When I started this PhD five years ago, I had no idea that I would be working on women in the glamour industry. This group had not really registered on my radar as a possible area of serious study. I did know however that I wanted to look at new areas of work that women, particularly young women, were being drawn into following the onset of globalization. Areas of work that had a direct causal relationship with the rapidly changing economy, areas of work that were global in emergence as sites of work for women, but had a local face too, that would show how globalization was being interpreted and played out in the local context. I narrowed down on two sites finally: the first was the topic of my M.Phil dissertation – women workers in Export Processing Zones, and the second was a topic I had indirectly been involved in doing research on in my other capacity as a researcher and activist with a women’s group – women domestic workers in the capital. I contemplated adding a third – women in sex work, having had considerable past research experience on the issue. At the last moment I rejected this and replaced it with a site of work which involved middle/ upper class, educated women – call-centres and fashion and modelling seemed to fit the bill; I picked the latter. I planned to undertake an inter-class comparison of the three sites of work and explore the experiences of women in each.

This proposal did not pass the scrutiny of the faculty committee meeting, and one of the suggestions made was that I focus on one site. I am glad they rejected the idea, because it led me to consider each area of work and choose by elimination the most unexplored and challenging one and to attune myself to the one that ‘called out’ to me.
Surprisingly, it was the glamour industry. The other areas had by now become established areas of academic study. I realized that this was the area I knew least about, the one site of work on which there was barely any academic material in India, and the one that appealed to the inherent women's libber in me. It was also the one that reflected certain questions of morality which had been bothering me for a while, and provoked radically opposite views. Moreover this threw up other nerve racking challenges to me as a researcher. So far I had done field work in villages in Rajasthan and Gujarat and in slum settlements in Delhi, amongst women largely in the informal sector. What would it be like to research young, educated upper/middle class women - my 'own' constituency? Secondly, as a feminist, would I be able to undertake an objective study on a group and phenomenon that I already had an ideological position on? Perhaps this was what a PhD really meant, I thought - as much of an unlearning as a learning. I took the plunge.

II.

If the study of caste has been conferred the title of being 'a cottage industry for South Asian scholars', the same can be said for the study of globalization by Western scholars. Sociology has not been left behind in the trans-disciplinary huddle to examine, interrogate, critique, understand the range of developments in an economy, polity, society that characterizes "globalization". The range of academic observations on globalization is outside the scope of this study, but it is important to situate the study in this context.

Globalization refers to a changing economic wisdom the world over which sees as legitimate only one way to achieve growth - through deregulation of the free market and enabling free flow of resources, capital and information through various tools - new economic policies, structural
adjustment policies and withdrawal of State from the sphere of the market. While this is called 'economic globalization', the term globalization in itself refers to a wide range of influences and processes in the social, cultural and political sphere as well.

Globalization has elicited extremely passionate responses, both positive and negative, as captured in the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen:

Globalization, which is a consequence of increased human mobility, enhanced communications, greatly increased trade and capital flows, and technological developments, opens new opportunities for sustained economic growth and development of the world economy, particularly in developing countries. Globalization also permits countries to share experiences and to learn from one another’s achievements and difficulties, and promotes a cross fertilization of ideas, cultural values and aspirations. At the same time, the rapid processes of change and adjustment have been accompanied by intensified poverty, unemployment and social disintegration. Threats to human well-being, such as environmental risks, have also been globalized.

Often globalization is conceptualized as part of a continued imperialist enterprise rooted in colonialism and modernity. In this conceptualization, globalization then for India is nothing new. Yet the form that it took in India in 1991 marks a cut off point for ‘classical modernity’ or even ‘post-modernization’ and heralds a new socio economic epoch, or a paradigm shift in the nation’s history.

Contemporary globalization in India is marked chronologically in Indian economic history as the period 1991 onwards when the wave of liberal economic policies, structural adjustments and liberalization was ushered in by the then Congress government, in response to a balance of payments crisis in the Indian economy. It was particularly significant as it marked a paradigmatic shift in Indian development policy and national vision, away from Nehruvian planned development to one in which there was a greater role for the free market1. Previous Congress governments

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1 The Prime Minister at the time, PV Narasimha Rao, however stated that the reforms would be in line with
had shown glimpses of 'tendencies to globalize' yet had not completely thrown open Indian doors to foreign capital. Fifteen years after this shift, we are still grappling with its far reaching effects, which have been varied and intense, reaching as deep into rural hamlets as the metropolitan mall.

III.

Glamour is not new to India. The stature of heroes and heroines of the film industry, in both the Hindi film industry and down south have shown that they are treated almost at par with gods. Temples are built in their honour, elections won in their names, many become important political leaders. The film industry has had a deep impact on Indian society and polity.

We are also a nation that has not shied away from fashion. Whether it is the 'sadhna cut' (a haircut named after film actress Sadhna) or the bush shirt or even the Nehru topi (cap) and Gandhi glasses, India has been a reasonably fashion self conscious nation. Textiles, handicrafts, weaves, silks, borders, prints, embroidery, we have a diverse treasure trove of textures and art with tremendous fashion potential. We are a nation (like many other nations) that has a unique and a vibrant sense of aesthetics. The concept of 'shringar' (adornment) has been embedded in our cultural text. Women put flowers in their hair, or henna in their hands, kajal in their eyes, ornament themselves – whether in courtship, festivity, to mark status or as female rites of passage. At the local level, women and men have always had their own 'designer wear' in a sense, designed and made only for them in their neighbourhood tailor-shop by the local darzi. Women innovate new necklines for blouses to go with sarees, or new cuts

Nehru's socialist values, and made the analogy that like a blocked artery needed a bypass surgery, this too would only be a 'bypass' to deal with the crisis at hand.
for salwar kameez in consultation with the tailor. A ‘designer’ exists in every locality.

Yet the era of ‘glamour’ that began after India opened its gates to foreign capital and goods marks a distinct difference in the way fashion became a part of Indian contemporary social-scape. As foreign goods trickled into the Indian market and the advertising agency began to profile anew the new age Indian consumer, the ‘glamour bug’ bit parts of urban India in a way that was different from the past. In conjunction with India’s wins at major beauty pageants, the reach of satellite media and the realization by Indian and multinational cosmetic giants that Indian women were a hugely profitable market for the beauty products and cosmetics industry, a foundation was set for the rise of a new type of ‘glamour industry’.

Fifteen years after the onset of liberalization, the glamour industry is today a wealthy and diverse one. The Indian fashion industry is projected towards becoming a Rs.100 crore industry by 2010. It is conspicuously ‘Western’, centred around consumption, lifestyle and status, one that demonstrates a certain understanding of the body and beauty which does not come from indigenous sensibilities, one that privileges (and promises) youthfulness and beauty. It is also one that has given rise to various professions under its rubric (now it is possible to be a fitness trainer or a nutrition expert or a yoga instructor or have your own nail spa as a lucrative career), but most prominently, it has made popular and aspirational the profession of modelling - something that is certainly not indigenous to India, and most certainly a by product of the changing times we live in, of the global village we imagine ourselves to be part of,

To capture the ‘definition’ of glamour is a difficult task, as it is an essence, or an impression that is more subjective in nature. In this study I use glamour to be a certain art of presenting oneself in an appealing, impressive manner suitable to the current context; it is an increased self-consciousness of physical appearance and efforts to present oneself in a designed image; finally it is a language of signs that communicates class, a global and luxurious lifestyle, success and charismatic power.
and the changing meaning that we as a society and as individuals give to 'glamour'.

The documented history and symbolism of the beauty pageant (once called a 'cultural institution' of the USA) demonstrate that it has a central role in various cultures and countries all over the world. Beauty pageants constitute a strategic part of various agendas: it can be part of a nationalist project (to enhance national pride, symbolize national unity); a political project (after US aggression in Afghanistan, the first Miss Afghanistan pageant was represented as the final liberation of women after the oppression of the Taliban); economic project (promote consumption of MNC products, cosmetic giants); or the technological project (promotes use of technology such as laser correction, leg elongation procedures).

Countries in economic transition appear to be strongly affected by the glamour industry. The beauty pageant is often a vehicle used by the State in selling the image of their country as a 'modern nation', or as way of handling the negative impacts of the transition. China, for example, hosted the Miss World pageant a few years into its economic reforms, as a sign of its openness to the spoils of capitalist progress. Photographs of the event appeared on the cover of the Beijing Review and other Chinese magazines and journals, demonstrating the importance the State gave to this event. Russia's well-known export to the rest of the world in the post USSR era has been in the large number of extremely young models to Europe and USA, as is the same for many South American countries. India has in the last decades got four Miss World titles and two Miss Universe titles to its name, supposedly emblematic of the way India has rapidly captured the imagination of the world.

These developments in India have met with a variety of responses. The
State, at a superficial level, employs it as part of its nationalist project, without undertaking any active measures to support the 'industry' as such in its own right. However mixed responses by the State and political parties can be seen at different points of time. The right wing, for examples, raises heated questions from time to time about the degeneration of Indian values and morals. Left parties oppose it also on various grounds; like Coca Cola or McDonalds it becomes a symbol of liberalization, to be opposed as part of their anti-capitalist and anti-globalization position. The media, both television and print, reorient themselves around it, making it an important source of TRPs and revenue for them. A 'Page 3' genre evolves and simultaneously provides a space for public debate on it. Civil society gives a mixed response – the middle classes participate in it, at the same time giving confused responses, lamenting the loss of Indian morals and values, yet holding local beauty pageants and encouraging their children to participate in these. The most vocal and articulate critique comes from women’s groups who are cautious about being, for once, on the same side as religious fundamentalists, but who object unequivocally to the sexual objectification of women, and the commodification of women’s bodies for profit and market. These arguments first presented themselves in an articulated form at the Miss World pageant in Bangalore in 1999. However the voice of women participating in the pageants and the glamour industry has been largely absent from these debates.

I want to here reproduce parts of the exchange that took place on a well-watched television show on the news channel NDTV called The Big Fight on the episode telecast on 3rd April 2004. The show is in the form of a public debate, for this episode the topic for the debate was "Are beauty pageants an exercise in futility?" In the programme three or four invited participants put forth their points in a stipulated time, then get a chance to respond to one another, and finally the debate is opened up to the
watching 'live audience' for questions. The participants for this episode were Diana Hayden, former Miss World winner; Ranjana Kumari, a women's rights activist with the Centre for Social Research; A.M Parigi, the MD of Times Infotainment, the corporate entity that manages the Miss India pageant; and Rahul Bose, a non-mainstream actor known for taking a political position on some issues. The debate is chaired by the anchor, television journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, then the political editor of the channel.

DH: If women activists like you are so concerned with empowerment, why not use people like us to talk on those issues?
RK: You mean you don’t know that there is female infanticide, dowry deaths, rape? Not one of the beauty queens has social commitment or done what they said they would.
AP: See, the pageants... it's about empowerment, marketability... It's a platform to show that Indian women are no less...
Audience (to RK): You talk of empowerment of women, but you forget that these women are showing Indian women as good as any in all parts of the world. (Part of the audience breaks into applause.)
RB: I'm shocked to hear you say that. These beauty queens hardly mean anything. It's Medha Patkar they will see and appreciate not a beauty queen. See it's a much bigger issue. Of seeing women are a sex object, this has been the system for 150 years - it is not the fault of the beauty pageants alone but the media who make page 3, page 1. Women like Medha Patkar and Kiran Bedi represent women of India, not the Diana Haydens.
DH: I don't believe we are any less than anyone else - social workers, whatever. As individuals, we have an opinion.
You women activists have fought so hard to get women like us where we are. To give voice to women. And now when we are have a voice you want to suppress us?
If in the course of all this, we are of some use to cosmetic companies. what is the harm?
RS: But... women have to fake their lives in order to pursue this dream!
DH: I've been faking my life since I was 14. I said I was 20 to put food on the table. I worked because I had to.
Clearly, the new glamour industry and the culture of beauty pageants have given rise to some sort of social tension. The points of stress or conflict are evident in the interaction above. One site of contestation is the appropriation of 'empowerment' by both parties - the pageant winners and organizers, as well as the women's activist representative. Another is the representation of Indian women - within India and to the rest of the world; at this point of time in the nation's history, which women showcase 'Indian women' / 'India'? What is also being contested is the 'achievement' of women who win beauty pageants, implying that there is little merit or real work involved and the assumption that they are 'less than others'. A moral judgement is implicit. Even as an 'empowered agency' is being attributed to the beauty queen, she herself appropriates victim-hood in a surprise move that hints at the complexity of matters.

This brings us to the dilemma at hand. What is the source of the tension surrounding these developments, and how do women in the industry experience these tensions?

While there is little doubt that our lives are full of information on the lives of people in the industry and ways of becoming glamorous ourselves, factual information on the industry itself and the experiences of women in this industry are hard to come by. Lost in this cacophony of debates is the voice of the woman herself who is at the centre of the storm. The question of representation looms large as others speak for the persons involved, imposing their ideological positions on women participating in the industry. As agents in their own right, surely women in the industry have their own reflective positions on these issues? What is their side of the story?

This study aims to fill this gap, provide a detailed ethnographic
exploration of what it means to be part of glamour as a modern day profession, give voice to women participating in the profession and respond to the debates which arise in the public sphere because of the increasing popularity of the industry.

For women in the industry, how have their lives changed? How does society (as well as they themselves) view their work and their bodies? How has their status been affected in the course of being part of the industry? Can it be an opportunity for empowerment, development, and open spaces for greater choice and negotiation of rights and status? Or in the garb of the language of 'freedom' and 'choices', is it a system, which in conjunction with existing structures, exploits and subtly discriminates, and invariably sexualizes, women's labour, and particularly women's bodies? What does this structural and institutionalized form of 'objectification' do to women? Are women objectified? These form the central questions of this study.

It was to this end that I undertook almost two years of qualitative research amongst women in the fashion, modelling and beauty pageant industry, conducting ethnographic interviews with 30 women in different age groups in the industry, the majority from Delhi and some from Bombay. Interviews were also done with participants and producers of the reality TV show Get Gorgeous and other actors in the industry such as choreographers of fashion shows, model coordinators, personnel in modelling agencies, photographers, editors of fashion magazines and the like. I also undertook participant observation in two Lakme India Fashion Weeks and through the production and shooting of two advertising films in Bombay. Through these interviews and observations, I was able to examine the glamour industry as a site of 'work' for young women in India today, document their experiences in the profession, and explore in detail their life-worlds. On the basis of their narratives, I then attempted
to address some of the dominant debates in the public sphere and in feminist discourse, and provide new directions to these. This study, then, can be situated in the body of sociological work addressing the “women’s question” in modern, globalizing, India.

IV.
Apart from this introduction, this thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 sets the theoretical tenor of the study, setting out the three broad areas that influence the conceptual approach to the issue. In this chapter, we recall major theoretical developments on the ‘women’s question’ in general and in India, then examine the theoretical framework of women and work, situating the glamour industry in a series of new sites of work for women in the post-globalized world. The chapter also reviews some theorizing around sexuality and issues of beauty, fashion and femininity, again in the West and in India, noting the theoretical gaps that exist on these issues in India.

Chapter 2 examines the methodological questions of the study. Besides outlining the methodology and field work for the study, we also introduce the sample and give an overview of the demographic profile of the women interviewed. This chapter also briefly looks at how the changing times, and the effect of globalization in particular, impacts the practice of ethnography, compelling us to confront the reality that ‘fieldwork’ in an era of globalization necessitates that we re-examine how we imagine the field and fieldwork, and relations in the field.

Chapter 3 looks at differentiation, stratification and power in the glamour industry. It sketches with broad strokes the changing face of the Indian fashion, beauty and modelling industry. In this chapter, we also examine the changing structure of the industry over the years into a high level of differentiation, and chart out the various institutions and
stakeholders in the 'glamour economy'. Finally, we also analyze the Lakme India Fashion Week, as constituting a 'field site' representative of one level of the glamour economy, and read the various spaces of the site, noting how power and interpersonal relations are practiced in the field.

Chapter 4 focuses on the voices of some of the respondent, highlighting some of the recurring themes underlying the narratives. We examine the everyday details of how women engage with demands of tradition, modernity and globalization, “when a great tradition (India) globalizes”. Women continue to be the site on which projects of tradition, modernity and now globalization are enacted; the latter amplified in the case of women in the glamour industry. This chapter examines some of these experiences, giving us a picture of what it means for a young woman in the glamour economy to live life in a globalizing India.

Chapter 5 zooms in on the world of work of models. The chapter brings out how women’s status in the glamour economy is still secondary despite the spotlight being focused on them, and also highlights the double edged sword that “professionalism” can be, being a desirable way of working but also used by others in the industry as a way of controlling and subjugating the models. Chapter 6 and 7 are borne out of two aspects of their world or work – one is that their work does not finish once they get home after a shoot. For women in the industry, working on their bodies in their everyday life forms a central part of the experience of ‘being a model’. This is their inner world of work, which is explored in detail in Chapter 6. The other aspect is the expression of sexuality in their profession, which also has implications in their personal life. I look at this in Chapter 7, simultaneously undertaking a complex reading of the contested notions of sexual objectification and free choice.
Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter; it tries to grapple with some of the central issues underlying this study, particularly issues of the new way discourses of sexuality have entered the public sphere today, women's subjectivity in expressing and managing sexuality and how these interact with a discourse of commerce. It also reflects on the implications of the study in relation to the struggle for the holistic empowerment of women.

Academics sometimes use the concept of 'registers' to capture the multiple meanings of an academic work, or the parallel functions it fulfils, and guide how it can be 'read'. This thesis can be read on two registers. On one, it renders the experiences of women in the glamour economy visible and documents their voices, their life-worlds and their concerns in a rapidly changing world. This 'rendering of experience' is critical to the inclusion of women's voices in history. On another register, it responds to important feminist and anthropological debates and social concerns today, seeking to provide empirical evidence to validate some points and contest others, and to forge a way forward in important debates that face the risk of becoming stagnant or lost to political correctness.