CHAPTER 1

A New Age

WOMEN AND WORK IN AN ERA OF GLOBALISATION

My interest in the problem is of course more than academic: I wish to see genuine change come about, the emergence of a social and cultural order in which as much of the range of human potential is open to women as is open to men. The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something, very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot rout out simply by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, or even by reordering the whole economic structure.

Sherry Ortner, 1974, Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?

A fundamental feature of the new society is the transformation of women’s condition in the most developed countries. At the roots of such transformation, which has taken place at an accelerated pace since the 1960s, are two interrelated phenomena: the massive entry of women into the labor market in most advanced economies and the social movements based on the defense of identity that nurtured the development of the women’s movement and of feminism in general.

Manuell Castells, 1999, The Information Age

This ‘mad folly called women’s rights’ has radically changed women’s lives across the world. From as early as Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) or Tarabai Shinde’s Stree Purush Tulana (1882), women in different cultural contexts have tried to articulate and challenge the subordination of women. However it was a burst of writing in the 1960s and 1970s in the West that began a new ‘wave’ of passionate enquiry into the continued subordination of women, and established a field of studies that took ‘feminism’ as it’s starting point. Since then,

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1 Attributed to Queen Victoria, cited in Amartya Sen, 2001.

2 Feminism is a politics directed at changing existing unequal power relations between men and women in society, taking as its starting point the patriarchal social structure in which women’s interests are structurally subordinated to the interests of men. (Weedon, 1987)
feminism has had a profound impact on many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities\(^3\).

The emancipatory goal of feminism has made it a driving force for women's movements worldwide. Feminism has also always been articulated in a context: not only in the context of a specific culture or a class, but against macro developments evolving in the world, such as modernity, democracy, capitalism, and the distinct relationship each has forged with patriarchal structures and ideologies.

The last hundred years, in particular the last fifty years, have witnessed substantial changes in the status of women, and the quality of relations between men and women. This is largely a consequence of the increasing participation of women in the public sphere and the inclusion of their 'voices' in the political arena.; It has also been a function of the increase in women's education, increasing number of women in paid employment, and the continued challenges posed by feminist thought and struggles of women's movements all over the world to demand rights of women within and outside the home.

Even as tremendous changes have taken place, sometimes within just one generation\(^4\), the issue of women's rights remains a livewire. Patriarchy may appear to be unevenly spread, even latent in places, yet a glance at indicators of human development, national statistics, or reports in the daily newspaper and the experience of women's lives suggests that

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3 American poet Adrienne Rich declared feminism a renaissance 'far more extraordinary and influential' in shifting perspectives than the effects of the move from theology to humanism in the European Renaissance. (Segal, 1999)

4 "It's hard now to evoke the sea of misogyny in which more than one generation of women struggled before he women's movement... The very difficulty of describing this pre-feminist atmosphere today is a measure of how dramatically things have changed." Two veteran US feminists Rachel DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, 1998 talking about how the world has changed, cited in Segal, 1999.
patriarchy is far from dismantled, and the project of feminism far from complete.

This chapter looks at the contributions of feminist theory\(^5\) in four broad areas that are pertinent to this study. We first examine the rise of the 'women's question' as articulated by feminism in the West and in India. Following this we look at theoretical debates around women and work, with a focus on understanding women and work in the current economic framework characterized by a global assembly line, 'light-footed capital' and the feminization of labour and migration. Women's work in the glamour economy is located as part of this employment of female labour in the service of global capital. As the glamour industry rests on the construction of a certain kind of female sexuality, a review of literature on social theory and sexuality is critical for our understanding; this is taken up in the third section. We also briefly look at how sexuality has been theorized in women's studies in the Indian context and note the theoretical gaps which exist. In the fourth section we look at relevant theoretical contributions that inform our understanding of beauty, fashion and the body, again noting the gaps that exist in these areas in Indian feminist and sociological theory.

It is in this broad theoretical space – the continued import of the 'women's question' and search for the emancipation of women, the impact of global capital on the forms, conditions and experiences of work taken up by women, and the changing contours of patriarchy - that this study is located.

\(^5\) Feminist theory is “fundamentally experiential. Its subject is women's lives, past or present, historically recorded or known only by inference, experienced in association with men of the dominant culture or with men who are also oppressed.” (Foreword in O. Keohane et al, 1982)
I. THE 'WOMEN’S QUESTION'

Feminist anthropology as a discipline set the trends for increased consciousness on including women's voices, so far 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham, 1973). The first phase (1850 to 1920) called first wave or suffrage feminism pioneered the inclusion of women’s perspectives. Until then, research in general had been done primarily by men for men. The assumption that biological sex determined the individual’s roles in society was unquestioned. This phase saw women anthropologists entering the field with men and for the first time recording the voices of women in the societies they studied.

In 1920 the American women’s movement won women the right to vote. Following this victory feminism “disappeared from the stage of history for several decades”. (Schneir, 1996) A reawakening of feminism came about only after World War II. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1952) initiated animated discussion and debate around her claim that womanhood was a construct (her famous quote that “one is not born a woman, but becomes one”). Psychologist Betty Friedan, in her book *Feminine Mystique* (1963) looked at gender roles inside families and the predicament of modern women in traditional roles, trying to articulate “the problem that has no name”.

After a brief lull, the second wave of the ‘Women’s Liberation Movement’ hit the streets in the West during the 1960s and 1970s. During this stage, scholars were preoccupied by the search for the root causes of the ‘universal subordination of women’ and in trying to find the ‘key’ to male dominance. Marxist feminist explanations go back to Engels’ *The Origin of Private Property and the Family* (1952) in which he suggested that woman’s subordination was the consequence of her reproductive role, limiting her access to the means of economic production that men
controlled in order to maintain the institution of private property. The category 'woman' was represented as a homogenous unifying category. This was the first time that 'sex' and 'gender' were separated as descriptive categories instead of being used interchangeably. Sex was defined as determined by biology, gender was distinguished as being culturally shaped.

In 1974 Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere edited the groundbreaking work, *Woman, Culture, and Society*, exploring the notion that women frequently participate in behaviours that go against their own interests, and can be explained and understood only in the context of an overall system. In this volume a particular essay *Is Male is to Females as Nature is to Culture?* by Sherry Ortner (1974) examined women's subordination to men cross-culturally and through time. Ortner explained the universal subordination of women by suggesting that women have been symbolically associated with nature, and nature is subordinate to men; therefore, women are subordinate to men.

The manner in which the symbolic subordinate position of women highlighted by Ortner is reinforced by notions of pollution and purity that are attributed to the female body, was brought out by Henrietta Moore (1988). Moore also raised issues of cultural context, pointing out that the dichotomy between nature and culture was a Western construct and not applicable similarly to all cultures.

Besides the symbolic explanation of the universal subordination of women, a focus emerged on articulating the systemic or institutional face of this subordination in the form of a web of institutions which constituted and reproduced patriarchy (Walby, 1986) and looking to psychoanalysis to explain gender formation, or the creation of the categories of masculine
and feminine. Nancy Chodorow (1989) used Freud's analysis to examine gender identity as part of self-formation and show how boys are socialized into negating their 'feminine' feeling by a gradual distance from their mothers. Connell (1987) examined the idea of 'gender regimes' to illustrate how gender is reproduced through active strategies, such as through the school system which privileges sports for boys and certain other activities like sewing for girls.

Since the 1980s, several scholars have proposed a reversal of the earlier separation of biology and culture, and articulating sex as a social category like gender. Butler (1990) brought back the 'body' into the politics of feminism, highlighting the ways in which social expectations are based on the physical body. Postmodernism also had an impact on feminism in this period, despite the critique that the ideas offered by postmodernism – such as the 'death of the subject' or the rejection of structure - could not be taken too seriously by feminism, premised as feminism was on the emancipation of a 'subject' and the existence of a patriarchal structure.

This decade also saw the emergence of the voices of Black feminists (Hill Collins, 1990) and Third World feminists (Mohanty et al, 1991), who began to articulate their 'difference', and question 'White feminist' hegemony, giving rise to a critical and painful evaluation of representation. Voices of non-Western, non-middle class women told other stories of oppression underlining the fact that being categorized as 'woman' did not supersede other roles and identities. Class, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion – all create multiple patterns of oppression and diversify the category of women; all women do not have the same universal needs and experiences.

Pioneering work by feminists on the issue of representation, visibilising
the ways in which theories are influenced by historical, political, social, and cultural contexts, raised critical questions regarding anthropologists relationships with their informants. as a consequence, some men in the "Anthropology of Men" began to look at "man" in a similar manner as feminists had been evaluating "woman." The embedded nature of gender, both as a material, social institution and as a set of ideologies, was recognized, as was the fact that the interpretation of gender roles is inter­related with race, class, religion, age and other hierarchies of domination and oppression.

Side by side with the development of theories of women's oppression, was the debate around emancipation and strategies for change. What is it that would change women's lives and lead to the end of subordination? Socialist feminists and liberal feminists were of the opinion that economic self dependence and equal opportunities with men in paid employment and other aspects of public life would enable women to take control over their own lives. Radical feminists held that it was only when women had control over their own sexualities that liberation would be possible. This debate remains at the heart of most feminist thought and activism today, even as 'feminism' evolves into 'feminisms' and enables a more honest and inclusive understanding of diversity and difference between and among women.

A Brief History of the Women’s Question in India

The women's question in India has its roots in the colonial encounters and social reform movements in the early nineteenth century, when educated Indians influenced by European liberalism were forced to re-examine social structures and relations in their own contexts. Self-reformation campaigns were started by middle class men such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and Vidyasagar calling for women's education and demanding abolition of sati, casteism and child marriage.
Following this came a period of ‘militant mother-centred nationalism’ (Kumar, 1993) and the identification of the nation state as the motherland (‘matribhoomi’). Women participated alongside men in the Swadeshi movement and were at the forefront of the nationalist struggle, even finding space within political party formations. When the All India Women’s Congress was set up, an organized effort to articulate women’s rights, particularly the right to suffrage and the right to education, was made. As a result, women’s rights were strongly articulated in the Constitution of India at the time of Independence.

Interest in the women’s question waned in the period after Independence, reviving twenty years later with a landmark report titled ‘Towards Equality’, released in 1974 by the newly instituted Committee for the Status of Women. The report showed that the reality of women’s social and economic status was far removed from the rhetoric of constitutional equality.

Responses to the report were also fuelled by the revival of attention to women’s rights with the United Nations declaring 1975-1985 the Decade for the Rights of Women. Claiming legitimacy for the “personal” as “political”, feminists questioned seemingly ‘natural’ differences between men and women, questioned the social structure and patriarchal control over women’s bodies and women’s labour in the home and family. Campaigns and litigation around dowry deaths and violence against women, insensitive judgments and violence by the police and the State brought women out onto the streets in Delhi and Bombay, spurring organization around these issues (Gandhi and Shah, 1992). As other women’s struggles – on land rights, fish workers’ rights, against price rise – emerged across the country, a cohesive women’s movement was born, energized by anger, oppression, creativity and hope.
The discipline of women’s studies also began to evolve at this time, theorizing and contextualizing Indian women’s experiences and articulating *nariwaad* as a distinctive Indian ‘version’ of feminism (Bhasin and Khan, 1986). Critical works of feminist historiography and readings of women’s literature, as well as the setting up of a feminist publishing house (Kali for Women) added to the substantial volume of material on the women’s question. In an important volume of essays *Recasting Women* Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1989) brought together explorations of the “historical processes which reconstitute patriarchy in colonial India”, highlighting the cultural specificities of patriarchal practices across caste-class formations and demonstrating how, in the Indian context, “both tradition and modernity have been... carriers of patriarchal ideologies”.

Other explorations on the women’s question focused on the dichotomies between the home/world or the public/private and the construction of Indian womanhood in the imagination of the middle class in opposition to other classes and to the image of the Western woman (Chatterjee, 1989; Bannerjee, 1989 in Sangari and Vaid, 1989).

The question of representation was also debated in the Indian context. The women’s movement was critiqued as largely middle class, urban and Western influenced group, not qualified to speak for the ‘real Indian woman’, invariably depicted as a poor rural woman (Krishnaraj, 1990; Kishwar and Vanita, 1991) Like the challenge of Black and Third World feminists in the West, these critiques challenged Indian women’s movements to undertake self- reflection on their own class and caste constitution and perspectives. In particular, the emergence of dalit women’s organizations visibilised the exclusion of dalit women’s voices in women’s groups, pointing to the latent brahminism of the feminist
movement (Rege, 1995).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the women's question was put on the public agenda through efforts to reframe public and judicial understandings of crimes against women and women's rights, change existing laws and create new ones to protect women's rights (such as the recognition of domestic violence as a crime against women), campaigns against sex determination, forcible contraception, unequal wages, obscene representation of women in the media, communalization of politics and the passage of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution to create quotas for women in local self-governance.

Today, groups that identify as part of the women's movement include women's groups, NGOs, women's wings of left party groups, women's studies centres, mass based organizations, other movements and individuals working to address injustices against women. Their alliance is founded on a broad common agreement that women are oppressed in all societies; that this is not natural or inevitable and can be changed; that there exists in society an unfair sexual division of resources and labour; and the recognition that institutions such as religion, family, and the State are essentially patriarchal and discriminatory towards women.

Despite being beset by problems – the fragmentation of issues, identities, the role of funding agencies, cooption of the language of women's rights by the market and the State – there is little doubt that the women's movement has generated a growing body of academic knowledge and empirical evidence on "women's questions" in India. Today 'gender equality' has become a part of public consciousness in India. Domestic violence and sexual harassment are no longer seen as 'private' issues. Information technology has allowed a globalization of feminist activism through networks and linkages with other mass movements in India and
in other parts of the world.

At the same time, the women's movement faces challenges on multiple fronts - the negative impacts of globalization, right wing fundamentalism or the backlash in the form of increasing violence against women. Old problems remain, new ones emerge. Yet, through both the hope and the despair that is evident in recent works on women’s rights, it is clear that the women’s question in India is being contested, reframed and reformulated in debates in the public sphere everyday.

II. WOMEN & WORK: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understandings of women and work have been theoretically grounded in sociology and anthropology in challenges to existing notions around women’s gendered roles - whether in the family, in public life or in the economy. Initial theoretical concerns in anthropology focused on tracing the genealogy of sexual division of labour, beginning from the ‘essential’ roles of men as hunters and women as nurturers/gatherers. Contextualizing these ascriptions within the nature/culture debate, feminist theorists pointed out that men and women were assigned certain roles in production/reproduction not because of ‘natural’ differences, but socially and culturally prescribed attributes linked to being male or female. The dichotomy between paid and unpaid labour in both the public and private spheres, and the lack of theorization on women’s role in the economy was challenged. At the same time, micro studies on different sites of work in particular cultures and differential genderization of labour became a focus of feminist enquiry.

Early Debates on Women and Work

Early theoretical understandings of women and work were strongly influenced by Marxist class analysis – one strand focusing on ways in
which women could be accommodated within class analysis, the other looking at how to use 'class' as a concept to theorize gender relations. Firestone (1970) for instance, conceptualized sex as class, with all women forming one class (reproduction) and all men the other (production). Delphy (1984) argued that housewives constitute the producer class engaged in housework, while husbands were the non-producing class who-, expropriated their labour. While such an explanation ignored cultural, sexual and ideological aspects of gender inequality (and also the fact that not all women were housewives), it presented new ways of looking at class and gender. Patriarchy and capitalism were both conceptualized as creators of class, their combined effect on women's oppression becoming the core of 'dual systems theory' (Walby, 1990).

Marxist feminists identified the family as a critical site of women's subordination, which benefits capital by providing a cheap way of providing everyday care of (male) workers and producing the next generation of workers, with women as the unpaid underclass who perform this work in exchange for maintenance from their husbands (Mies, 1986). Ann Oakley (1974) was among the first to show that housework was work like any other, even though not rewarded by money, and was not a cultural activity. Others pointed out that the issue of 'unpaid' labour must be seen with the - specific subordination in the workplace of women in paid employment.

Three basic questions were raised in the context of paid work - why women engage in less paid work than men, why they do different jobs from men and why they typically earn less than men (Walby, 1990) Explanations included those based on economic and sociological functionalism - women get paid less as they have less skills and market experience and fewer qualifications due to their position in the family. Parsons (1954) conceptualized gender relations in terms of 'sex roles', with
men in the family performing the 'instrumental' role oriented to the external world, while women played the 'expressive' role, looking after the internal needs of family members. Gender relations in this view can be characterized as "different but equal". According to Parsons, separation of roles is essential to avoid conflicts and tensions between the occupational structure and the kinship system.

Essentialist and functionalist views have been countered by feminist theorists who have contested the notion of women as mothers/nurturers/caregivers. Today, debates on gender and work are around issues such as segregation of women at the workplace, the glass ceiling and occupational stratification, and the responsibility of the state to provide child/elder care.

The question of race as a determinant of women's work has entered the discourse in the last twenty years through issues such as the particular types of work given to women of colour and the predominance of poor women of colour in sweatshops, as factory workers, as maids and in other low paid blue-collar jobs. Stereotypes linked to particular groups have also been linked to specific types of work. There is also an expanding body of literature on migrant women workers, focusing on the impacts on women migrants of disruption of livelihoods in the South simultaneously with stricter immigration regimes and borders in the North. Feminist economics has also emerged as an important area of focus, which brings a sociological and anthropological lens to economics.

**The Indian Context: An Overview**

Debates on women and work in India have been situated in the context of poverty, access to resources and a large informal sector in both rural and urban areas. Both the extent and the nature of women's work remained invisible in statistics until recently. The extent of this invisibility, and its
consequence for the economy, began to be discussed in 1975, following the 'Shramshakti' report by the same Commission for the Status of Women. The report revealed that 94% of women workers remained untouched by labour laws, and provided an exhaustive compilation of data on women's work and economic activity in diverse sectors.

Studies on women and work in India in subsequent years have focused primarily on the rural informal sector. Women's agricultural labour on family-owned farms, unrecorded until the 2001 Census, has been another area which has been studied, providing both data on the contributions of women to subsistence economies, as well as conceptual insights on the notion of "choice" as related to workforce participation in the Indian context (Mazumdar, 1990).

The urban informal sector has also been studied in the context of poverty; Mazumdar sees this sector as 'a universe of limited opportunities and special vulnerability for illiterate desperate women' (1990). Various micro studies on working conditions of women in the urban informal sector have been done - powerloom workers, rag pickers, handloom workers, home based workers, street cleaners, fish workers, women vendors, lace makers, bangle makers and so on. Some of these studies have focused on women's own conceptions of themselves as workers, particularly in relation to home-based work. Studies on the impact of micro credit, self-help groups and women's cooperatives have provided important insights on strategies for economic self-reliance and empowerment. Gender issues in trade unions have also been studied, although to a lesser extent (Gothoskar, 1992).

Data from micro-level studies have often contradicted macro data on women's labour and contribution, highlighting the gaps and biases in national data collection. It is only recently that there is acknowledgement
of the fact that the complexity of women's work and their multiple roles - productive (paid and unpaid), reproductive and community management (Bhat, 1999) - has not been captured by conventional systems of data collection. Recent national data from the Census 2001 and the 55th Round of the National sample Survey on some of these aspects provides an opportunity to fill these gaps.

**Women Workers and Global Capital**

Women in capitalist economies are categorized as the producers of labour and constitute a 'reserve army of labour'. An important aspect of a globalizing world is the feminization of labour. Women (particularly women from the 'global South') constitute a new category of labour created and maintained by the international division of labour, where much of the skilled, highly-paid work is done in the First World and unskilled, semi-skilled, low-wage labour is relegated to the Third World. Henry Ford's innovation, the assembly line system of factory-based production, has moved onto a different scale. Today the world is an assembly line, with major labour intensive activity occurring in environments where labour is low-skilled but cheaper, regulations such as health and safety are minimal and organization of workers is controlled. The advanced technological and capital-intensive stages of production in this global chain occur in environments where labour is not cheap, but is highly skilled. Simply put, the exigencies of poverty and the interests of state capitalism ensure the continued working of the system - if one country does not meet the needs or demands of transnational corporations, they can simply move their operations to one of the other countries which are vying to attract foreign capital. The system thus pits the countries of the global South against one another in undercutting each other's wage-structures and backtracking on commitments to worker's rights.

The global assembly line is powered by a 'cheap labour force' of women.
Women make up over three-fourths of the labour force in most Free Trade Zones, holding mainly semi-skilled jobs while men occupy most of the skilled and management positions. (World Bank, 1992) The recruitment of women workers is a deliberate policy pursued by both the host government and companies. Transnationals prefer to employ women because their supposedly 'nimble fingers' are more suitable to factory work. In reality, however, the attractive quality of women workers is their greater vulnerability and insecurity that makes them more compliant and less likely to participate in agitating or organisational activity. Furthermore, the absence of minimum wage legislation in many of the countries of the global South allows employers to cut costs by paying women less than they pay men. Companies have also been able to take advantage of a high-labour turnover amongst women through their almost enforced retirement as a result of marriage.

The entry of large numbers of women into the labour market usually takes place under two different sets of circumstances - either when the economic situation is so terrible that women are forced to work even under insecure and hazardous working conditions (as for example in garment factories in Bangladesh); or in cases where due to rapid growth, transnational corporations are willing to offer higher wages, better working conditions to local workers (as in the case of the electronics industry in Malaysia and Singapore).

In many cases, a combination of gender myths and racial stereotypes feed into the trend of feminization of labour - that women 'naturally' have nimble fingers and are good at fine work; that women do not need to earn as much as men since they are only secondary earners; that; that women are naturally caring and therefore good at caring jobs; that household work is women's work; that women from the "East" are docile, compliant and easily controlled.
Women's bodies have occupied a central position in strategies for marketing. The economic success of countries such as Singapore and Thailand, dependent in part on a flourishing sex tourism industry, has also fuelled a trend of more women entering the sex entertainment industry in other countries.

Shifts in the global economy and the steady erosion of agriculture and the natural resource economy have pushed women into moving and migrating across and within borders in search of livelihoods. According to the World Migration Report 2003, almost half of the estimated 175 million migrants worldwide are women - a "feminization of migration". The growth of export-oriented industries like garments, electronics and practices such as outsourcing have created a demand for female labour in certain locations. In addition migrant women are in demand in care-related jobs, specifically domestic work, child and elder care. The growing sex, entertainment and tourism sector also demands female labour (Jagori, 2002).

However, the increased presence of women in specific sites of work has its own contradictions. On one hand, the capitalist order requires women to be drawn into the labour force so as to reduce their costs of production and increase profits. On the other hand, the patriarchal order requires 'traditional' male-female hierarchies to be maintained.

*An Example: Women Workers in Export Processing Zones*

Unsurprisingly, NEPZ (Noida Export Processing Zone) has posted record profits - the value of exports increased from Rs.720 million (US$16.8 million) in 1990-1991 to Rs.6.04 billion (US$141 million) in 1997-1998. But this growth has brought little cheer to the lives of workers, especially women. Wages in the zone are lower than outside and workers have to cope with harsh working and pitiful living conditions - overcrowded slums that lack sanitation, clean water and access to government schools and health services.

*Sita's Daughters, T K Rajalakshmi*  
PANOS Features (1 May 1999)
In this account of life at an export processing zone (EPZ) near Delhi, T K Rajalakshmi reveals the terrible price that workers in a developing country pay when it embraces a policy of export-led growth. With export promotion being a prime characteristic of the global economy, China and India are both committed to expanding their Export Processing Zones (EPZs). India is creating a series of new EPZs. In China, EPZs contribute about 22 per cent of China's total exports annually.

India's earlier policy on Special Economic Zones incorporated a certain amount of regulation and reasonably stringent labour laws, at least on paper. However, following the EXIM 2000 policy, many new concessions are proposed for the new SEZs to be set up in the next phase, with the objective of freeing them from the existing labour laws and making them globally competitive. For instance, the government has declared that new zones are to be declared 'public utility services' where strikes will not be permitted. In practice, even trade union activity is not permitted in most SEZs. The oldest of these, the Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone (SEPZ), set up in Mumbai in 1974, is a case in point. A study by the Delhi-based National Labour Institute (NLI) in 1993 found that the workforce comprised young, unmarried women school graduates below the age of 25, many of whom were paid less than the minimum wages. An earlier study by the Tata Institute of Social Services (Sharma and Sengupta, 1984) reported similar findings. NLI researcher K Padma, who studied marine food processing units in and around Visakhapatnam, found that only three out of 20 units had unions. The majority of workers were women contract workers from Kerala. Indu Agnihotri, who tried to study working conditions in Noida, bordering Delhi, found it impossible to gain entry into the Noida EPZ, and had to speak to EPZ workers privately outside the zone. (all reviewed in Madhok, 2000). The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) or "call centre" industry appears to be based on the
same logic of EPZs - cheaper labour in the South is used to substitute labour in the West, with services as the exported commodity.

Another Example: Women in the Domestic Services Industry

Internal migration flows within India have intensified in the last decade, with thousands of women coming from rural areas to work in the cities as domestic workers. With the stagnation of agriculture, erosion of rural livelihoods and diminishing food security, the only option for displaced, unskilled women is to take up domestic work which taps their 'natural' gendered skills of being able to do housework. The low value and status attached to these traditional female services have been reinforced in the contemporary situation. Moreover there has been a growth of agencies run by convents or private operators, some in the guise of NGOs, that provide live in domestic help to customers, retaining a commission for themselves. These agencies usually 'source' young women from tribal areas all over the country. Women domestic workers are vulnerable in multiple ways, having no job security, no protection from abuse and exploitation and no social security.

Globalization both creates the circumstances for the supply of domestic labour and in creating demand for care services. Other than the care requirements of nuclear families where both partners are working, demand for domestic help has been linked to consumption patterns and lifestyles in the globalized world. It has been suggested that the increasing consumerism and consciousness of status in a globalized, consumerist society contributes to the increased demand for domestic servants (Anderson, 2000). Anderson notes that:

We need to accommodate the raising of children, the distribution and preparation of food, basic cleanliness and hygiene, in order to survive individually and as a species. But domestic work is also concerned with the reproduction of life-style, and crucially, of status. Nobody has to have stripped pine floorboards, hand-wash only silk shirts, dust-gathering ornaments, they all create domestic work. But they affirm the status of the household, its class, its access to resources of
finance and personnel. These two functions cannot be disentangled.

There have been various unsuccessful moves to regulate and formalize the domestic work sector. The industry is a source of income through remittances for 'sending countries' such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Eastern Europe. For example, Sri Lankan women migrants remitted $880 million to their home country in 1998. The Sri Lankan government facilitates migration of domestic workers to countries in the Gulf and even Italy, even providing training. Similarly, Thai women are encouraged to migrate to Europe as entertainers, sex workers or wives, and send money back home. Women are seen as more likely than men to remit money home to their families. The economic contribution of women migrant workers has been recognized in terms of foreign revenue, whether through remittances or the revenue generated locally. (Jagori, 2002)

**Seeking More Examples: A Statement of Purpose for the Present Study**

The examples above illustrate the opening up of new areas of work for women in an era of globalization. This study seeks to explore forms of gendered work that women are subtly invited, encouraged, seduced or compelled to take up under the direction of global capital. All these forms of work can be located within the new global economy, allegedly functioning to "sustain global corporate capital, First World identities and masculine hegemony" (Kempadoo, 1999).

The glamour industry is one such gendered site of work which young women are increasingly being drawn to in India following the advent of liberalization, and which is based on Western constructed notions of beauty, desire and femininity.
III. SOCIAL THEORY AND SEXUALITY

A Historical View

Sexuality has found itself placed at extremes within social theory; either it is irrelevant (as in the case of class analysis) or central to the experience of oppression (as in the case of radical feminists). Theories around sexuality were initially the domain of psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology. With Kate Millet’s pioneering book *Sexual Politics* (1970), feminist theorizing brought sexuality to the centre of its analysis of the politics of patriarchy, contesting its definition as ‘private’ and ‘personal’ by linking it to discourses of power and identifying it as a major site of women’s subordination. Within radical feminism, there are various theorizations of sexuality; MacKinnon (1982) contends that ‘sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism’, concluding that the eroticization of dominance and subordination constitutes gender. Others (Gough, 1975; Rich 1980; Dworkin 1981) see male-dominated forms of sexuality - from the institution of heterosexuality to pornography - as being central to men’s domination over women.

Women’s movements have played a vital role in contributing to debates around sexuality with work on violence, sexual health, birth control, family planning, population policies, contraception and abortion. The publication of *Our Bodies, Our Selves* by the Boston Women’s Health Collective in 1971 opened up a unique perspective on women’s health, delinking it from patriarchal contexts and medical discourses which seek to regulate and control women’s bodies. Work to theorize sexual violence and explain the phenomenon of rape (Brownmiller, 1976)- as ‘natural’ to frustrated men, as acts of disadvantaged men in class/racist society, as an act of deviant/deranged men, as an act of power, as being central to gender relations - all contributed to deepening the understanding of sexuality. ‘Take back the night’ movements highlighted the restrictions
placed on women's mobility through the fear of rape, raising issues of women's control over their own bodies.

Sexuality is also being theorized in terms of its intersections with race, class and nationalisms, as well as in relation to notions of identity, masculinities, femininities, alternative sexualities, militarization, disabilities and pornography.

**Sexuality in Indian Social Theory**

In a pioneering collection of essays *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State* (1996), Patricia Uberoi states that the "ethnography of South Asian sexualities is still very much in the beginning stages". Within South Asia, social theory on sexuality has been dominated by theorizing on the cultural and social boundaries prescribed for women through the control of women's sexuality by the State, community and male members of the family, notions of shame and honour as part of a sexual politics specific to the South Asian cultural context (Uberoi, 1996; Viswanath, 1997) and the silence surrounding issues of female sexuality. Anthropological explorations in this area have covered issues such as the control of female mobility, rules of deportment, behaviour, notions of purity and pollution practiced on the female body, conjugality, celibacy, widowhood, nationalism, and the experience of violence in the Partition.

Feminist groups engaged with sexuality differently, not from the perspective of 'cultural inscriptions' but from the standpoint of women's experience, particularly that of sexual violence. (Viswanath, 1997). Sexuality was examined as a site where men exert power over women (Gandhi and Shah, 1992) through sexual violence and rape. A large volume of work looks at the legal implications of sexuality and attempts to critique and reframe existing laws dealing with violence against women (Kapur, 1996).
In the early years of Indian women's struggles against sexual violence and rape, conceptualizations of sexuality focused on violence and power in social relations. Other aspects of sexuality remained unexplored - neither feminist groups, nor anthropologists theorized on sexuality in the context of women's pleasure or as a site for liberation, although feminist groups did highlight elements such as women's mobility and freedom from 'moral' restrictions as central to the empowerment of women.

Today, even though a large volume of work by women's groups exists on the body, reproductive health, contraception and sex education, there is still very little that looks at sexuality as pleasure or as a site for liberation of women. Recent literature on sexuality focuses on the State's regulation of sexuality (Puri, 1999), sexual economies (John and Nair, 1998), a critique of hetero-normativity and theorizing around alternative sexualities and sexual minorities (Bhan and Narain, 2005), sexuality and disability, cinema, censorship and media (Ghosh, 1999) and migration and trafficking.

**Reading Sexuality in Issues of Gender and Labour: Theoretical Gaps**

Theorizing on women, work and sexuality has largely been limited to three areas, the most voluminous being on the obvious issues – sex work and prostitution.

The debate over whether sale of sexual services in exchange of money is 'labour' or exploitation, has led to the polarization of ideologies. One side holds that prostitution is a form of violence against women and is best understood as commercial sexual exploitation that must be ended. The other side sees prostitution as a form of work, and prioritises the protection of labour rights of sex workers. Work around this issue has focused on articulation of these two positions, on the genealogy of sex
work from a historical lens, legal implications and interventions of the State in regulation of sex work. (D'Cunha, 1991; O'Connell Davidson, 2003; Kempadoo and Doezeema, 2000) There is considerable recent research on sex trafficking, sexual slavery, sex tourism, discourses of HIV AIDS and migration, all in the context of globalization.

In many countries, women (and sometimes men) in communities that have been pushed to the margins by the impacts of globalisation, turn to sex work or to exploiting the perceived sexual image of their womenfolk as a strategy for survival. Among these ‘sex economies’ is Thailand, where much of the national income derives from sex tourism. There is some evidence that such trends have also fuelled changes in power equations in some communities. For instance, women of the Nat/ Bedia community (who are traditional sex workers) are now the main breadwinners and chief decision makers within their families. In fact, the mobility of Bedia and Kalbeliya women as entertainers (dancers, performers and sex workers) has given them greater power in their communities (Jagori, 2002).

The other area that makes some reference to sexuality in studies on women and work, is on issues of migrant women and the element of sexual stigma that is attached to them. Even when they are not actually involved in sex work, the demands or opportunities resulting from globalization for women to work in the public sphere (often transnationally) risk women being targeted as sexually immoral. Studies show that women workers in Sri Lanka’s EPZs contribute a large percentage to foreign exchange reserves, but face disrepute in both their home towns and at the places of work because they are stereotyped as being promiscuous and loose. Similarly, nurses from Kerala working in the USA describe how they are stigmatized back home because the nature of their job involves proximity with bodies (George, 2000).
Another area where issues of labour and sexuality intersect is that of sexual harassment at the workplace. While there is not much theoretical work on sexual harassment at the workplace, legal research and advocacy and policy documents have looked at this issue from the perspective of protection of rights of professional women.

As the above discussion makes clear, several theoretical gaps still exist in incorporating feminist perspectives on sexuality into explorations around gender and labour.

IV. BEAUTY, BODY, FASHION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

An Overview of Western Literature
Naomi's Wolf's The Beauty Myth (1991) was a defining feminist intervention into the discourse of beauty, developing the idea that the stranglehold of beauty represents a backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement. While women are made to be more and more concerned and involved in making themselves beautiful, men continue running the world. According to Wolf, as soon as women freed themselves from the myth of domesticity, the beauty myth took over with the 'youthful beauty' replacing the 'happy housewife' as a model of successful womanhood. Wolf explored the (inverse) relationship between female liberation and female beauty, stating that as women acquired greater and greater levels of freedoms, phenomena like eating disorders and cosmetic surgery became more common, as women became more enslaved to their bodies and to using beauty as currency. Wolf states that the beauty myth is not about women at all – it is about men's institutions and institutional power. The beauty myth is the last and strongest of the belief systems that keeps male dominance intact.
Black feminists brought the politics of race and class into discourses on beauty through their analyses of the notion of "fairness" as beauty. In her seminal work *Outlaw Culture* bell hooks (1994) traces the Black Power revolution of the 1960s that raised the call "black is beautiful" to empower black people, challenging them to examine the psychic impact of white supremacy. Although the effects of this movement was short lived, the idea that a positive self image and love for one's own self could be a political change was critical. It was also a powerful reclamation of the notion of 'beautiful'.

Some works have attempted to examine the inter-linkages between economic restructuring and changing attitudes to beauty through the phenomenon of beauty pageants. Bridger, Kay and Pinnick (1996) for instance look at the changing status of women in Russian society in the new market economy and recall that images of Russian women two decades ago were very different from what fills our TV screens today. Rather than women on tractors, construction sites, sportswomen or space explorers, today the dominant images are "of the provocatively dressed or entirely undressed glamour model with a very different suggestion of what women are capable of". They attribute this to a response to massive unemployment in transitional economies and diminishing options even for educated women. Other reasons include the changed priorities of younger women, who want to reduce their workload, change the quality of their lives and have "time for themselves".

Time for themselves, for younger Soviet women of the late 1980s, meant very firmly time to indulge in all the paraphernalia of the growing beauty industry as the ultimate antidote to the image and reality of manual labour.

A combination of factors led to a new preoccupation, amounting to a national obsession, with fashion, glamour and the sex industry. To quote,

... The entire nation became rapidly entranced by the sheer novelty of a further Western import, the beauty contest. At the very point at which western interest in such proceedings was flagging alarmingly for their organizers, Soviet schoolgirls,
factory workers, nurses and sociologists were to be found parading in bikinis while whole families settled down for an evening’s unsophisticated talent-spotting in front of the TV, much in the manner of so many families in the West some two or three decades earlier.

However frivolously, beauty queens represented a lifestyle where fighting for the basic necessities would be over, and served as symbols of a different way of life. A striking feature of these contests in Russia was the high proportion of entrants with higher education and professional jobs.

**Sociology of the Body**

Marcel Mauss’s essay *Techniques of the Body* (1973) was among the first prominent academic exploration of the body. Mauss showed how femininity and masculinity were produced through various techniques, such as women wearing high heels, applying make up, men knotting a tie or women plucking their eyebrows. Following this Bryan Turner’s *The Body and Society* (1980) was a critical text that moved away from the dominant trend in sociology to look at abstract structure, function and class, and brought the body back onto the radar of sociological theory.

Recent works such as *Real Bodies* (Evans and Lee, 2002) points out the ambivalent attitude of the contemporary West to the body, with extreme regulation on the one hand (reflected in eating disorders, social prejudices towards fat people, vigorous normalizing discourses about appearance and the ideal modern body and so on), while simultaneously encouraging and acknowledging the existence of ‘non-normative’ body types (as in athletic meets for people with disabilities, occasional appearance of women amputees in *Vogue* fashion magazine and on the Parisian catwalk and so on). By and large, scholarly examinations of the body share this ambivalence, seeing the body both as women's means to freedom as well as the locus of their enslavement.

This duality is also reflected in visual discourses, which project a
fantasized modern body that is completely different from the real bodies around us. This fantasy body (created by the West and recreated in global media across the world including in India) is created to match not only the ideals of feminine beauty and body size, but also the expectations and demands of capitalist society. This visual policing of the body within late capitalism in the West however also led to a counterculture – that represented by street fashion or 'grunge'.

Market capitalism today is fuelled by growth in the services sector and the demand for consumer goods, and requires a labour force that is educated, also efficient, effective and in itself as advertisement for the products of its labour. As Evans and Lee say, “The ideal employee of late capitalism is therefore, not just a hard working individual, but a person who possesses the public characteristics of being an acceptable shape, size and ‘well dressed’. And who therefore confirms the desirability of the products of a service-sector economy.” Fashion reflects these ideals, hence the trend of corporate ‘power dressing’ and the increasing popularity of grooming classes by MNCs in India and China.

Other scholars have looked at the relationship of clothes with the body. Eco (1986) recalls the experience of wearing jeans and his heightened awareness that he calls ‘epidermic self awareness’, saying “I assumed an exterior behaviour of one who wears jeans ... the garment imposed a demeanour on me”. Entwistle (2000) recalls the relationship of the dress to the social world – the garment you wear doesn’t just belong to you but to the social world as well. She distinguishes between the physical body and the social body, and her research of career women reveals that they experience two different bodies – one at work and one at home. The body at work is tailored, structured, formal and tightly constrained, like the garments she wears, while at home her clothes are untailored, unstructured and designed for comfort.
social status enjoyed by the industry, a changed approach to jobs in the media, increased number of model hunts and reality TV shows, as well as many more options to join an agency like Elite in Delhi (which did not exist until three years ago). Those joining in the last three years therefore have seen a different ‘time’ in the industry than those who joined 5 years ago.

I now examine in closer detail various demographic characteristics of the sample, and attempt to assess some broad trends from these statistics.

![Age Composition of Respondents](image)

**Figure 2**

*Age Profile*

Respondents were predominantly young women in their mid twenties. The youngest respondent was 17 years, and the oldest nearing 50 years. Exact ages were rarely given, references were made at times to approximates.
More recently academics like Carol Wolkowitz (2002) note that the numbers of people in occupations that take the body as their focus, or do 'body work', have grown in recent years, like beauticians, health instructors, salon workers, doctors, nurses, healers and so on. Most sociologists however rarely associate the experience of the body with work; instead they "associate sensuousness with play, desire and spontaneity rather than with employments numbing routines". Wolkowitz adds that the healthy, fit and attractive body is today not only a sign of class privilege but may be becoming increasingly central to the reproduction of professional and managerial status.

Sociology of Fatness

Cutting across race and class, the sociology of fatness has also been a site for feminist theorizing in the West, particularly in the USA. Susan Bordo, in her work Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body, looks at the cultural construction of the female body in Western society, from being a symbol of nature to a symbol of culture, which can be controlled through dieting or altered through plastic surgery. (Bordo, 1993) She examines cultural images dominant in American society that promote the idolization of the 'postmodern bodies' and the creation of a 'hungry self', and links body fetishism to a consumerist culture. Bordo points out that problems such as hysteria or anorexia are born out of the 'practice of femininity itself'.

Most American research on body image, anorexia and thin-ness is in the context of issues of adolescence and identity. Joan Jacobs Brumberg states in The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls (1998) notes that "American girls make their body their central project is not an accident or a curiosity, it is a symptom of historical changes that are only
now being understood. Using diaries, journals and medical records, Bromberg shows how middle class American girls are raised in the 19th and 20th century to be submissive feminine creatures in society and later consumers at large. In a later work (2002) she documents the medical history of anorexia nervosa to shoot down the myth that it is a new age eating disorder, tracing the existence of these conditions over decades and showing that the roots lie in changing but powerful notions of female attractiveness, psychology, social relations and class.

In fact, much of the literature on eating disorders and body image has come from the field of public health and medical anthropology, drawing largely from medical records.

Fat continues to be an important subject matter for Western social theory (Kulick and Meneley, 2005) with continued links being made between anorexia nervosa and the spirit of capitalism and the stigmatic elements of fatness as oppression, exclusion and a source of identity. A new trend is also to bring the male body under scrutiny. For instance, Susan Bordo in *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (2000) studies the ambivalent attitudes in American cultural imagination towards male bodies and the phallus.

**Theorizing Fashion**

Fashion has been theorized to some extent in Western academia from both a feminist and a cultural studies perspective. Fashion is one in a line of methods used to define women - like advertisements, cartoons and stereotypes. Beauty is the most visible manifestation of the need of women to please others. Both feed on the insecurity and lack of confidence that characterize women in a patriarchal society. (Nunes and White, 1972). *Fashioning the Body Politic* (Parkins, 2002) takes a detailed look at the social role of fashion in communicating affiliation, participation and
protest, highlighting examples from Argentina, China and Italy to demonstrate the metaphorical power of clothing as an expression of social and cultural identity.

Fashion has also been examined in the context of globalization, identities and consumption cultures. John Berger (1972) regards the situation of being envied as glamour, and advertisements the vehicles of glamour-creation. Almost all discourses on political economy today begin with the premise that capitalism is the force and logic behind recent transformations, and that globalization restructures not only economies but also cultures, societies and the way in which people construct identities. (Bergeron, 2001). The values that are inherent to globalisation are a shift from production to consumption, fuelled by the seemingly 'free choices' available for this consumption. Fashion is one discursive field for the representation and exercise of these choices. Fashion is also part of the urban experience. While urban political economists lament that cities are increasingly consumption machines, dissenting voices say that consumption has a productive role in creating social relationships (such as public cultures organized around consumption of coffee, beer or food) and building a new enthusiasm and belief in urban life. (Latham, 2003)

Jean Baudrillard (1988) also points out that the core dynamic of postmodern society is not the mode of production but the mode of consumption. The experience of the world is mediated through the mass media. According to him, today, we buy our identities. Fashion fits in perfectly with fluid identities in a disembedded modern world. Baudrillard identifies these as the new order of social control, making it possible to "inject the prison directly into the body". He also links fashion with democracy, saying that the growth of fashion is linked to the rise of individualism and hence democracy.
Foucault, in his essay “What is Enlightenment” (1984a) when reviewing Baudelaire’s idea of the modern man hits on perhaps what is the enduring relevance of ‘fashion’ to modern man’s life:

To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration: what Baudelaire, in the vocabulary of his day, calls dandysme. Here I shall not recall in detail the well-known passages on ‘vulgar, earthy, vile nature’; on man’s indispensable revolt against himself; on the ‘doctrine of elegance’ which imposes ‘upon its ambitious and humble disciples’ a discipline more despotic than the most terrible religions; the pages, finally, on the asceticism of the dandy who makes of his body, his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art. Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.

A Brief Review of Indian Feminist Theory on Beauty and Body

The 1994 double victory of India at the Miss Universe and Miss World pageants is marks a change in global (and Indian) perceived Indian women. The titles were hailed as national honours with self-congratulatory refrains that ‘Indian women are very beautiful’. The beauty queen manufacturers took it upon themselves to claim that it was ‘all about empowerment’, that it was to their credit that the world (and indeed, the “universe”) now did not only associate Indian women with dowry deaths, sati and child marriages. Following these wins, the rising national interest in these events forced feminist scholars and activists to comment on them.

Madhu Kishwar (1995) traces the changed attitude towards beauty pageants commenting that “the victories of Sushmita and Aishwarya ... were celebrated in India the way America celebrated its first astronaut’s walk on the moon.” She also opines on the elitist project of such enterprises, and the Westernization inherent in them. Kishwar feels that in the Indian context weight is not an issue that bothers women. Neither is being sexually attractive or the fear of ageing an important part of their...
social existence, as it does not define or influence their relations with men. Various other metaphors such as the 'elder sister/ mother/ aunt' which are invoked by women in public social relations offer respite to Indian women, and enable them a way of avoiding being sex objects. Kishwar warns against the threats of a rising obsession with beauty, as it will make women competitive and invite not only desire from men, but envy from women.

Other feminist writing on beauty pageants also focuses on their linkages with globalization and nationalism. John (1998) looks at the way in which the visual media, particularly satellite television, has been an agent in communicating and implementing the agenda of globalization and creating a boom in the fashion and modelling industry, a prosperous and growing glamour industry and an ideal of a globalized 'lifestyle'. Rupal Oza sees beauty pageants as an 'icon of globalization' in the new India (2001). Kumkum Sangari (2004) looks at the role of both nuclear bombs and beauty queens in the nationalist project, pointing out the similar ways in which these are used as political tools to raise nationalist sentiment.

More recently, Meenakshi Thapan (2004) provides an incisive analysis on the "desirability of woman's body, not only as glamorous, well groomed product, but also as a commercialized product for consumption in an international marketplace, thus affirming that India has arrived in the world of beauty and glamour, and legitimizing the recolonization of Indian woman's embodiment in the global economy". Through a reading of Femina, the women's magazine including advertisements, visual and textual material, Thapan concludes that beauty is today communicated as an ideal and a goal which can be achieved by any woman. By enhancing sexuality (although carefully so as to maintain traditional boundaries), an emphasis on individual choice and a call to celebrate the self, the magazine exhorts the new Indian woman (or Generation W as the
magazine tags her lot) to "be herself". However this itself reflects the "ambivalence of Indian womanhood" as it involves balancing the world of tradition as well as Western modernity within the prescribed norms of femininity.

In India, conceptualizing around the female body in particular has focused on cultural inscriptions, particularly notions of pollution and purity. The notion of 'embodiment' was examined in detail in a ground-breaking collection of essays (ed. Thapan, 1997) and further explored in recent works (Thapan, 2004) in relation to the projection of the 'new Indian woman'.

**A Context for this Study**

Feminist or anthropological scholarship in India has so far only superficially engaged with the impact of these developments on women's lives. Neither has it examined the specific experiences of women who have participated in these enterprises. The minimal theorizing that exists emerged in response to and in the context of globalization, which in itself goes to show the organic links that globalization has with the current form of the glamour industry.

Popular media has occasionally attempted to explore the glamour industry. For instance, BBC made a documentary on the glamour industry some years back which was a dramatic expose of the illegal practices and exploitation in the glamour industry. Newspaper reports show that the opportunities to make careers out of modelling or beauty pageants are no longer limited to the upper classes as they were once assumed to be. There exists today an escalating fascination with beauty contests in small town and semi-urban areas. Parents from Patiala or Patna also want their children to become dancers/models/beauty
queens/singers. In fact the popularity enjoyed by beauty contests in small towns is well documented in the media. There appears to be a new model of 'empowerment' for young women, involving serious efforts towards grooming bodies, putting together portfolios and being successful in these new career options. The popularity of the glamour industry as a career option is a reflection of the wider impact of globalization on the economy and on peoples' lives. In selling the dream, in selling global products, in selling brands, in selling attitudes - the modelling and fashion industry appears to be a crystallization of what globalization has to offer.

Surrounding these developments are debates on the increasing use of women's bodies in selling and the resultant sexual objectification and commodification of women's bodies, with its dangerous implications such as the increasing obsessing about weight, skin colour, beauty, hair, being attractive and so on - issues which were allegedly not part of the un-globalized Indian psyche. There are also concerns about sexual exploitation and the murky underbelly of the glamour industry.

These issues lie within the purview of some of the dominant concerns of the feminist theoretical and activist framework in India, such as the conditions of work of women in the industry, or violence and exploitation faced by the women. Other key concerns include the limited and problematic nature of female agency, the complexities of choice and consent, or the increasing body worship that is evident in urban India.

Despite these concerns, feminist theory has not engaged fully with these issues. There are gaps in theorization on issues such as body work, beauty, weight, and the production of glamour in the Indian context, perhaps because of their direct and obvious Western reference, and the assumption that these are issues that affect the elite in urban India. Yet
these Western issues do have an Indian face, as this study goes on to unmask. Today, the dichotomy between Western issues and indigenous issues is slowly blurring, and nothing that impacts women – Indian or Western – can be left unattended.

In this chapter I have indicated the conceptual and theoretical gaps in Indian feminist theory with reference to the confluence of women, work and sexuality and the situation of women in the glamour industry. I have also pointed out the lack of empirical evidence and attention in the Indian context to hitherto 'Western' issues such as body image, beauty, weight and fashion, and the absence of the documentation of the voices and experiences of women who are implicit in these discourses, such as women in the modelling and beauty pageant industries. The present study attempts to fill these gaps.