through subterfuge and a careful management of the self that young men manage to participate in these pleasures of a ‘new’ India. Within their inner homosocial worlds, young men dance, drink and smoke, they meet girls, enjoy sexual and romantic relationships, they shop, take selfies and enjoy what they deem as being ‘free’ and ‘modern’. The forces of neoliberalism which are highly malleable also work around these social constraints for example through offering ‘afternoon parties’ which I explored in Chapter Three A New Indian Man. Such practices allow for both the moral and social worlds of the young men to coexist side by side without really challenging each other but remaining in a constant tension.

It is this tension that is at the heart of the great anxiety the Urban Smart Strivers experience. Indeed, the very idea of being a ‘striver’ underscores this anxiety. First of all, there is anxiety in learning how to socially and culturally participate in the spaces and practices of a ‘new’ urban leisure architecture, whilst also making sure that they are not ‘caught’ by their families whilst doing so. Similarly there is fear of various ‘backward’ qualities of the self, the city and India that are blamed on ‘outsiders’ and ‘rustic/rural’ bodies and their unintelligent and non-civic ways of being. This externalisation narrative is crucial for the Urban Smart Strivers to attempt to address their personal and social anxieties and enable them with power and legitimacy to be young consumer-citizens of ‘new’ India who can ‘remedy’ these issues. As I have shown, the process of being and becoming an ‘Urban Smart Striver’ is never complete or fully achieved. It is always a process in motion, changing in the context of what is ‘smart’ and valuable

within the context at a given time. In being Urban Smart Strivers, young men have the difficult task of managing their changing relationships with their families, their relationships with women as well as their relationships with urban spaces. Young men's lives are caught up in an anxious state of being where they are neither here nor there. This anxiety is also linked to a deeper question of what it means to be a 'man' in a changing India. The 'new' Indian man for them is normatively a 'modern' figure who is active, smart and enterprising, but he is also connected to his family and the 'old'. This figure attempts to bridge the two moral worlds and thinks of himself as a morally superior way of being. As I show in the thesis, it is only through focusing on the lived realities of young men that the dialectic and contradictory processes which require creating a code of how to switch across multiple social worlds of belonging can be unpacked.

The making of an Urban Smart Striver and his 'smart' surroundings take place on multiple scales. On the one hand, it is at the level of the individual and the personal where through embodied consumption a 'smart' self image is constructed and performed. However this also requires a 'smart' city and various 'smart' places on a larger scale which allow for the image of a smart nation to emerge. These spaces operate relationally and socio-spatially at different scales which link the self, the city and the nation together. Young men themselves access and engage with these narratives across different scales. Similarly, the corresponding anxieties of the Urban Smart Strivers also operate across multiple scales, they are anxious about 'being' urbane and smart on the one hand, but they are also anxious about the unevenness of the 'smart' landscape and the warped idea of a 'smart' nation. As I show in the thesis the everyday lives of the Urban Smart Strivers, lived in a highly unequal contexts, brings them in an intimate and troubling relationships with their own selves, other bodies, and the city. They are constant thorny reminders of their inability to be completely 'smart'.

In the pursuit of being Urban Smart Strivers, I have shown that the idea of striving to be part of a 'new' India means that this anxiety around a constantly projected story of change, requires young men to put in great effort and resources into 'making' their bodies and their selves to belong in line with its projected messages and images. This active construction of the embodied self in appearing to be

‘modern’ and ‘smart’ for them, is a process which requires constant and appropriate consumerism and a commodified masculine embodiment as well as access to new commodified and exclusive spaces which are forcefully separated from the rest of the social context. In embodying a commodified masculinity, a ‘new’ Indian man’s body goes through marked changes. He is on the one hand a glamourised and carefully manufactured body, but at the same time narratives about the ‘natural’ strength of men and their ‘hardiness’ make these practices appear as ‘normal’ rather than highly stylised or vain to them. By appropriately embodying a ‘smart’ and urbane appearance and image, they create for themselves a social standing and claim to power as consumer citizens in ‘new’ India.

In being these Urban Smart Strivers they also facilitate the appropriate gendered consumer identities and practices of women which are always defined in relation to their own ‘masculine’ practices. Ordering different drinks for women for example which I explored in Chapter Five A Smart and Masculine City, allow the Urban Smart Strivers to be and remain ‘masculine’ within sociocultural worlds and allowing women an appropriately complimentary femininity through feminised forms of consumption. Yet as I show, when women are represented as not drinking these ‘sweet drinks’ but preferring the ‘hard masculine’ drinks, this cohesion between appropriate consumptions and gendered construction of masculinities and femininities gets disturbed and challenged. There is a constant anxiety in making sure that consumption is appropriately classed and gendered and the neoliberal market forces create and feed these insecurities by warning young men like the Urban Smart Strivers to make sure they are consuming ‘manly’ goods, whilst at the same time attempting to make a set of gendered discourses around commodities appear normal. The emergence of ‘manly shopping’ habits amongst the Urban Smart Strivers serves as an indicator of the way Indian men may continue to be targeted through such binary discourses by market forces in a neoliberalising India. Particularly given women’s growing economic and consumer potential in India, consumption itself is a gendered site wherein men try to feel safely masculine and unthreatened by women. However such manly consumption is fraught with challenges that are never fully resolved for young men as I have explored.

Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers their class position and gendered position operate in and through each other to provide them with a great sense of entitlement and control. In this process, both markers of classed and gendered power have to be correctly embodied by young men in order to create a legible masculinity that can be 'respected'. The very process of being urbane and smart allows young men great power and access to spaces, bodies and resources of a 'new' India. They are entitled young men wherein their already privileged class positions is further compounded by their gendered positions. Their power comes from their marked role as 'new' Indian men and their importance within a particular developmental trajectory of India where the nation is turned into a nation for the middle classes and is presented as a nation in service of the various consumer and lifestyle demands of the middle classes. This in turn allows young men like Raj and Aditya to display a great sense of authority and claim over the city and its bodies as well as the nation. As a result, the poor can be dominated and pushed around by the Urban Smart Strivers based on their perceived moral and social superiority.

Similarly, as the opening clip from *3 Idiots* indicates, the socioeconomic change is providing new spaces for romantic and sexual desires for young men like Raj and Aditya have girlfriends in a context where their interaction with women is heavily controlled by their families. Nonetheless, young men date their girlfriends in clandestine ways away from the gaze of their families, but in 'public' places of 'new' India like its many malls, metro stations and cafes. The Urban Smart Strivers initial contact with women too has similarly been made more accessible and possible through their wide reach of smartphones and internet data now available in India due to the profound shift in communication technologies. In this process, 'modern' spaces for dating and 'modern' ways of connecting with women become valuable and important sites where young men feel legitimated in their desires and sexual expressions towards women, their world of selfies, clothes, grooming and aesthetics to make sexually and socially attractive selves. These are practices that are legitimated and given a social purpose and value as part of a 'good life'. It is in this symbolic field of meanings and ideas about a 'good life' that young men's practices of smoking, drinking, dating whilst also being 'tough' and 'hard' as repackaged practices of a 'new' India.

However as this thesis has hinted, the power of arranged marriage as the norm is deeply pervasive and powerful in India. Amongst the Urban Smart Strivers there is no clarity if their girlfriends will ever become wives. Indeed as scholars demonstrate, a 'social conservatism' (Jaffrelot and Van De Veer 2008) amongst the middle classes means that gendered norms and practices are rigid and reproduced in new forms. Although the Urban Smart Strivers are unmarried, studies with similar profiled older educated and upwardly mobile men suggests that girlfriends almost never do become wives. Carol Upadhyay's work (2008, 2009) with Software engineers shows for example that most such men, even when they work with women on a daily basis in close quarters, prefer getting arranged marriages organised by their families. This allows the young men a sense of giving control to their families which they think is a good and noble indicator of being 'Indian'. Similarly Patricia Uberoi (2006, 25) suggests that 'arranged love marriage' wherein young men and women claim to 'fall in love' after getting married, is the solution to the central contradiction between parental authority and modern pleasures of a 'new' India. This suggests that the clandestine and secretive dating practices of the Urban Smart Strivers that I explored in the thesis maybe a recurring and powerful trend that may not change soon. Young men may constantly require keeping up this balance of dating women on the side but not challenging the authority of their families.

Similarly, the process of embedding and normalising a heteronormative culture of urban youth masculinity is a fragile process. This thesis has probed the extent and limits of such a discourse in the everyday context of the Urban Smart Strivers, where young men have to engage in homosexual activities in hidden ways. Amongst the young men, there is an attempt to present heterosexual macho masculinities as the norm which further attempts to shape and usurp public spaces through such practices of normalisation. However, as I have demonstrated, in a city like Delhi, an enquiry into the margins and cracks of this heteronormative discourse provides ample evidence to the limits of such a discourse. Young men engage in non-normative sex inside moving metros and in the heart of 'new' India in spaces like the 'gay park' in Connaught Place hinting to the socially constructed nature of such spaces and their contestable meanings. Ironically, as I have shown in the thesis, Aman and his girlfriend can walk around in Connaught Place in Central Delhi and some of the 'new' places around the city but

they cannot hold hands in other parts of the city for fear of taunts or even violence for such blatant a display of a 'modern' and sexualised relationship. However Aman can demonstrate a great amount of physical intimacy with other men in all parts of the city because of a desexualised public narrative.

Remapping A City

The centrality of urban spaces outside the home has been demonstrated as crucial for understanding young urban Indian masculinities and their cultures. For the Urban Smart Strivers, a great sense of entitlement over the city and the nation result in a particular conceptualisation of the city and its organisation, as well as their belonging within it. Young men are taught and encouraged to be active members of the 'outside' world or learning the act of '*dunyadari*' as I have explored in the thesis. This allows the Urban Smart Striver a great sense of ease with which they can be in public spaces without purpose and aimlessly go 'roaming'. The power of this discourse is such that masculine bodies themselves are constructed to be unproblematic in public spaces and are legitimately allowed to be there if they play by the masculinist rules of the space. In this process, both the city and masculinities work together to remap the city space as a masculine space and cast masculine bodies as 'public' bodies. That is why studying the 'public' nature of youth masculinities has been crucial in this thesis.

The unevenness of the 'smart' landscape of the cities in India, mean that it is only within certain spaces in the city, like the mall, the metro or the gym, that the Urban Smart Striver can become urbane and smart in the ways that they would like to. Just like young men try to live lives in compartmentalised ways to build coherent narratives of a 'modern' subjectivity, the city too is imagined and accessed in pockets and enclaves. Not all places, parts and people of the city are part of the Urban Smart Strivers imagination of their city. For them, their imaginary 'smart' city is where their idea of a 'new' India and its smart and 'new' Indians exist. In this process, urban spaces are remapped in the collective imaginary of the young men and the middle classes more broadly as 'developed' and 'real' whereas the rest of the city becomes the '*kachra*' (garbage) which needs to be addressed. This then raises further questions about what the future holds for the urban poor as economic inequality and the removal of slums intensify in cities like Delhi (Baviskar 2003, 2006, Bhan 2009, Ghertner 2015).

Similarly, the remapping of city space by young men is very different to women's ideas of the same spaces as has been long argued (Ardner 1993). In the context of the Urban Smart Strivers, they think and access the city space as 'their city' and it is imagined as a masculine place. 'Modern' spaces like the mall or the cinema multiplex or metro are seen as being 'smart' new places which are above the 'old' problems of India and are imagined to be egalitarian for men and women in the narratives of the Urban Smart Strivers. Hence through association with these spaces of the city, the Urban Smart Strivers get a sense of being the smart and urbane men who 'respect' women and are 'modern' in ways that they would like to be. Yet at the same time, as I have demonstrated in the thesis, patriarchal biases against women and their access to spaces continue to remerge and present themselves in new forms without allowing them to be identifiable as oppressive or biased. In and through these spaces, the 'smart' city is remapped in the imagination of the Urban Smart Strivers, as a neutral and 'free' space, however women's presence is hypersexed and marked in them.

Apart from the gendered dynamic, there is an important classed dimension here which is crucial for the Urban Smart Strivers who find almost no urban space inaccessible. A confident display of a groomed and 'smart' masculine self, allows young men entry to many spaces and access to services. It becomes important for them to act with an embodied sense of gravity and purpose to demonstrate their entitlement and their social connections over all spaces of the city given their superior perception of themselves as pursuers of a 'new' India. For example, the idea of showing '*akkad*' or arrogance/entitlement when moving around the city with other 'brothers' were practices by the Urban Smart Strivers to show their social status which indicated not just gendered and classed power, but a sense of social connectivity with similar brothers. As I have demonstrated, going to 'fancy' or 'nice' places is anxiety provoking and is an activity that requires great effort and appropriate embodiment and hence the remapping of the city as a masculine and classed city requires concerted and regular effort to keep it as a city for such men. In this process, other types of men and masculinities who are deemed as not appropriately belonging have to be socially and often physically excluded to establish and maintain a sense of masculine and classed control. In this way, the thesis has demonstrated that spaces of leisure and modernity are being claimed and maintained as masculine middle class spaces in a 'new' India.

The process of building a gendered city is a heteronormative construction as the thesis has tried to argue. The city also provides spaces to meet for other young men like Rahul, Narayan and their 'park friends' to congregate. Similarly, the changes in the urban leisure and consumption architecture brought in by global capital are also providing a new ray of hope for young men like Narayan about creating social through consumption and slow changes in the public culture. As Narayan once explained to me "New films are coming out about gay stuff, so even my parents are knowing about it now. And now Starbucks and GAP and Tanshiq etc all these big brands are giving positive messages about accepting gays, so I am sure things will change". The idea of 'homonationalism' (Puar, 2017) is turned on its head in many ways by young men like Narayan in India, who feel that global capital and the making of a 'smart city' could provide an in road by making non-normative sexualities and practices respectable much like the way being an Urban Smart Striver has become respectable in the and through consumption and leisure architecture of 'new' India. However as various queer studies scholars demonstrate, the neoliberal 'pink washing' agenda brings with itself the homogenising and standardisation of sexual identities (Boyce 2006, Barker 2013) What is also important to point out is that as various scholars in India explain, these processes also open up the space for young men like Rahul to become more hardened and narrow in their homophobic attitudes towards other men through their rigid ideas of 'Indian values' and an Indian 'masculine respectability' which are exoticised and marketed through various narratives in a 'new' India (Krishnan 2014a, Rao 2013). Hence what emerges is a complex picture about the future of neoliberalism and the rights and spaces of queer people in India where their sexual practices continue to be illegal.

Making a 'Safe/Unsafe' India:

As this thesis has argued, in being Urban Smart Strivers, young men like to think of themselves as more 'modern' than their fathers and an older generation. In this narrative, their alleged sensitivity to discourses about gendered violence towards women and equality are crucial in bolstering their sense of being righteous young men who are 'new' Indian men who 'respect' women. They would hate to think of themselves as violent young men or men who were aggressive towards women because their self-

representation of themselves as 'modern' is precisely because they perceive themselves to be more egalitarian and welcoming towards women. This self-perception of the Urban Smart Strivers strengthens their sense of moral superiority and entitlement by allowing them to think of themselves as 'better' and a part of 'new' India.

As a result of this process, the Urban Smart Strivers self-congratulate themselves on their ability to hold conversations with women, pull out chairs for women to sit in restaurants and take pride in allowing women to shop for 'whatever' they want and getting them 'sweet' drinks which are allegedly suitable to their natural dispositions. Through this, gendered inequalities are glamorised and turned into the very terms through which young middle class men and women interact and associate with each other. These newly cultivated habits and traits of 'dealing' with women in new spaces are presented and learnt as projects of 'self-improvements' amongst men in keeping with the neoliberal cultural tropes that surround them. They hence learn how to who 'respect' women by treating women differently and respecting the 'natural' difference of the gendered binary. This has worrying consequences in the Indian context where gender biases are rife amongst the middle classes and their social and political influence keeps increasing without check.

Within this context, as I have shown in Chapter Seven *A Safe/Unsafe City*, a narrative of 'protecting women' emerges and gets legitimised. This narrative situates young middle class men in the role of 'protecting women' and in this process helps to address the problems of 'old' India where there was allegedly a lack of respect for women. Such 'old' traits are also prescribed onto rural, poor and migrant men and masculinities who are inherently lacking in the 'modern' qualities of the 'new' Indian male and hence are prone to irrational violence and unjust acts of gendered bias. Through this narrative, the city becomes remapped as an 'unsafe' city because of these abject bodies who remain untouched by 'development'. The threat of the 'unsafe' city then allows gendered and classed inequality to be accepted as part of the dynamic and for men to legitimise their roles as patriarchal protectors of women. The obscure and constant nature of this 'threat to women' in the unsafe city narrative is useful in legitimising and bolstering men's positions and roles as appropriately classed and gendered protectors

in a context where other conventional forms of gendered difference amongst men and women are narrowing.

In this process of being ‘new’ Indian men, what counts as ‘violence’ towards women in the perception of the Urban Smart Strivers also gets a narrow and myopic conceptualisation. Huge public discourses about the brutal gang rapes of women in urban spaces become indicators for them of what this violence towards women is. In turn the consumer goods and the market make powerful efforts to construct ‘good men’ or men who ‘respect’ women which is part of the way in which consumption operates in India and allows ‘manly shoppers’ to think of themselves as ‘real men’ who are against such rape and other spectacular forms of violence towards women. Nonetheless as feminists point out, these developments have also greatly broadened the scope of what is ‘speaking’ about gendered violence in India after the Nirbhaya case and have broken a ‘social silence’ around such issues (Kabeer 2012, Brosius 2017). However as I have also pointed out, through the opening up of such a discourse, other realms remain out of the reach or come to be closed off. In the thesis for example I explore the realm of ‘*masti*’ or innocent fun within homosocial groups of the urban middle classes, which is a realm that remains largely untouched by their conceptualisation of violence towards women.

What gets further removed from the discussion is the role of masculinities in making the city space unsafe for women in the first place. As more and more ideas of being ‘real’ men who respect women deepen binary ideas of gendered differences between men and women, the Urban Smart Strivers become more resolute about their ideas of being ‘real’ men who only do ‘good’ things. Hence various kinds of highly gendered and aggressive practices of groups of young ‘smart’ men towards women, begin to be framed as inconsequential and ‘innocent’ fun. As McDowell (1983) points out, in such cases, the whole discourse ‘describes’ rather than ‘explains’ women’s dangers in the city and attempts to make it ‘safer’ without identifying the cause in the first place. Hence complex and deep rooted cultural issues of gendered inequality are reduced to fit into current discussions comfortably without any challenge or debate about power relationships.

What is also important in this thesis is the social justification for various forms of violence and aggression that get legitimised for young men. As we see in the last chapter, the hypersexed presences of women in public spaces, from a masculinist narrative, allows young men to think of themselves as entitled and able to 'approach' such women. In the thesis I have been careful to avoid any suggestion that young men actually commit violence which can be studied in isolation - rather my point has been about the social and cultural context in which women's presence in public spaces gets marked.

The changing nature of such patriarchal gender relations, taking place in the context of an 'new' enterprising India and its new Indians, allows in creating and reproducing a deeper and more powerful inequality because it becomes more entrenched and depoliticised. The insidious and more covert nature of this new gendered inequality, operating within a context of very public and large scale narratives about men's efforts for gender equality and empowerment, means that political action and transformative change in power relations are never addressed or even brought up. Young men like the Urban Smart Strivers already feel they are doing 'good' and are men who 'respect' women. Furthermore violence towards women is externalised and turned into a issue that such 'smart' men need to address. The historian Gyanendra Pandey (2006) arguments on the routine nature of various forms of violence in India hints the creation of narrative of collective suffering and externalising of violence as always caused by someone else. In the case of the Urban Smart Strivers too, they think of themselves as part of the suffering middle classes who are troubled by the poor and their 'criminal' habits. Hence legitimately allowing violence to be something that the poor do in the poor parts of the city. Indeed, as I have touched upon already, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declared it his role to remove the 'burden of the poor' which the middle classes in India are alleged to be carrying.

As this thesis has demonstrated, amongst the Urban Smart Strivers, making a 'safe city' is an important aspect of 'change' and 'modernity'. However without understanding how the city is made unsafe in the first place, 'change' and 'modernity' are reduced to a questions of educating the uneducated, employing the unemployed and making the poor wealthy. As we see in the thesis, this allows to further embeds middle-class ideas of the violent and dangerous poor by conceptualising violence towards women as an

individualised and behavioural issue rather than as part of a wider structural and sociocultural inequality. 'Development' then becomes the scapegoat which is projected as bringing 'change' to India. These dynamics have also been replicated on a larger scale in the recent protests on gendered violence in India. For example, as Tara Atluri (2013, 373) observes that amongst protestors of gendered violence in India, the demands to 'hang the rapists' or addressing individualised 'evil' acts of men are seen as legitimate solutions to increase the safety of women. She explains that the neoliberalizing and self-responsibilisation dynamics allow anxieties about unwanted lower-class youth and migrants in the city to construct a particular configuration of women's precariousness. Women are first of all not just address as 'individuals' who need individual protection, but female labour is also constructed to be innocent and victimised, whilst precarious male labourers are always and only seen as individualised criminal deviants (Atluri 2013). Such a framing does not allow for the structural ways in which patriarchy reinvents itself within neoliberalism and thus allows in a defanging and obscuring of attempts to address the root of the problem.

As I have tried to demonstrate in the thesis and elsewhere (Philip 2015), the phenomenon of violence towards women in public spaces of urban India is being conceptualised incorrectly in the dominant policy and development thinking in India. The city space is not inherently violent or 'unsafe' in India. It is rather turned into an unsafe space by the practices and discourses of gender and sexuality that surround and make that space. Blaming the poor or migrants to the city as the source of violence incorrectly links a lack of material wealth with the propensity to violence. This simplistic notion is not just misleading but is also dangerous to how knowledge is created and applied. In contrast, I demonstrate that in the case of the Urban Smart Strivers, aggression and hostility towards women steams from a position of great masculine entitlement.

Fragile Men and Masculinities?

As I have demonstrated, middle-class men in India are not naturally powerful or masculine. There are various complex social, cultural and economic processes working to together, along with constant

embodied effort from young men themselves to achieve a status of power and entitlement. In this process, the thesis has to a great extent 'dislocated' young men from their masculinities to understand the dynamics of power interplaying through class, gender, space and age which give certain masculinities power. But very often individual men cannot embody these and hence remain vulnerable to such constellations of power. The very idea of dislocating masculinities, initiated by Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) almost two decades ago, allows us to rightly address the 'simultaneous articulations of power' that exist in relational and sometimes contradictory and tense ways. Hence although the Urban Smart Strivers are powerful, there are limits to their power. From a feminist perspective, understanding such limits provides a useful way to engage with the issue of masculinities in more critical and potentially transformative ways. Dislocating the naturalisation of privilege and to locate masculinities in the plural allows us to look at both the power and privilege that men enjoy but also their vulnerabilities. Through this thesis I have tried to probe and dismantle a naturalised understanding of the flow of this power in and through masculine bodies to highlight its contingent nature. Hence I have looked at both the anxieties and vulnerabilities of the Urban Smart Strivers alongside their attempts to claim and demonstrate power.

The fragility cohesion between young men, their ideas of masculinities and their ideas of a respectable male self, as I have explored are powerful in India. Yet their limits and incompleteness also presents an opportunity for feminist scholars and activists to challenge the gender order in India by using these gaps by troubling the already fragile cohesion between men and their masculinities. Similarly the process of gendering and sexualising bodies and their norms are inherently fragile as this thesis has tried to demonstrate. To challenge men's power and control over bodies and space, as well as over sexual normativity, unpacking its fragility and revealing its internal limits is an useful avenue of engagement. If we are to 'redraw' the 'patriarchal map' as Geetha (2007) suggests by looking at the gap between actual and normative sexual and gendered practices, a space is created to encourage a fundamental shift in how gendered subjectivities are constructed. For a development studies researcher like myself, these shifts cannot simply be measures to integrate more 'men and boys' into development work or more 'empowerment' projects for women, but rather require a much deeper shift in what it

means to be a 'man' and a 'woman' in the contemporary Indian context. Similarly, the myth of heteronormativity itself needs, and indeed can be, dismantled to allow for new and broader meanings and ways of being to come to the fore.

A City of Men?

Through this thesis I have probed how the politics of class, gender, space and age come together to create a gendered city. We have seen that young men attempt and successful 'make' masculine bodies and selves that belong in public places and as a result become purveyors of city spaces. They succeed in making the city space theirs to roam and belong in. However this process is not straightforward or unchallenged by non-masculine bodies, allowing the ambiguity to remain whether a city can really be a city of men? Similarly, as the thesis has demonstrated, a city is not a homogenous place and nor are men a homogenous category. Class and gender work together in the case of the Urban Smart Strivers to give them legitimacy and power in a city space. It prompts the reader to the ways in which a city of men can be challenged, dismantled and reordered. Hence the title of this thesis 'A City of Men?' attempts to bring out both the power and vulnerabilities experienced by men in making a city a masculine space as well the possibilities and challenges that also coexist.

Epilogue:

On my last field visit to Delhi, a year after my fieldwork, several things in the city and my informants had changed. The 'gay park' in Connaught Place was completely closed from public use. The young 'effeminate' men who visited the park and were an assurance of good company and chat on lonely fieldwork evenings in Delhi had also completely vanished. In place of the park, a new shopping area and a museum to Gandhi had been installed. On entry to this museum, the entry ticket came with a ribbon of threads in the colour of the Indian national flag: Orange, Saffron and Green which were allegedly hand spun using 'Indian technology'. The young men who were once my 'sisters' in the park were no where to be spotted anymore. I tried one of their mobile numbers but had no luck and could not reconnect with them. Given the high turnover of their fake Facebook profiles and loss of mobile phones or change in sim cards meant that I was not totally surprised at losing digital contact with them. However the guarantee of the space of the park to meet and reconnect with them always allowed me to feel that I could stay connected with them. This alas was no longer the case.

The cigarettes too had become more expensive. The cheapest Goldflake cigarette was up by 3 Rs and the Malbourough Lite up by Rs 4. This was a significant increase and Raj explained to me that he felt this was due to the new government nationalised tax system on consumer goods. As I left Delhi, the debate about this debilitating tax were being hotly debated, whilst my informants had to fork out more money than before for their smokes and drinks. Similarly the metro too had become more expensive. For Raj these factors bothered him. He felt that such indirect taxation was a burden on the middle classes and was irritated by the government's inability to see how this was affecting the 'ordinary' people like him, "It's now too much yaar, the rich guys this is nothing, but for the normal ordinary people like us, this is really bad, we are the ones who are suffering, this is not the way to go". For Raj the poor were the mysterious beneficiary of all this additional taxation and the rich were largely immune to it. Within this narrative what further became established is that the 'ordinary' was in fact the middle classes and they remained the de facto representatives of the nation-state. Nonetheless, Raj told me he was very excited about projects like the vastly expensive bullet train coming up in India and how India would be one of only three countries in the world to have such a fast train.

The city too had further signs of becoming ‘clean’ and ‘modern’. Now there were large multimedia boards beaming images of various state propaganda about a ‘new’ India and its ‘new’ citizenry constantly. A new recycling machine for the ‘kachra’ has been installed in the corner of the A Block where the ‘effeminate’ men used to flock. Rahul told me “Now no one comes here, only a few ones, it had become so bad, on Saturday and Sunday evenings you couldn’t set foot in CP, that’s how many people used to come here. Now its all gone, I think its a good thing only”. His own embarrassment and helplessness at being on the margins of respectable society were quite evident in the way he narrated the changes taking place in the sites. On the one hand there is a great sense of loss, a community and a safe hidden space that has now been snatched away. Yet on the other hand, the normative values of a masculinist neoliberal state that seeks to ‘cleanse’ and ‘modernise’ its young citizens requires them to be ‘modern’ and ‘respectable’ and ‘productive’.



Fig. 30 New Multimedia Boards in Connaught Place, Philip 2018
Fig. 31 New Waste Recycling Machine in Connaught Place, Philip 2018

One of the biggest changes was that my informant Aman was now engaged. He and his girlfriend who we meet in Chapter Four ‘Desexing a Masculine Body’ were no longer together. Aman, who was very enthusiastic about meeting up again after so long, decided that we ought to meet at our same spot in

Connaught Place for our usual tea and chat on the bench. He told me that it had become more and more difficult with his girlfriend and in the end her family decided to get her married. Aman said that she called him to invite him for the wedding but he was not interested in attending. He felt that she invited him because she could not forget him, but he claimed that he was over her and had decided to go ahead and get engaged with a young woman his family chose for him. She was a nice girl he felt and that his match would 'improve' his life.

Meeting Aman, now as a newly engaged man, did not feel particularly different in the way he spoke of the world and his place within it. He told me that he planned to gift his new fiancée a 'gold rose' as a sign of his commitment to her. He felt that a rose made out of gold, was better than a real flower which would wither away. He told me that he would have loved to have a 'destination wedding' which would best reflect his personality, but his family wanted a lavish conventional wedding in Delhi which was probably what was going to happen in the new year. Meeting Aman left me wondering how much of his life had changed and how much it remained the same. Now as an engaged young man, about to get married within his class and caste group, a commodified way of life and being seemed to have travelled and made its way into his idea of marital bliss too. He told me that he now planned to go 'ghumne' to all the nice places of Delhi with his future wife and he wanted to take her to the clubs and to 'live life' a little bit. In many ways, the realm of leisure and what a 'good life' meant to him, still consisted largely of the same hopes, but now within the fold of an endogamous arranged marriage. Our meeting left me wondering, how much of a 'new' Indian man will survive and move in to Aman's next phase of life? From a youth who consumes and parties, would he become the married man who continues to shop, groom and live a highly commoditised middle class life in 'new' India?

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Appendix 1:

Urban Smart Striver Profiles:

Raj: Raj was studying Information Technology in South Extension when we first met at the cigarette stall. He was 24 years of age and had previously dropped out of a Graphics Design course to now start his current IT training at a private college. His family paid for this degree which he told me costed ‘almost one lakh’ a year (£1000). His father was an administrator for a large construction firm and had an ‘office job’. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Raj too had joined his fathers employer and used to go to ‘office’ in the morning with his dad. He had an older sister who was married and hence not living at home, being the only son, he often got a lot of privileges and expense money.

Aditya: I met Aditya through Raj. They were friends from their English medium school in South Delhi where they were classmates. Aditya too started the Graphics Design course with Raj, but unlike Raj he continued to complete his studies. When I met Aditya, he was about to start a ‘masters’ in Graphics at a private institute and in his spare time he worked as an ‘Events Manager’ for an company called ‘WestWind Productions’. Aditya’s college was also in South Extension and so we would often meet at the cigarette stall because it was convenient for all. His mother was a housewife and his dad was a mid-level government worker at the Delhi Water Board. His parents were very generous to all of Aditya’s friends and we would often hang around his house.

Rahul: Rahul was 26 years of age and became a close friend during the time of fieldwork. He was desperately seeking for a stable job for over a year but had not managed to find anything suitable. He was considering a move to the ‘hospitality’ industry, away from his education in Marketing and Communications because he felt there were more jobs in hospitality the sector. We met in Connaught Place having a cigarette, he had clocked me on his ‘gaydar’ he explained and this became a source of great joke and jest amongst us. He had a tough relationship with his family and often fought with them. But because he lived at home, he had to be careful not to irritate them too much. He defined himself as

a 'hot tempered' man and confessed to me that he would often beat-up 'ugly gay people' if they approached him for a sexual encounter and he did not like the look of them.

Aman: Aman was 27 years of age and worked for the Bank of Baroda in Connaught Place. We met at the tea stall having tea, often with his colleagues or sometimes alone and became friends through various meetings there. His family originally from Rajasthan but had been living in Delhi for over 25 years. Aman himself was born in Delhi and thought of himself as a 'Delhiwala'. He harboured ambitions of being a 'Bollywood actor' and a 'model' at various points and was determined to get a 'portfolio' made at some point. He told me that his family often encouraged him to take on apply for acting roles because they thought of his height and fair skin complexion to be an advantage. Aman had a longterm girlfriend and they would both share photos together on their social media. Amongst his friends Aman was largely regarded as 'married' but also a 'Casanova' who could win over girls.

Kartik: a student, largely optimistic about the future he will have. His family were originally from Bihar and like Aman he was also born and raised in Delhi. He held some fond memories of visiting relatives in Bihar but he felt that it was not the place for him. In Delhi he studied accounting and was a hardworking young man. We often met for tea in Connaught Place which was near his college at Delhi University. Kartik enjoyed singing and would often post videos of himself singing either at home or at family events on social media and enjoyed showing me his skills. He had started looking for work but had not managed to find anything appropriate for his qualifications he felt. Kartik was the only Urban Smart Striver who wore 'kurta and pyjama' (long Indian men's cotton shirts) because he found it comfortable and also more suitable to his image as a 'singer'. He was careful about wearing more contemporary outfits when performing 'modern' or 'Western' songs he told me.

Narayan: Worked as a junior customer service professional for the international firm Proctor and Gamble. He worked in the consumable goods branch of the firm and dealt with wholesale customers purchasing large quantities of soaps, creams, detergents etc. He was 27 years of age and was on a temporary contract at his firm. During fieldwork, the Prime Minister's heavily criticised demonetisation

policy to remove almost 85% of existing currency from circulation in an attempt to tackle 'black money' and 'corruption', caused great chaos and difficulties in obtaining cash. Narayan got an offer via social media at the time to join an 'cashless' online wallet firm called 'Paytm' and moved there. He showed me several photos of his office interiors which had shiny floor and bar stools as chairs and was very proud to be part of the 'change' in India's development trajectory.

Sampat: Sampat was a quiet young man of 25. He worked for an IT firm making codes for various companies. He often complained about his low salary at work in comparison to his expenses and obligations to his family. Sampat was very eager to start an 'export-import' business and was always trying to connivence me to join his business venture. We met in South Extension which was close to his office but he was not a frequent visitor at the cigarette stall and would only visit if I told him I was there and that he could catch up with me there. His interest in starting a business meant that he would often make an effort to come and meet me, but as I made it clear to him that this was not something I could undertake early on, we started to develop a more balanced relationship.

Ratish: Ratish lived close to my house near South Extension and we frequented the same gym and became a close friend. He worked for the National Railways, a job that his father who also worked in the company helped him get. Ratish got his clothes specially tailored from a local tailor in the neighbourhood and liked to pay close attention to fit and cut. His parents liked us spending time together because they thought I was a 'good friend' and a 'good influence' on him. He would often ask me for tips to improve his English and was always very sensitive and embarrassed about his linguistic skills which he felt I could help with. Ratish and I would often spend the evenings hanging out in our 'colony' and through him I became friends with the gym trainers and several of the local young men who lived in our neighbourhood.