Chapter 6

In Lieu of a Conclusion:

Sexuality, space and class are all fraught areas of negotiation both separately and together. In this thesis, I have sought to engage with some of the areas of contestation around these three concerns taken together. All of these concerns are in the process of being renegotiated. The middle class itself is in the process of in reconstructing itself as the bastion of both productivity and respectability and therefore of a particular brand of urban middle-class (often upper caste Hindu) global Indianness.

In this last chapter, I engage some of the recent moral panics that we have found ourselves in the middle of. I also look at just why space is such a contentious issue in Mumbai. I argue that the new spaces of consumption are far from conspiracies to keep women inside but at the same time they do not in any significant way further women’s claims to real political space. Finally I engage with feminism’s relationship with pleasure and fun.

Of the three: sexuality, space and class, perhaps sexuality is the most visibly and publicly incendiary. The last decade has seen several moral panics around a number of issues, which variously express anxieties about control of women’s sexuality, the global reputation of Mumbai, the moral fibre of our youth, among other things.

In April 2005, a young college student was raped by police constable at Marine drive in a police chowki after he had asked her boy friend to go outside while he “questioned her”. The University of Mumbai responded to the rape of the college student on Marine Drive by proposing a dress code for its students suggesting clearly that women’s attire influenced whether or not they would be sexually harassed/ assaulted. The tone of the debate that followed the rape often suggested that women needed to be more careful.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ One particularly conservative editorial read: Be careful and the world will appear to be good... But in today’s superfast world... there are shards of glass on this modern path... we don’t see parents telling their children to tread carefully. ... There seems to be a competition
Another case that underscores that when women are sexually attacked in any way the onus continues to be on them is the molestation of two women on New Year's Eve 2008 near Juhu beach.106

A newspaper photographer captured the assault on camera.107 In the brouhaha that followed the Mumbai Police Commissioner D. N. Jadhav’s was quoted the following day as saying, ‘Anything can happen anywhere,’ that ‘These small things happen in every society …’ and that ‘The media is creating a mountain out of a molehill’. As if this were not enough, he went on to assert, ‘Is your wife at home safe …? That’s because of our policing …’108 Commissioner Jadhav’s misplaced notion of what his policing duties involve apart, his comments indicate not just police apathy, but also a larger vision of where women really belong for, shockingly, Jadhav’s views seemed to be mirrored by many others in the media and public.109

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among young women to show their undergarments in the name of a ‘below-waist’ fashion. ... To see girls dangle a cigarette openly is worrisome. If a man is provoked by such clothes, who can one blame? (Saamna, Shiv Sena newspaper, 25 April 2005.).

Although this quote is not representative of the general tone of the media and is arguably its most conservative voice, media reports do tend to underscore the danger that women face in the city.

106 A similar incident had occurred in 2007 when a girl was molested by New Year’s Eve revellers at the Gateway of India.

107 ‘Shame old story’, Hindustan Times, Jan 2, 2008’


109 When The Times of India, Mumbai, 4 January 2008) ran a half-page story asking if Mumbai was becoming increasingly unsafe for women, almost 85 per cent of their readers said ‘yes’ but surprisingly most readers blamed the women for this. When women are held responsible for violence this reduces not just access to public space but even the potential to seek legitimate access.

Some responses to The Times of India survey were:

‘Everything comes with a price tag. If you want to enjoy clubbing at late night (sic) and stroll in the streets of Mumbai as if its Switzerland you can’t expect people to welcome you with flowers on the roads. If you have guts to handle the consequences then dare to party late nights …’—Raj

‘Women are fighting for their freedom, what kind of freedom do they want? They come out on the streets half dressed at midnight and they want to walk freely. Women are equally to blame in these situations … they should bring about changes in their lifestyle.’—Venkat

‘I am deeply saddened but how could they be so empty-headed to go out at 1.45 am in such a crowd? Crazy women! What were they thinking, that people would come to protect them and bring them home safe? I must say that they paid for their foolishness and arrogance.’—S. Moosa
In April 2009 a young woman, an international student in Mumbai, was drugged and sexually assaulted by six acquaintances. She was assaulted at a flat in Mumbai where she went with the six men who proceeded to assault her. The story was reported explicitly on newspaper pages, including a news report that asked ‘Why was she with six men that night?’ In the public debate that followed the question was often raised in conversation of the young woman’s ‘stupidity’ in going to an empty flat with six men. Here it is important to point out that many other women (and men) have done similar things without adverse outcomes. The problem must be located not in the woman’s desire to have fun, but in the men’s plan to commit a crime.

If these instances of assault led to discussion in regard to the safety of (middle-class) women, other instances have squarely vilified women as the problem.

In July 2005, dancing in the down market bars in Mumbai was banned by the government of Maharashtra. The banning and closure of these bars was represented in the languages of morality (the bars are corrupting the youth and breaking up families), sanitation (the bars are a slur on the body of the city) and danger (the night as a time of unbridled sexuality). The bar dancer in this case was vilified as the moral problem. Interestingly other kinds of performances in three and five star hotels were not similarly banned. It is the division between the public and the private that marks one as a part of new global sexual regimes and another as illegitimate, vulgar and to be erased from the city.

In 2004, Bollywood film star Kareena Kapoor began legal proceedings against a tabloid newspaper that published photos of her kissing her co-star and then

‘Not only Mumbai, other cities too are becoming unsafe. But the people responsible for this are girls themselves. Why should they roam around at night? Can’t they celebrate at home? And what kind of dresses were they wearing? … I hope other girls will learn a lesson from this.’—Prakruthi


111 In April 2006, the Bombay High Court ruled upholding the right of women to earn their living by dancing in bars. The judgment striking down the dance bar ban as unconstitutional, in the case of Indian Hotels and Restaurants Association and others Vs. the State of Maharashtra and others, was pronounced by a division bench comprising Justices F I Rebello and Roshan Dalvi. Now an appeal is pending in the Supreme Court.
boyfriend Shahid Kapur. The photographs referred to were pictures caught on mobile phone camera of the duo kissing in a restaurant in Mumbai. She and Shahid Kapoor claimed the photos were doctored and were not of them. She further asserted that she came from a good family and would never do “that”.

What the “that” is, is rather baffling, for Kareena Kapoor had been open in regard to her relationship with Shahid Kapur and it was unclear why she was protesting so much over a kiss. The problem with the kiss, I would like to suggest is that while people merely assumed that she and Shahid Kapur had a sexual life it remained private but being confronted with the reality of that sex life threatened Kareena Kapoor’s status as a good girl. It is interesting that Kareena Kapoor chose to deny the kiss, thus underscoring her respectability, rather than asserting that what consenting adults did was nobody’s business but their own.

In 2006, Rakhi Sawant filed a police complaint against Mika, the pop singer, for allegedly forcibly kissing her. The broadcast media gave as much air time to Mika as they did to Rakhi Sawant refusing to take sides. Somehow being who she was – loud mouthed, apparently sexually assertive, not quite middle-class in terms of cultural capital, and an “item girl” to boot meant that her complaints did not elicit the same kind of outrage as those of someone more clearly marked as good girl might have.112

Rakhi Sawant is clearly in this case a bad victim – that is she comes across as neither innocent nor virtuous. This meant that she could not as Kareena Kapur did, assert that she was a good girl and would never do ‘that’. What she did say and what was not considered significant was that she did not invite Mika to kiss her and that she did not want to kiss him then. She did not say she would never have kissed in public or even that she would never have kissed Mika, simply that she was kissed against her will. The public response was to see it as a publicity stunt and there was no discussion at all about Rakhi Sawant’s right to consent or not to consent.

Until recently Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code rendered all non-penovaginal sex illegal, both in public and in private. On 2 July 2009, the Delhi High

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112 Then Mika came up with his album along with Meet Brothers called ‘Bhai tune pappi kyu le’ which asserted his version of the incident.
Court struck down the provision of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalised consensual sexual acts of adults in private, holding that it violated the fundamental right of life and liberty and the right to equality as guaranteed in the Constitution. Though this is no small victory in the battle for sexual rights of all people, one must recognise that once again what is being asserted are private rights. Nonetheless the public debate that surrounded this judgement has in many ways transformed our engagement with sexuality.

The various moral panics reflect an effort to control women’s sexuality. Consumption and the new spaces of consumption I would argue are often ways in which women’s sexuality can be if not controlled at least domesticated to a large extent. In these spaces often, though not always, women are offered choices that are non-threatening to the maintenance of larger status quos such as those of class and caste endogamy. As suggested earlier in the dissertation, women (and men) who marry against the wishes of their families and communities often face ostracism and even brutal violence.

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Space is at a premium in the city and many battles have been fought over it in terms of mill lands and now with the SRA schemes especially in Dharavi. A process of gentrification is taking place which is closely tied to the building of malls and multiplexes as these are the structures replacing the mills in central Mumbai. Elsewhere too the glitzy exteriors are rapidly becoming the sought after areas to live in. Public spaces in the city are all too few and in fact, open plots with public access are de-reserved regularly to be replaced by privately-owned facilities. Even when the mill lands in central Mumbai became available for redevelopment, the possibility for the city to have one large open park, accessible to all, and/or several smaller parks, was lost because of vested real estate interests and the lack of a comprehensive vision for open spaces in the city. Open spaces like parks are frequently seen as an invitation for what is termed as ‘anti-social activity’.

In an attempt to control local open spaces, manage them, and make them available for local use, residents associations have sprung up all over the city. At face value, these are democratic organizations widely held up as an example of
public participation in governance. Unfortunately, they end up representing just the middle classes, and not all citizens who use these open spaces. Amongst the most visible projects of residents’ associations in the city is the upgradation of the long stretches of sea front in Bandra—the Carter Road and Bandra Bandstand promenades.\(^\text{113}\) The promenades have been paved, fenced, beautified and new facilities such as amphitheatres, small parks and children’s playground equipment have been added to them. Besides walking and sunset gazing, new ways of using the promenade have emerged such as tai chi classes on Thursday mornings, weekend art classes, late evening music concerts, plays and poetry readings. While these have expanded access for some people, the promenades are now also stringently policed, especially against vagrants, hawkers and couples.

For women, middle-class women that is, it is the privatized new spaces of consumption are the ones offered as approximating some facsimile of the ‘public space experience’. Real public spaces are seen as undesirable for them unless of course they have been re-made into suitably gentrified locations. The kind of access allowed by the presence of the new spaces of consumption offers some avenues for pleasure and also what women suggest is agency and choice. At the same time this choice is circumscribed and restricted. These spaces underscore a particular kind of heterosexuality that is linked not only to the production of a globalised femininity but also just as significantly the construction of a class. These spaces are designed to ressemble similar such spaces anywhere in the world creating what some of my respondents called the “new India”.

These new spaces of consumption are often presented as public though in fact are private. I suggest that these privatized spaces, then while they offer avenues for women to stroll and perform particular forms of modernity and to experiment with clothing, cosmetics, and culinary forms of consumer culture they nonetheless do so in ways that do not threaten the location of women as primarily in domestic spaces, nor do they transgress acceptable forms of sexual expression and performance.

\(^\text{113}\) This upgradation was undertaken by the Bandra West Residents Association and the Bandra Bandstand Residents Trust.
The interesting thing is that circumscribed as they are these spaces too are sometimes policed as discussed in the thesis. This situation creates an interesting scenario where it is these market driven new spaces of consumption that then become the bulwarks of modernity reflecting women’s desires and sexual agency. When women are attacked in such spaces as they were in Mangalore in January 2009, the media responds with outrage and condemnation. While this is heartening, one should take note that in these situations what happens is that these spaces then approximate the safe havens for women and this over-focus on these incidents means that the much needed debate on the provision of ‘real’ public spaces does not take place at all.

Real public spaces which might be accessible to all are invisiblised in the process allowing the city to further eat into the little public space that does exist. When the new spaces of consumption become the threatened spaces that must be protected the debate then is located only among the middle classes and most centrally on the figure of the middle-class woman. This then allows any public debate on women in the city to be only about middle class women further erasing not just lower class women but also lower class men and disregarding any claims they might have to the city. The global city then even in protests belongs squarely to the middle-classes.

This situation has also allowed the public face of the space of the sexual-modernity (and pleasure and desire) to be occupied largely by the forces of the market through advertising which offer up closed packages of such ‘freedom’ and ‘modernity’ tied to various consumer products.

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Within feminist debates there has been some reluctance to engage with these concerns for fear of being seen as frivolous and engaging with issues that are not relevant. Often the fear is that if pleasure gets on the agenda, women will lose what we’ve so hardly won. Feminists have also been wary of being accused of demanding ‘things’ that are lower down on what Nivedita Menon satirically refers to as the ‘hierarchy of oppressions’.114 The tradition of Left ideological-

114 See Menon, 2005 p.34.
based feminism dominates the women’s movement and the desire for pleasure, in a context where people are poor or face violence is seen as suspect. There is a belief that claiming victim-status allows the movement to win many of the small battles and make gains for women. What is never considered is that this might well mean losing the war. In keeping with this strategy, feminist engagements with city public spaces have, given the instances of violence against women, focused on eliminating the risks of violence as far as possible.

Feminist debates need to take these into account and to think of pleasure as important. Sexual pleasure for some time has been an avenue of discussion. However pleasure in public space is not even considered. While I am not dismissing the possibility that women might find pleasure in the privatized public – it is important for us to struggle for real public spaces. As I’ve suggested in the thesis such spaces are all too few and those that exist are rapidly shrinking and heavily surveilled.

Anthropologist Carole Vance (1984) has famously argued that feminism’s success in bringing sexual violence into the public had also had the unintended consequence of suggesting that women are less sexually safe than ever and that ‘discussions and explorations of pleasure are better deferred to a safer time.’ Vance argues that if as feminists we allow ourselves to be convinced that our desire for sexual pleasure should be postponed until all sexual violence is eliminated, we will wait forever. She suggests that we need to talk of sexual pleasure even as we battle against sexual violence and that these two projects are by no means mutually exclusive. Using this line of thinking I argue that we cannot postpone thinking about the pleasures of courting risk – the pleasures of walking the streets and viscerally writing the city with our bodies.

When I say pleasure here, I refer to something that encompasses fun, but is much more than that. Pleasure itself is highly subjective and is inextricably linked to a range of choices including those related to sexuality, dress, temporality, matrimony (or not), motherhood (or not), to name some. Pleasure might be found
in solitude as much as in company; it involves the visceral body as much as the untamed mind; and it involves activity as much as simply doing nothing.\footnote{115}

As Vance suggests, the struggle against violence and the quest for pleasure cannot be separate things. The quest for pleasure actually strengthens our struggle against violence, framing it in the language of rights rather than protection.\footnote{116} The ‘right to pleasure’ must always include the ‘right to live without violence’. The struggle against violence as an end in itself is fundamentally premised on exclusion and can only be maintained through violence, in that, it tends to divide people into ‘us’ and ‘them’, and actually sanctions violence against ‘them’ in order to protect ‘us’. The quest for pleasure on the other hand, when framed in inclusive terms, does not divide people into aggressors and victims and is therefore non-divisive.\footnote{117}

Despite Reclaim the Night marches, access to pleasure in public space has never really occupied centre stage. There is also a fear that the quest for pleasure, an unknown quantity, might be seen as too threatening to society’s ideas of order. It might derail the struggles and undermine the righteous and moral grounds on which the women’s movement has fought for women’s rights. As a result even within the women’s movement, women do not place themselves or their desires centre-stage because this would immediately be tagged as selfish, self-serving and divisive. The quest for the right to enjoyment, fun or pleasure for its own sake just does not find legitimacy.\footnote{118}

\footnote{115} My understanding of pleasure was developed together with Shilpa Ranade and Sameera Khan.

\footnote{116} I am aware of the limitations of using the discourse of rights in this argument given the feminist critique of rights as being individualistic, reifying liberalism and often reflecting existing hierarchies of all kinds and thus limiting the terms of the debate This critique is both valid and very valuable and it is important not to forget this. At the same time, the language of rights is also a powerful tool to promote greater inclusion and participation in quest of a more egalitarian citizenship not the least because it has a wide acceptability and for now perhaps the best way to articulate both the entitlement to be free of violence and the claim to pleasure.

\footnote{117} See Phadke, Ranade and Khan, 2009.

\footnote{118} This critique however, is not intended to undermine the achievements of the women’s movement in India especially in the struggle against violence. For a detailed discussion on the women’s movement’s response to violence and the campaign against it see Agnes 1992, Dave 2006, Gandhi and Shah 1992, Kumar 1993, Phadke 2003, Sunder Rajan 2003,
Further a focus on the middle-classes might also be seen as suspect. One might argue that to seek to explore concerns of sexuality, space and consumption in middle class contexts is an exercise that does not merit a high priority. I am aware that increasingly in urban India class structures are sharply hierarchical where a small section of the population has access to first world lifestyles, another larger section sinks further into poverty and deprivation. The forces of globalisation accentuate these differences. As a result questions regarding sexual and reproductive rights and choices have to be framed differently for different segments of the population. It is important to foreground and prioritise, as the women’s movement has done, issues relating to reproductive health and rights and sexual health and rights.\textsuperscript{119} At the same time it is important not to ignore issues of sexuality which relate to the comparatively small minority of middle and upper middle class women who have apparently greater choices and certainly greater access to material resources.

The most prolific images of womanhood visible in the media (including television & film) are those of middle class women and as such these become the defining and aspirational images for women across classes and in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, middle class and upper caste women are the grounds on which questions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' are framed. They are perceived as the guardians of the morality of the nation and form the carefully policed boundaries between licit and illicit expressions and forms of sexuality. In this context it becomes imperative for feminist scholars to turn their critical gaze to analyse these more 'bourgeois' sexual processes of globalisation. If we neglect to do this, we risk the possibility of 'sexual liberation' being sold by the global market forces in various limiting packages.

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In relation to question of fun in public space – we need to think of these if we are to speak to a generation of younger women. Young women increasingly express

\textsuperscript{119} There are several NGOs engaged in conducting empowering sexuality workshops among all classes of women, particularly poor women in rural and urban contexts and this is a significant effort towards empowerment.
a disenchantment with feminism or at least an unwillingness to call themselves as such. This group of women is particularly the group that I have studied. For this group of upper-middle class young women, equality has come to mean a denial of difference. In a neo-liberal economy, their concerns are increasingly class-focussed and to complicate this context by bringing in gender seems to them to be almost pre-modern. Over the years through my continuing engagement with under-graduate and more recently post-graduate students, I notice that over the years, young women’s lack of enchantment with feminism has only intensified.

There are two important and related issues here. One is the more obvious one, that a group of young women, in many ways beneficiaries of the struggles fought by the women's movement are now choosing to reject feminism, and to seek affiliation in class identities through corporate and professional careers and various acts of consumption that are offered as 'choices'. The other issue maybe less obvious but it is no less relevant for that. In many ways feminism in India (and to a large extent elsewhere in the world as well) has been unable to address issues of 'pleasure' and 'desire' in the context of consumption. From the perspective of such feminism then, women who are part of consumer economies can be seen alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, as victims of false consciousness and as colluding with the despised forces of capitalist exploitation.

Even as a lecturer, I find it hard to find a language within feminism to address desire in the context of consumption in a way that does not see it as suspect. For many such young women then, it is the global market economies through the practices of consumption that become the spokespersons for what it means to be modern. Modernity as represented by the media has come to mean the ‘freedom’ to choose from a variety of consumer goods that range from nail polish to cars. The question, I found myself asking over and again was: how does one find a way to illuminate the limited nature of the choices being offered by the consumer economy without dismissing entirely the desire to be part of this economy.

In a context where many anxieties are created and located around ideas of heterosexual conjugality which is offered as the normative aspirational ideal, young women are more than willing to buy into stereotypes of feminists. They fear becoming like the bra-burning feminists, never to find husbands and
therefore forever be excluded from the hetero-normative dream. As a result they proclaim loudly that they are "Certainly NOT Feminists". Hidden within this apparently arrogant ignorant self-assurance, given that their privileged status as educated young women is the result of feminist struggles in India and the world, lies a world of confusion and fear. For they are perhaps the first generation of middle class Indian women of whom it is asked not only that they be virtuous but also that they appear simultaneously sexually desirable. For on their virtue is premised the preservation of the morality of the Indian middle classes, the family values which proclaim the superiority of Indian Culture. These anxieties articulated around heterosexual relationships and marriages reflect the almost schizophrenic pressures that young women face today. These are compelling narratives to which, I often find I have no answers.

In the 1970s, radical feminists in the west sought a focus on women’s subordination using the slogan; the personal is political, suggesting that insofar as individual oppressions replicated themselves in women’s lives they were not personal issues but larger political concerns that demanded political action. In the Indian context feminism was largely represented by the socialist feminist strand that sought legal reform using the logic of personal as political in its practice. While in some ways this strategy was useful, there was an over-focus on the state and law as institutional structures of patriarchy. It seems to me as if somewhere along the way we lost sight of the personal within that political. In the effort to be political, it was somehow not acceptable to discuss what was seen as the personal. As a result issues of sexuality, marriage (when not connected to violence), and mothering (when not connected to lack of nutrition or access to health care) could not be discussed and especially not for middle class women who were acknowledged to be better off. Since then, sexuality has become much more central to a feminist inquiry though it is concerns of violence that are still privileged.

Globalisation has meant a market focus on the middle class as consumers, a concentration reflected in the visual culture in the country: advertising, print media, television and even film to an extent. As feminists if we ignore this constituency, we risk leaving a discussion of modernity and gender to reactionary
voices that offer traditional symbols as fashion statements and ways to be Indian and modern simultaneously.

It is now important that we find ways to re-insert the political-personal into the political – to make it legitimate to discuss painful adolescence; the desire for beauty, consumption; the multiple questions around sexuality and pleasure – both straight and queer; the complexities of being individuals within the institutions of marriage and motherhood (taken together and separately) to allow us to politicize them without depersonalizing them. Such a move may bring in its wake accusations of being bourgeois, of subscribing to a brand of broken-finger-nail feminism but it must nonetheless be done.

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This thesis is part of many such stands of inquiry that have consumed me for the last decade and a half. It is however, a journey that is far from over, or complete and much needs to be done. For myself, areas that have begun to concern me include young women’s relationship to feminism in continuing where I end this thesis, I hope to engage with their disenchantment and reflect on just where and how feminist dialogues might expand to include young women and their concerns. Similarly I have also become very interested in specific forms of agency that young women enact in relation to their sexuality such as the use of the over-the-counter emergency contraceptive pill. I would like to think through the ways in which this expands women capacity to express their sexuality as well as the ways in which it might circumscribe them.

What I often feel I need are ways in which to address the contradictions that we find ourselves in the middle of in creative and critical ways that allow for a re-interpretation and re-imagination of feminism that goes beyond understanding the discrimination involved in suffering to exploring the subjection often implicit in pleasure even as we acknowledge our own complicity in the narratives around both suffering and pleasure.
# ANNEXURE A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
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<th>Religion</th>
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