Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

There is a certain image that one sees over and over again – it’s the image of the apparently heterosexual, ostensibly monogamous, conspicuously consuming and unnaturally happy couple – on billboards in the city, in advertisements and in media stories both in print and on television. It is the woman in this image that interests me – the articulate professional, the perfect homemaker, the sexy siren, the unflustered mother, and the delighted consumer – sometimes separately and sometimes in various permutations and combinations of these.

In 21st century global Mumbai, certain women are both visible and desirable in the public, particularly in their roles as professionals and consumers. However, despite this increased visibility, women have only conditional access and not claim to public city spaces. This is true even though Mumbai is unanimously considered the friendliest city for women in the country. Though political and economic visibility has brought increased access to public space, it has not automatically translated into greater rights to public space for women. In the last two decades, as Mumbai strives to take its place among the global cities of the world, the presence of women in public space, as professionals and consumers, increasingly signals a desirable modernity. As a result, even if women in general don’t have unconditional claim to public space, in the narrative of the global city, women of a particular class and demonstrable respectability have greater legitimacy in public than many men of a lower class.

In contemporary Mumbai one finds an increasing number of images in the visual public sphere (which includes newspapers, magazines, broadcast media, that are not only sexual but also implicitly tell us how we can be appropriately sexual. This is however, not intended to suggest that cultural texts or images in regard to sexuality are new to the Indian context or that it was globalisation which was
responsible for sexualisation of the public domain. These images are located in several simultaneous contexts of geography, multiple ideologies of religion, class, caste and gender, and also various forms of resistance to the dominant ideologies. These images circulate ideas about what it means to be Indian, modern, sexual and desirable in the 21st century.

Consumption, consumer goods, consumerism stare us in the face everyday – we see them in advertisements, in proxy advertisements, in films and television serials and we experience them as we traverse the city not just in hoardings but in the comparatively new spaces that the middle-classes are beginning to occupy, such as shopping malls, coffee shops and multiplex cinemas. In the last twenty years the public debate on the middle classes’ relationship to consumption has changed dramatically, from a time where Nehruvian socialism and the vision of a welfare state made conspicuous consumption something to be frowned upon to a time where consumption is positively celebrated. The middle classes are now ironically being encouraged to consume – and consumption is now paradoxically perceived to be “good” for the nation – i.e. creating productivity as opposed to reflecting bad citizenship in a socialist welfare economy. The middle classes may now consume not just guiltlessly but virtuously since they are the ones contributing to the economy. This also gives the middle classes a sense of righteous claim to the city.

As Mumbai is poised on the brink of being recognised as a ‘global city’, the marginalisation of the poor is increasingly reflected in public policies that chart this new vision for the city. Where earlier the state assumed responsibility for poverty, now the poor are not just responsible for their very poverty but may also been seen as a drag on the nation’s progress. The blame for poverty can now be

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1 Purnima Mankekar (2004) for instance argues that the “late twentieth century representations of erotics did not emerge in a cultural vacuum” but rather resonated with older conventions of erotics. She cites among others texts such as the *Kamasutra* and *Natyashastra* as well as refers to poems in varied languages and traditions (p.406).

2 A classic example of this is a 2004 report, called ‘Vision Mumbai’, aiming at making Mumbai a ‘world-class city’. This report was brought out by international consulting firm McKinsey for Bombay First, a corporate-funded lobby group.

3 This is reflected for instance in the roles essayed by actors. Today, the same Amitabh Bachchan, whose character cocked a snoot at the rich, saying “*In zameenon ka mol ho*
laid at the door of the individual, absolving the state of any responsibility, simultaneously giving those with resources a not just a sense of righteous claim to what are in reality common resources such as water and space but also a sense of virtue in consuming – for they are the “engines of growth” for the new globalizing nation.

In this “world class” city, the middle classes are the ones being wooed by advertisers and investment markets. They are being wooed interestingly not as individuals but as couples, more specifically as heterosexual couples. And so in these images of middle-class consumers, one sees: heterosexual couples eating in up-market restaurants, heterosexual couples buying large several carat diamond engagement rings, heterosexual couples on five-star holidays, heterosexual couples in designer clothes, heterosexual couples with the requisite two-point-two children romping around in a shopping mall, heterosexual couples buying the said children all manner of expensive consumer goods.

Such images have in the last two decades marked the beginnings of an acceptance for a particular kind of visibility of sexuality in urban India – middle-class, consumer-based, heterosexual and private. Heterosexual couples are welcome but alas only in a limited way. They are particularly welcome as consumers but not so much as public lovers. So they are welcome in coffee shops but not on our promenades where they might be castigated as or “corrupting the youth with their profligate ways” or be seen as illegal presences, as being “obscene”. These malls, coffee-shops and multiplexes are the new spaces of consumption where the expectations are different from those on the street where people are addressed as ‘global citizens’ rather than as ‘authentic Indians’. I use both terms in quote marks calling their use into question as I am aware of the multiple ways in which both these terms may be used. However, for my purposes

shaayad/ Aasmaanon ka mol kya doge? (These lands may have a price/But what price will you give for the skies?)” in *Lawaaris* (1981) sneers at the poor in a broadcast advertisement for a leading newspaper group. This advertising campaign suggests that there are two ‘Indias’ in this country: “one that is straining at the leash” and eager to forge ahead and take its place in the world, and “the other India that is the leash” which is holding that self-propelling nation back. It is evident that by the latter he means the poor, the illiterate and the daily waged worker who actually keeps the city ticking. (*The Times of India* (2007) for its India Poised campaign.)
I use them in a colloquial way – where global citizens functions as shorthand for a particular kind of middle-class group that has the cultural capital to slip into first-world consumption and other practices without their identity as ‘Indians’ being questioned. What these images do is also legitimize a very specific image of globalised sexuality that permits a small group of people entry into a lifestyle that is described as ‘global’ and ‘Indian’ at the same time.

Nivedita Menon (2005) addressing a similar kind of idea of the Indian as belonger, points out that very few can afford the designer label Indian. The authentic Indians on the other hand in a similar shorthand, useful for my purposes are those who do not have the requisite cultural capital that might have enabled them to transcend the demands of fundamentalist culturalist groups in regard to what constitutes ‘Indian’. These are by no means watertight categories and often their cultural capital, real or perceived is inadequate to protect even the upper-middle-classes from the demands of fundamentalist groups.

For my purposes, the new spaces of consumption are a part of the larger visual culture and intervene to transform the contemporary urban experience and indeed the landscape in a similar way to other forms of visual culture such as the media.

The thesis brings questions of spatiality to the ongoing debate on sexuality in urban Mumbai in the 21st century. The research engages with concerns of sexuality and gender in relation to public space to ask where and how women might express their own sexuality in 21st century Mumbai. The thesis focuses on middle-class women suggesting that even the most desirable of the city’s women might only exercise their sexual agency in limited spaces.

1.2 Geographical and Temporal Location: The City of Mumbai in the 21st Century

Mumbai is a city that is larger than life in the national imagination. Bombay / Mumbai is a city of 12 million or 16-18 million if one includes the larger
metropolitan region.\textsuperscript{4} Of this population, over 50 per cent are slum and pavement dwellers, occupying by many calculations a mere 8 per cent of Mumbai’s land area. Mumbai is a city that is often represented as a study in contrasts where affluent high-rise apartments flank poor infrastructurally deprived slum settlements. The city is also the locus of the Hindi film industry and consequently seen as the location where dreams are created and achieved. It has been represented in various Bollywood films as being alternatively benevolent and malevolent to those who enter its embrace.

Mumbai as a city in some ways defies understanding given its multiple heterogeneities and complex spaces. As a field of study, the city of Mumbai challenges the researcher to find ways to represent it that are both particular and amenable to some generalization. In the last decade there has been a fair amount of scholarly research on Mumbai engaging with the profound changes that have taken place in the city.

Some scholars of globalisation and cities suggest that the middle-classes in Mumbai have become in many ways representative of the ideal typical example of the rise of new middle-classes in liberalizing India (Fernandes 2000b). Sassen (1991) suggests that contemporary Mumbai provides a striking example of a new ‘global city’ characterized by an economic transition which is accompanied by the growth of the financial sector and a corresponding decline in the manufacturing sector and the active political soliciting of foreign investment.

Since the early 1990s globalisation has in Mumbai, as in other mega cities, changed the landscape of the city. Like in other parts of the country post-liberalisation there has been an increasing informalisation of labour. Simultaneously the spaces of the former textiles mills are being rapidly gentrified. Icons of globalisation shopping malls, coffee shops, multiplex cinemas and global clothing and food brands occupy increasing space in the city.

This global-aspirational vision excludes an increasing number of people seen as obstacles to its realisation. As real estate values soared the city sought to mark its

arrival as a global entity by attempting to remake itself in various ways into a more sanitized place, by attempting to eliminate all those people and objects that did not fit in with its vision. Hawkers, slum dwellers, bar dancers are only some of the groups who have been cast as outsiders. The vision is also premised on its own morality, one that perceives hawkers and bar dancers as not just outsiders but as ethically inferior inhabitants of the city.

Mumbai is no longer seen as a city that will feed and house anyone with the will to work, but rather as actively hostile to the poor person cast as migrant. The huge slum demolitions of December 2004 and January-February 2005 are testimony to this. In this period the NCP-Congress government in Maharashtra permitted a large scale demolition of slums rendering almost 3.5 lakh people homeless. Subsequently the demolition drive was arrested but the writing is on the wall: there are the citizens who own the city and then there are the non citizens, to whom the city does not belong.

In fact, by repeatedly using language that describes them as “encroachers” and by paying more attention to the illegality of structures of the poor than to those of the rich, slum dwellers – who number seven million and form 60 per cent of Mumbai’s population – are constantly viewed as being less than full citizens.

Mike Davis’ (1992) chilling work on the militarization of LA and the systematic exclusion of the poor and dispossessed should act as a reminder that the drawing of such hierarchies will not help the city.

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5 This is also reflected in the burgeoning citizens’ groups – each seeking to ‘clean up’ their 200 square yards of the city. The control of public spaces has been given a new turn by the establishment of the Advanced Locality Management (ALM) groups. Founded in 1998, ALM is a concept of citizen’s involvement with local governance. The equivalent of a neighbourhood association, the ALM is however, written into the municipal governance structure. An ALM covers a neighbourhood or street, normally about 1,000 citizens. Architect Neera Adarkar (2007) suggests that ALMs are a form of “unprecedented territorial claim made by the elite middle-class on their respective neighbourhoods.” These groups, which have taken it upon themselves “to save their own neighbourhoods by cleansing and beautifying them, more often than not do not represent all the voices in the locality.” Often these groups seek to erase the presence of hawkers or slums “by beautifying elements such as flower planters along the pavements and decorative fencing around playgrounds, parks and waterfronts to keep away the unwanted ‘others’.”

6 Arjun Appadurai (1990) suggests in his essay on Spectral Housing that Mumbai was once the city of cash – where anyone could make a home. This he suggests is no longer true in a time of multiple polarizations.
At the outset, I would like to clarify that I use the terms 'Mumbai' and Bombay interchangeably. In 1995, Bombay/ Bambai/ Mumbai all names for the city in English, Hindi and Marathi respectively became officially only Mumbai. The name was changed by a BJP-Shiv Sena government. Prior to this, the names Bombay, Bambai and Mumbai were often used interchangeably with each other. The move to alter the name has been perceived alternately as a politically motivated chauvinistic ethnic move on the part of the Shiv Sena and a way of re-claiming the pre-colonial heritage of the city. Sujata Patel (2003) points out that though the term 'Mumbai' been in use in both Marathi and Gujarati, and in Hindi the city was referred to as 'Bambai', it was the term 'Bombay' that was associated with the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual cosmopolitanism signifying a bourgeois class based modernity.

The change in name reflects a larger conservatism that replaced the city’s former claim to a more liberal ethos and most visibly particularly from the early 1990s when debates on various issues started to be articulated increasingly in the language of exclusion or morality and often both. The displacement of the plurality of names for the city seemed to reflect a more sinister undercurrent of intolerance for difference. This is not intended to suggest in anyway that prior to the 1990s Bombay was a completely liberal city. However, it is nonetheless true that by 1995, the presumption that the city was cosmopolitan and liberal had been greatly eroded.

The communal riots that the city witnessed in 1992-93 only marked a larger acceptance of something that had been apparent for a long time – Mumbai was no longer the city of dreams, that welcomed the outsider offering, as the tale went, employment, a roof over ones head and two square meals a day. This communalism and conservatism has manifested itself in a politics of morality and a deep suspicion of those seen not to belong. A growing body of critical scholarly work has profiled and analysed these changes even as Mumbai is sought to be remade (by planners and policymakers) in various ways into a more sanitized
place, by attempting to eliminate all those people and objects that did not fit in with its vision.\textsuperscript{7}

The loss of its cosmopolitan reputation is due not only to the more visible communalization but also to a particular kind of consumption based globalised capitalism. Without wanting to over generalize, I would contend that the rising visibility of these conservative agendas replacing a more liberal rhetoric that was part of the city’s ethos, is linked to the opening of the economy. As the economy liberalized, cultural boundaries were drawn more tightly and monolithic interpretations were offered. Further, it is reflected in the decline of secular collectivities such as trade unions as well.

Since this research is located in contemporary Mumbai, and Mumbai is a specific context many of the observations and assessments in this report are informed by this location. However, despite the specificities that characterise the city, it would not be an over-generalisation to suggest that in many ways these are not unique to Mumbai and will find resonance to a greater or lesser extent in other cities in the country.

In discussing Mumbai women, I consciously use the term Bombay girls instead of Mumbai as this is the term that sticks to women who grow up in Mumbai. Despite the fact that it is now almost a decade since name of the city was changed, it is the term ‘Bombay Girls’ that is evocative of a kind of modernity and liberation that is simultaneously envied and derided. From the perspective of the rest of Maharashtra, certainly the smaller cities of Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Kolhapur and Nagpur, to name some, Bombay Girls are not desirable brides for moffussil townsmen. However, women who come to Mumbai from other town and cities in the country are often seduced by the charm of being Bombay Girls, and the increased freedom it offers.

The above paragraph is not intended to romanticise Mumbai but to offer an idea of what it might mean to be a woman in Mumbai. Relative to any other city

Mumbai is the city that offers women the maximum mobility. It is a city that the media sells as a safe city for women despite the more recent narratives of danger and violence. In many ways it is true that the women’s movement and various social and cultural reform movements have created an increasing mobility for women in the public. The reasons behind the relative freedom that women experience in Mumbai are multiple and complexly inter-connected. Part of the answer lies in Maharashtra’s history of social reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Another part of the answer is certainly the presence of a large and visible workforce of women workers, white and blue collar, particularly among the heterogeneous middle-class groups (that is, upper-middle, middle-middle and lower-middle-classes across linguistic, ethnic and community lines). Thirdly, one cannot but acknowledge the role of urban transport in furthering Mumbai’s reputation as a safe city. A fourth reason is the way in which residential and commercial areas of the city are intermeshed - creating very few areas that empty out completely during the night. Perhaps, none of

8 Indeed, an issue of the Business Today magazine (November 23, 2003) published a survey (conducted in collaboration with NFO, a market research company) which using a variety of criteria went on to proclaim Mumbai (formerly Bombay) as the safest city in the country for working women.

9 From the late nineteenth century and following the period of social reform in Maharashtra, women have been important voices in the expansion of space in the public sphere for themselves. Not only did they lend their voices and pens to the cause of social reform but also critiqued men reformers for their inability to stick to their principles when to do so would have meant open rebellion. Their writing expanded the space for women's voices to be heard and taken seriously in public sphere debates and contributed to an increasing acceptance of the visibility of women in public spaces. The Rakhmabai case filed in the Bombay High Court (1884-88) was fodder for a great deal of public debate on the questions of child marriage, education of women, custom and legal reform. Rakhmabai herself participated actively in this debate particularly by writing two letters that were published by the Times of India on 26 June and 19 September 1885 under the pseudonym "Hindu Lady" and later a letter to the editor published on 09 April 1887 signed as herself. Pandita Ramabai was perhaps the most publicly articulate of all the women. Her first work titled The High Caste Hindu Woman, was published in 1888. Pandita Ramabai, who returned to Maharashtra only after her widowhood, steadfastly refused to stay within the domestic private spaces, entered into public debate, openly challenging the ideologies that would have her live the life of a social outcast. Tarabai Shinde's book Stree Purusha Tulana, published in 1882 is a polemical take on widowhood and the hypocritical attitudes of men. For a more detailed understanding of these see Uma Chakravarti (1998), Sudhir Chandra (1998) and Rosalind O’Hanlon (1994).

10 The few areas that are solely business districts like Ballard Estate and Nariman Point in South Mumbai, the Bandra-Kurla Complex and the MIDC (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation) area and SEEPZ (Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone) in East Andheri on the western side of the city are very lonely at night.
these factors on their own would mean as much, but a visible presence of women in public space fostered by a combination of historical precedents, ideological change, economic necessity, financial independence, geographical spread and good urban planning in some aspects and sheer serendipity in others makes Mumbai a more accessible and comfortable city for women.

Mumbai is a city where it is possible if not always comfortable or easy for women to use public transport late at night to go home from a night of partying or clubbing. It is a city where women who dance in ‘ladies bars’ use the last train to travel home. Both the so-called respectable and the non-respectable women are in public space at night. Sometimes it’s hard to tell them apart. In this greyness and ambiguity lies much of the uneasiness with women’s expressions of sexuality – the fear that the lines between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women are not longer easily defined.

Despite Mumbai women’s privileged access to public space, women continue to have to strategise to access public space. What women get are contradictory messages of danger coded in various sub and super texts that women must read and negotiate. On the one hand, the city is constructed as a space dangerous for women, who stand to be contaminated by its disorder and must therefore be protected preferably in the private spaces of the home. On the other hand, are the parallel narratives on the modern global city, where middle class women are visualised as important actors in the roles of professionals and consumers. I am very aware that the category, women in Mumbai, encompasses a range of diverse identities that intersect with gender – class, religion, caste, age, educational status, employment situation, and physical ability – to create very different experiences for women living in the city.

1.3 Central Concerns of the Thesis

In the last two decades contestations around sexuality have grown even as the visual public has become in various ways increasingly sexualized. Simultaneously, concerns of morality have also grown with shrill calls to reclaim
‘Indian’ family values and more significantly for this thesis, an ‘Indian’ femininity/ womanhood. The central concerns of this thesis are linked to these pushes and pulls and focus on the various contestations around concerns of gender, globalization, modernity, middle-classes, new spaces of consumption, sexuality, morality and public space.

The first concern of this thesis is to examine how questions of spatiality impact people’s capacity to be sexual, more specifically to look at how concerns of public and private become central to the debate on sexuality. This concern is linked a larger global debate on how Indian cities in general and Mumbai in particular are becoming more exclusive and are seen as belonging only those who have the power to consume (Anjaria 2006, Appadurai 2000, Chandavarkar 2004, D’Monte 2002, Fernandes 2000b, Hansen 2001, Masselos 1994, Nair 2005, Patel 2003, Phadke, Ranade and Khan 2009, Sassen 2001, Sharma 2000, and Varma 2004, Weinstein, 2008). The thesis seeks to examine how such exclusion is played out in public spaces in relation to questions of sexuality.

The second concern of the thesis is to examine how globalization and the concomitant changes in the organization of shopping and consumption have created a new space for women – the new spaces of consumption. Also to examine how these spaces in particular and the imagination of the global city in general have been rendered middle-class and sanitized. The thesis engages with the idea of consumption as pleasure for women and attempts to understand both the possibilities created by this as well as the limitations.

The third concern of this thesis is to examine these new spaces of consumption and to look at the construction of heterosexuality connecting this to the earlier two concerns. Here I examine two particular instances, the case of lingerie display and the case of coffee-shops to look at how a particular kind of middle-class, consumer based, private heterosexuality is being constructed as the only legitimate one.

The thesis engages with these contemporary contestations around questions of sexuality locating its arguments in relation to the various moral panics that have emerged in the recent years.
1.4 Central Concepts: Defining Terms for my Purposes

In this section, I define some of the key terms that I use throughout the thesis for my purposes. These definitions are as always partial definitions and signal the meanings I attach to them. In doing so I also attempt to reference some select texts and scholars who have addressed these terms especially in the Indian context.

Sexuality

Sexuality is a concept that is nearly impossible to define. I began by using a definition provided by Chandiramani et al (2002) who write: "sexuality encompasses eroticism, sexual behaviour, social and gender roles and identity, relationships and the personal, social and cultural meanings that each of these might have" (p.1).

This definition provided the broad contours for my understanding of the width of ideas, experiences and practices that the term sexuality encompasses. However, I needed a definition that was more specific to my study. For my purposes then, sexuality refers to the complex of ideas, practices, experiences and performances in regard to the presentation of the self through dress, mannerism, speech and action that are assumed by individuals in order to present themselves in various contexts as sexually desirable, sexually experienced, sexually progressive, sexually virtuous and respectable, simultaneously and separately. Drawing on the large body of work of Michel Foucault, sexuality then can be seen to be an assemblage of various forces, discourses, pleasures, desires, institutions, identities, and perhaps in some ways even speeds and intensities. If we are to see sexuality as an effect of power, these powers have effects at the level of our most minute bodily responses: for instance an image affects us at both the level of discourse and representation and the level of specific sensations. In our understanding of women’s sexuality I would argue that we need to take into account how power is producing not just representations but sensations, intensities, complex affects at the level of our bodies.
Sexuality has come to be seen as the fundamental truth, the core of who and what people are and is seen to define them. As a result sexual relationships become the focus of attention both popularly and in academia. However, focussing on sexuality to the exclusion of other frames of understanding: social, cultural, economic and political and indeed on other multiple forms of desire and expressions of that desire can be counterproductive. It can create a context where sex and sexuality are foregrounded to the exclusion of other forms of discrimination and violation. For instance sexual violation of women is seen as much more invasive or violent than physical non sexual assault. This also fits in with more conservative notions of protection and modesty where a woman’s sexuality is seen to be at the core of not just her own identity but that of her community as well and therefore to be guarded at all costs sometimes even from her own desires.

Brinda Bose and Subhabrata Bhattacharyya (2007) write: “Contemporary Indian sexual identities, it may be said, are constructed out of the peculiar, particular, multiplicitous effects and perceptions of tradition, modernity, colonization, and globalization that are more often than not in confrontation with each other. Sexuality is today at once the most personal and private, the most public and the most political of issues that engages us both intellectually and practically in everyday life. The range of issues surrounding sexuality span, … heterosexual-homosexual-transsexual divides. The continuously interrogate moral, social and political stances – both personal and public/’national’ – as established/accepted/’traditional’ mores are challenged and changed by events and influences.” (p.xii).

The thesis focuses explicitly on heterosexuality in order to destabilize the normalized lens through which heteronormative forms of sexuality are often seen. Further, I will argue that in the last two decades, heterosexuality has been sought to be redefined and reframed particularly through various forms of consumer modernity and it is imperative for us to engage with these constructions. This focus is not intended in anyway to ignore or erase the complex and inter-linked questions around homosexuality. In focusing on heterosexuality, the intention is to problematise it rather than privilege it. In
suggesting this I follow Stevi Jackson (1996) who suggests that “heterosexuality cannot form the basis of a feminist political identity because it is the institutionalised patriarchal norm” (p.175). My own intent in this study is to make heterosexuality more visible and in doing so understand the various codes that operate to ensure not only that heterosexuality is the norm but also determine what is appropriate within heterosexuality. The intention is to explore how within heterosexuality certain forms of expression and being are privileged over others. In doing so it implicitly questions a hetero-normative condition. It does not however explicitly explore questions of homosexuality in the lives of women and does not interview lesbians. However, despite the fact that queer sexuality is not the focus of the research it is certainly part of the terrain of negotiation that women enter into and as such informs the research at every stage.

**Middle-Class**

In one sense, 'middle-class' is a hat that might fit a variety of persons who may individually be very different from each other. In an inclusive way one might suggest that the term 'middle-class' encompasses a range of income categories that allow for varied forms of consumption, as well as different religious, caste and linguistic communities. Despite these differences, and there are many, it is possible to make generalisations about the 'middle-class' which even if they are not entirely true, are at the same time not entirely false either.

For instance, in global market terms, the middle-classes are 'consumers' numbering anywhere between 100 and 300 million depending on the audience and the persuasive powers of the marketing person making the claim. To religious fundamentalists of various hues, the middle-classes are the main constituency upon whose bodies must be written the cultural nationalist ideologies being espoused. To the socialists, the middle-classes are the ones selling out, abandoning Nehruvian socialism for the commodity fetishism of global capitalism. These are gross over-generalisations but they nonetheless constitute recognisable images of the middle-class constructed for us by various sources and filtered through the print and audio-visual media.
These generalisations do not make it any easier for one to define who the middle-class are. Economically, the middle-class encompasses a wide group who may be socially and culturally very different from each other. For instance, traders and shop merchants may economically belong to an upper middle-class income category or higher but in social terms they may lack an education and a cultural background that gives them a sense of familiarity and comfort with what one might call the aesthetics of middle-classness. On the other hand, another group of say, college lecturers may in an economic sense fall into a middle-middle-class or even lower-middle-class category but command a high cultural capital that places them in a situation where they feel a high degree of comfort in various spaces of consumption. What unites these different people is that they are all in various ways the target audience for various media messages selling various commodities, lifestyles and ideas.

In understanding cultural capital I draw on the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bordieu (1986) who expands the notion of capital beyond its material and economic basis to include what he calls cultural and symbolic capital as well, referring to a more abstract and non-material understanding of capital. For Bordieu then, the term cultural capital represents a complex combination and permutation of ancestry, family background, socio-economic class, investment in and commitment to education, resources that impact academic outcomes, access to other resources such as books and music from a young age.11

In relation to concerns focusing on the middle-class Fernandes (2000b) argues that there is a need to understand the structural economic shift for the middle-class that go beyond the realm of consumption. Parvan Varma, in his book, The Great Indian Middle-class (1998) for instance, initiated a significant national public debate on the declining social responsibility of the Indian middle-class and

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11 Bordieu (1986) writes: “Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalised state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee”. (http://www.viet-studies.org/Bourdieu_capital.htm)
its gradual abdication of a broader ethical and moral responsibility to the poor and to the nation as a whole. There is a sense of loss that Varma articulates -- of a disdain for material exhibitionism that characterized a Gandhian or Nehruvian visions of India and its middle-classes. Fernandes (2000b) argues that it is the culture of consumption that is the key marker of the of the ‘new middle-class’ in India, which is that ‘the “newness” of the middle-class involves an ideological-discursive projection rather than a shift in the composition or social basis of India’s middle-class’ (p.90). Here, I would like to add that the middle-class in India has always been an important class in terms of their capacity to influence public opinions. However, prior to the 1990s, the class that had cultural capital, the educated intelligentsia often had much less financial capital than the traders who may have been seen as culturally below the middle-classes but who were economically wealthier. In the last decade, this has changed with the entry of the multi-national corporations which have revised remuneration packages of many white collar professionals and employees in the upward direction greatly increasing the disposable income of these middle-classes who now in addition to cultural capital also have financial capital.12

Reflecting on the construction of the middle class post globalisation Christiane Brosius (2010) writes: “Globalised capitalism, in particular since the new millenium, has produced a large and heterogenous middle class that is distinctly different from the ‘old’ middle class. The dramatic speed at which India opened up to the world market and economic growth has also contributed to the production of new lifestyles that allow members of the new middle classes to both adapt to this change in terms of mobility and flexibility, and learn to perform and display the newly gained wealth and confidence.” (p.2).

Sanjay Srivastava (2007) suggests that class is a site of contest rather than an easily definable social (or economic) category and the as we move to a consumer oriented, less regulated economy “the idea of ‘middle class’ becomes a key site for discussions around sexuality. Sexual cultures and those of consumption

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12 See Leela Fernandes (2000b) for an assessment of the socio-economic effects of liberalisation where she examines changing labour market characteristics of segments of the middle class in the private sector (p.89).
combine to both consolidate existing class identities as well as arouse aspirations to be other than what one is” (p.3).

The notion of the middle-class then is rather ambiguous and it is only on a very small category of that middle class that I attempt to focus in this dissertation.

_Middle-class Women_

In this thesis I foreground the person who arguably is seen most to ‘belong’ inside any culture drawn boundary – the middle class upper caste, young, able-bodied, heterosexual Hindu urban married or marriageable woman. Normative ideas of the appropriate cultural behavior, attitude, dress, place and values are structured in relation to this figure that has come to represent global Indian womanhood.

Through their access to both economic capital through private infrastructure and cultural capital through education, middle class women are located in an interesting space of privilege on all counts other than gender. She is assumed to be not lower class, not Dalit, not Muslim, nor lesbian. This is the woman whose virtue is seen to reflect the nation’s culture and whose assumption of ‘modernity’ is seen to mirror the nation’s global success. This woman is significant because she represents the hegemonic idea of respectable womanhood that must be protected, sometimes even from the woman herself (Phadke 2007). It is relevant to foreground the middle class woman because it is around her that various questions of morality and expressions of public outrage are articulated. The middle-class, Hindu, upper-caste, heterosexual, married or would-be-married woman is significant not only because her body is the canvas on which narratives of modernity, honour and nationhood are simultaneously written but also because her identities mark her as privileged in every way other than gender.

Focussing on the middle class woman facilitates an interrogation of the public discourses of morality and the media narratives that tend to focus disproportionately on the middle-class woman. In focusing on the middle-class
woman I do not erase other women, especially lower-class women from the debate, but use this vantage point to ask questions about hierarchies of class particularly in relation to gender. If middle class women are expected to be the embodiment of respectability then this demand is no less applicable to women of lower classes as well.

Precisely because of their privileged location, any focus on middle-class women is often seen as yet reinforcement of this privilege and therefore suspect. However, I would argue that if feminist scholarship and activism fail to address the questions of the middle classes and to engage with consumption and desire, we risk leaving discussions of ‘modernity’, ‘liberalism’ and ‘Indianness’ to the distinctly illiberal forces of globalisation and ironically the religious fundamentalists, globalisation’s strange bed-fellow (Phadke 2003).¹³

That middle class female respectability is central to any discussion is apparent from the multiple narratives that constantly perceive it to be under threat from television images and films, from the presence of sex workers and bar dancers and from women’s own desires and agency. The drawing of cultural boundaries is most visible when constructed around an event that is seen to pose a threat to what are seen to be common societal values. These are often linked to the fear of various kinds of corruption of society through drugs, sex or even music. In recent years, since globalisation a great deal of anxiety has focused on issues of sexuality, sought to be claimed as private rather than public and to be established as culturally Indian in a context where other branding is global. Sexuality has been articulated in a language of morality and discussions on morality are rife in the media. These morality concerns on issues ranging from sexual assault to the

¹³ The feminist movement in the West, has been accused of being white, middle-class and bourgeois. The women’s movement in India has been accused of being Hindu, upper-caste, urban and English educated. However, the women's movement in India has always been sensitive to issues of class. Voices from within the movement and women's studies have also self-consciously raised concerns about the legitimacy of urban middle class women speaking for the poor or the rural women. Indian feminists have always engaged in a dialogue with the State, to make development work for women, hence the focus on poor women. In relation to issues of class the women’s movement has demonstrated a tradition of vocal debate. For instance, Left parties suggested that urban middle class women in the ‘autonomous’ women’s movement could not possibly represent ‘Indian’ women and that the real role of feminist was to participate and raise questions from within mass organisations. These ideas have rendered feminist studies of middle class women slightly suspect.
opinions of individual celebrities have elicited not just several column centimetres of newsprint and reels of film tape but also public outrage.

Middle-class Sexuality

The term 'middle-class sexuality' in relation to the public domain conjures up very different pictures in the early 21st century than it might have twenty years ago. A plethora of ideas and images around sexuality — soap operas, reality shows, advertising, advice columns; real life dramas around the culture policing of heterosexual and homosexual couples; dress codes and new fads like the celebration of the metrosexual male (and more recently the contrasexual female) among others — shape public discourses around sexuality in the urban context. Nonetheless despite this over-determination, middle-class sexuality continues to be under-mapped, not the least because one is never quite sure whom one is referring to when one says 'middle-class'.

If 'middle-class' is an amorphous category, middle-class sexuality is even less understood. Despite what appears to be an explosion of images of middle-class sexual bliss in advertising, little is known about the lived experience of sexuality

14 Terms like the metrosexual male and the contrasexual female are often coined by the media to explain different ways of being masculine and feminine. It is important to note that the conceptions of metrosexual male and contrasexual female do not challenge normative ideas of masculinity or femininity in any radical way. They do however, tend to expand ways of being masculine and feminine to allow men access to fashion and beauty and women access to the material success. At the same time in suggesting this I am not attributing a capitalist conspiracy to these trends. The intention is to point out that while these terms may create some spaces for people to explore different ways of being male and female they do not challenge established norms significantly. Indeed the language use by the media features and reports immediately co-opts these forms as individual choices. For instance Olivera writes: 'Why contrasexual? Because their aspirations run contrary to conventional thought. These women live life on their terms and redefine traditions. Thrill-seeking, confident, financially independent women who do not feel any pressure to settle down with a family. They are not against the idea of marriage, they just don't wish to adhere to set patterns.' Or as Pooja Vashisht reports: 'She is the new, subtler face of a fiery feminist. She is the subverted sexual statement. She is a metrosexual's counterpart in the consumerist community. She is the contrasexual woman. Designer Kiran Uttam Ghosh, who catapulted the term by dedicating her spring summer collection to this woman, describes her as someone who wears sexuality on sleeve and femininity on the fall of skirt!' (Roshni Olivera ‘Mary Mary, Quite Contrary’, Times of India, November 11, 2004; Pooja Vashisht, ‘Here Cometh the New Age Woman’, Times of India, April 08, 2004.).
or how gender and power operate in affecting people's, especially women's, sexuality. State narratives of sexuality have focused on binarily contraception and the management of fertility and reproduction through 'Family Welfare' programmes devoid of an understanding of citizens as sexual beings. Even NGOs focussing on issues of sexual rights have often tended to highlight the more pathological aspects of sexuality.

Chandiramani et al (2002) suggest that studies of sexuality tend to focus on that which is perceived to be 'deviant' and in fact richer data on the sexual lives and practices of, for instance, sex workers, truckers, street boys is available than for more mainstream groups like married couples or university students. This suggests that certain groups are perceived to be essentially sexual while others are perceived to be sexual only in some hidden part of their lives, if at all (Petchesky, 2000 in Chandiramani et al, 2002: 21). In this sense then, very little is known about middle-class sexual practices though ideologies of Indian-ness in regard to morality and modesty are constructed around them.

Popular magazines focusing on political and social issues such as India Today and Outlook run surveys on the state of 'sexual activity' in Indian cities every year – these tend to focus on the middle classes but there is little academic research that focuses on middle-classes in relation to sexuality.

Despite an apparent focus on decorum and virtue, the very fact of being middle-class has come to be seen as sexy in the late 1990s and early 21st century. Here, when I say ‘sexy,’ I do not refer only—or even at all—to actual sexual practices that continue to be a mystery, but to how the everyday life of middle-class people is constructed around narratives of heterosexual conjugality.

Modernity and ‘Indianness’

Modernity in this context focuses on how for India as newly globalised country it is important to send the right kind of messages about its readiness for such an assimilation into a global economy and culture and its capacity to successfully
withstand such a transition. Codes of modernity, as much as the codes signifying community, are written on the bodies of women.\textsuperscript{15} Modernity in this context then is about assuming the various practices, economic and cultural, particularly in relation to consumption and desire that have in the western context come to signify the opposite of tradition. Modernity is defined in opposition to the binary of tradition.

However, it is also simultaneously important to ensure that this assumption of modernity does not signify a loss of culture and hence the need to project the nation as one that is modern but also rooted in a culture that is thousands of years old and therefore strong. This contradiction often finds expression in the embodiment and articulations of Indian beauty queens who are trained to reflect this most desirable mix of a sexual and consumption-oriented-modernity that is nonetheless culturally all Indian, often in ways that negates the heterogeneities of what it may mean to be Indian.

The term ‘Indian’ as a noun and adjective, concept and construct has always been contested, in the last decade, such contradictions have increasingly been articulated around questions of globalisation. Indian-ness gets constructed by a variety of sources—in the last decade, the most visible and insidious of these has been Hindu fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{16} An important part of the fundamentalist project is to promote the idea of a coherent, monolithic, homogenous Hindu culture and then have this stand in for Indian-ness. Despite these efforts, it is not easy to imagine the homogenisation of a cultural context as diverse as that of India. The process of globalisation may have transformed the expression of these diversities (and sometimes exoticised them) but they have not erased them. Indeed

\textsuperscript{15} For instance, Nilüfer Göle (1997) writing in the context of Turkey suggests that the modernisation project of the 1920s demanded a public visibility of women in a western mode where public demonstrations of the citizenship of women was the marker of modernity. By the 1980s, movements towards Islamisation suggested that women prove their modesty by reverting to the headscarf. In the 1920s, concerns about being part of western Europe dictated the ways in women needed to be represented. By the 1980s, these were overshadowed by the Islamic resurgence.

\textsuperscript{16} Kumkum Sangari (2003) writes: Given the intertwined legacies of colonialism, the patriarchal assumptions in nationalism and the particularism of the Hindu right wing, definitions of Indian culture have always been problematic, especially in the way they cast the ‘nation’ as an entity affected and endangered by the west (p.199).
particularly advertising often uses diversity as a means of promoting the use of a
given product suggesting that the product unifies Indian across difference.\footnote{For instance, Arvind Rajagopal (2000) uses the example of the Asian Paints ad. One ad is set during a Pongal celebration, the Tamil harvest festival. The ad showcases a family that is modern and independent but nonetheless tradition bound and seeped in culture. Rajagopal documents that accompanying this ad were three others released in the south-western, northern and eastern regions of the country, each for a regional festival, Onam in Kerala, Diwali in the north and Durga Puja in the east. “Asian Paints comes to symbolise regional diversity, collective festivity, religious tradition and family reunion” (p.83).}

I would like to suggest that the media has become an important means of
constructing the imagined Indian nation. In arguing this I draw on the work of
Benedict Anderson (1983) who emphasised the constructed nature of culture and
the role of print capitalism to the development of nations. Anderson privileges
print capitalism in his understanding of nations as imagined communities,
claiming that it was print capitalism which allowed for the development of these
new national cultures and created the specific formations which the new nations
would eventually take.

Print-capitalism as an activity, ideology, and a political economic process enables
the possibility of globalisation as a condition, where globalisation is seen as an
institutionalised process of consumption and production of cultures, practices and
images. Here, on the one hand, one might see women’s magazine in English,
such as Femina or Cosmopolitan as productions which represent and in a
substantial measure are propped up by certain institutional frameworks.
However, I would like to argue that the market, particularly the market media
despite its persuasive powers and compelling messages, offers space for
questioning and debate. In suggesting this, I draw on the work of anthropologist,
Arjun Appadurai (1996) who explores the effect of media (and migration) "on the
work of imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (Appadurai,
1996:3). He focuses largely on the electronic media but also includes print media.
Appadurai argues that it is far too simplistic to assume that the media are the
opium of the masses, in the face of what he sees as growing evidence that the
mass media often provokes "resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general,
agency" (Appadurai, 1996:7 emphasis in original). He writes: "T-shirts, billboard,
and graffiti as well as rap music, street dancing, and slum housing all
show that the images of the media are quickly moved in to local repertoires of irony, anger, humour, and resistance” (Appadurai, 1996:7). It is Appadurai’s understanding of imagination as social practice that is relevant to my work.

Globalisation is the context in which all of these dreams and dilemmas play themselves out, especially, the contradictions of being sexually desirable and sexually virtuous simultaneously. Provisionally one might see globalisation as probably the most overwhelming contemporary experience, a socio-cultural process that is at once confrontational and assimilative, involving a trans-national transfer of images, icons and lifestyles available for a skewed but simultaneous consumption.

Often the idea of being the new middle class Indian is linked to the notion that the truly globalised Indian can simultaneously inhabit a consumer and lifestyle context similar to that of the affluent west and also retain cultural values that make her/him uniquely Indian. The success of such an apparently schizophrenic existence is proved precisely by the denial of contradiction, by a demonstration of the capacity of moving seamlessly between the two worlds. The media celebrates this capacity to live effortlessly in two worlds through the ways in which it represents middle classes and constructs notions of normative global lifestyles. These representations and constructions are intimately linked to concerns of sexuality.

New Spaces of Consumption

By the new spaces of consumption, I refer to those post-globalisation spaces that have opened up for the ‘middle classes’ to hang out and spend money involved in the construction of themselves as new global citizens of the city. I focus particularly on spaces such as malls, coffee-shops and multiplexes as these are the spaces where scripts of both middle-classness and heterosexuality are being

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18 It is precisely this notion that allowed a right wing government like the BJP between 1997-2004 to pursue globalising economic agendas even as it sought to assume the role of determining what constituted ‘Indian culture’.
played out. In these spaces, the middle classes are able to blur the imagined lines between public and private space and create a new facsimile of the ‘public’ but which is located in a private space that only ‘they’ can access.\textsuperscript{19} These new spaces of consumption have also become the spaces where the vision of the new global city is being played out and as such are worthy of a closer look.

1.5 Contribution to Knowledge

The thesis seeks to contribute to an understanding of sexuality in relation to visual culture in 21\textsuperscript{st} century India focusing on spaces in Mumbai. Its point of departure is to look at visual culture and sexuality in relation to public space and the ways in which sexuality is cast in public space. Its contribution is in bringing concerns of spatiality to concerns of sexuality. The thesis examines how a particularly kind of middle class heterosexuality is centre staged in the new spaces of consumption.

The thesis’s contribution to the rapidly growing body of scholarship on sexuality in contemporary India is to make the connections between globalization, the new spaces of consumption, and a gendered spatiality that responds to these changes. It will also engage with the new forms of morality policing and the concomitant public sphere negotiations with questions of morality that are brought on by anxieties regarding these changes. It uses the prism of space to engage with new expansions and simultaneously the drawing of new boundaries in regard to questions of sexuality. From here I argue that these new regimes are wittingly or unwittingly engaged in a construction of a new middle-class, a class whose values and traditions are once again written on the bodies of women.

One of the important premises of the study is that in the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, sexuality is being defined by a market led media defined version of sexual

\footnote{I use the binary terms, public and private though I am aware of the need to see the public and private as fluid continuous categories that move in complex ways between one and the other. In the perception of our respondents then these were real and in some ways concrete categories and we represent them as such. Nonetheless narratives around public space are often conducted in very strong binaries of boundaries especially those between public and private and it is difficult to avoid using these terminologies.}
modernity. What this study attempts to do is to illuminate the nuances behind these media-created images to understand that what is at stake is a definition not only of sexuality but also of modernity, Indian-ness and respectable progressive womanhood. The study also focuses on the ideas of desire and the practices of consumption that middle-class urban Indians are part of.

Sexuality is central to the discussion of both Indian womanhood and a global middle-classness and I argue that sexuality is the terrain on which both of these are being contested and often bitterly contested. The thesis aims to look at some of these areas of contestation. These contestations I suggest are once again written on the bodies of women and are about the assertion of particular kinds of patriarchal, class, caste and religious hegemonies where struggles for dominance and control are being played out. These women however, are no passive spectators in this process. Women are not simply silent objects, but speaking subjects who intervene as agents in these contests. Women participate as members of civil society, as professionals in the media, as users of the media and telecommunication technologies, and most importantly as individuals with a stake in the outcome of these debates.

In this thesis, I look at women as agents in relation to concerns of sexuality asking how women engage with the new opportunities offered and demands made on them. I also explore the new spaces that have opened up to women and the pleasure they afford even as they simultaneously impose new and old restrictions. I reflect on the new spaces of consumption and raise questions about the ways in which these are part of the new regimes of sexuality and how arbitrary public-private boundaries are being redrawn. I argue that women and their negotiations are central to the ways in sexualities are being mapped in contemporary Mumbai.

In this thesis, I attempt to understand how the debate on sexuality, morality, and the public sphere has been articulated and polarized suggesting that what is at stake here is not just a control of female sexuality but also the reputation of Mumbai and India as belonging simultaneously to the global order as well as retaining their culturally ‘Indian’ roots.
1.6 Methodology

The Context of the Research

This thesis is part of an ongoing enquiry into gender, space, sexuality, the middle classes and consumption in Mumbai that has spanned nearly a decade. My engagement with the politics of urban space in the city is reflected in much of my research in the last decade. Research on the thesis has been done using multiple methods. These include ethnography, interviews, and discourse analysis of media narratives and advertising.

Interviews with twenty middle-class educated professional women in Mumbai were conducted between 2002 and 2005. This inquiry focused on women’s engagement with the media in relation to questions of sexuality and representation. My effort here was to understand how the media constructs women’s sexuality through the codes of modernity, morality and notions of what it means to be Indian in a globalising age. It also explored how women negotiated with the media, their urban environments and their own lived experiences in regard to sexuality in 21st century Mumbai. Indepth interviews were conducted two or more times getting women to reflect on, among other things, the spaces which they occupied in the city and their embodied experiences in these spaces.

I conducted interviews with about 20 upper-middle class women who were either employed or had been employed at some time. All of them had masters or professional degrees and above. Though this is not an indication of women’s agency or choices, it does indicate a kind of cultural capital. These interviews provide some insights into women’s engagements with the contemporary questions of morality and sexuality. These interviews were conducted largely between 2002 and 2005 and as such are now about five years old. However, I would like to suggest that they continue to be relevant in terms of current public debates on sexuality in terms of the concerns reflected in these interviews.

20 This was funded by the Achyuta Menon Centre for Health Science Studies, Trivandrum and was published as a monograph (Phadke 2005).
In continuing my engagement with the gendered aspects of public space, I focused on women’s access or lack thereof to public space in Mumbai. In engaging with what I called ‘real’ public spaces, such as parks, streets and transportation hubs, when women were asked where they hung out in the city, many responded by saying they frequented the new shopping malls and coffee-shops in the city. This led to my researching these new spaces of consumption even though they are not public spaces as such but are privately owned. In these spaces I spent many comfortable if boring hours in participant observation and ethnographic engagement.

Ethnography was conducted in the shopping malls and coffee-shops where I engaged in participant observation as well as interviews with women who shopped in the malls and those who worked in the malls as well as women who frequented the coffee-shops. The interviews with women who shopped in the malls were short interviews often conducted in the malls and a few outside separately. Interviews with women who worked in the mall were all conducted in the mall itself. Interviews with women who frequented the coffee-shops were all conducted in the coffee-shops but by pre-arrangement, not chance.

Three shopping malls and three coffee shops in Mumbai were chosen as the locations of study. These malls included: R-Mall in Mulund, In Orbit Mall in Malad and High Street Phoenix in Lower Parel. The coffee-shops malls included: Café Coffee Day on Carter Road, Bandra; Barista on Chowpatty, and Barista in Chembur. This ethnography provides a thick description of these spaces and the kinds of dynamics that operate within them. It includes a descriptive analysis of the ways in which class presented itself to me in these spaces as well the ways in which heterosexuality was showcased in these spaces.

21 This research on public space and gender in Mumbai was conducted collaboratively with Shilpa Ranade and Sameera Khan and took place under the aegis of Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research (PUKAR)
Some scholarly reflections on ethnographic research

Since a fair component of my work is based on ethnographic data it is worth reflecting here on some of the concerns raised by a feminist understanding of this methodology. This section will seek to outline some of the dilemmas of both textual analysis and ethnography in relation to both women as subjects and media audiences.

Walters (1999) suggests that the quest for a female gaze is closely linked to an ethnographic approach that seeks to give women access to a voice that has been long denied. She points out that feminist researchers are familiar with the insight that "cultural meaning is not simply immanent in the text but produced at least in part by actual audiences in particular social contexts" (p.244).

Walters further argues that an ethnographic approach involves a great deal of interpretation on the part of the critic and that it cannot give the guarantee of truth any more than textual analysis can. In my work I attempt to blend these two methodological strategies to arrive at as many critical versions of social reality as possible. She also points out that turning the phrase "the personal is political" into a methodological principle would mean a move towards a greater engagement with the lived experiences of women.

Chandiramani et al (2002) point out that sexual behaviour has also been studied in the context of reproductive health, primarily infection (reproductive tract infections and sexually transmissible infections) and contraceptive decision making. They also point out that intervention programmes tend to focus on those who are outside the 'normative' range of sexual and reproductive behaviours contained within stable, heterosexual, patriarchal family units - women who are perceived to bear too many children, men who have sex with men, and women who sell sex, for example. They argue that increased research on sexual behaviour has not been accompanied by an increase in the understanding of sexuality and how it plays out in lived experience. They also point out that even less explored and understood is how gender and power operate in affecting people's, especially women's, sexuality (p.1).
In my own work I attempt to engage with lived experiences of women in relation to consumer practices and locations which has historically been seen as inadequate as data in social science research. In doing this I posit reading as a complex activity which is not merely passive but involves an active participation in interpretation. A purely textual analysis may suggest the presence of a homogenous and ideal reader thus conflating the distinct categories of implied and real reader. Such a conflation may render invisible the embodied female reader (in making this argument, I draw on the insights of Walters, 1999 and Gray, 1987). The concern is to raise questions about how women interact with and interpret texts and representations related to sexuality in specific women's magazines. Here I draw on the work of feminist scholars Janice Radway (1984) and Tania Modelski (1982) who suggest the possibilities of reading against the grain. Walters (1999) defines 'reading against the grain' as that through which films or television shows (in our case magazines) are read for their "absences and ruptures in an attempt to reveal the internal contradictions and produce an interpretation that challenges the dominant reading of the film as well as its coherence and closure".

Ien Ang (1996) raises the very relevant concerns of attempting ethnographic studies of audiences. She points out the various dilemmas that are inevitable to the writing of ethnographic accounts and in the context of audience studies suggests that there is no easy way out. It is imperative that the ethnographer at every stage reflect on the partiality of the enterprise and articulate this partial position in the telling of the narrative. She also raises several questions in regard to the reception of texts by audiences which will be addressed in detail in the study.

Purnima Mankekar (2000) offers a richly textured and layered ethnography of women as television audiences in her analysis of lower-middle-class women as viewers of Doordarshan in two localities in Delhi. Her analysis reflects on how the narratives of the state, nation and appropriate womanhood are central to the act of interpreting the texts offered. She focuses on the dramatisation of two epics, the Ramayan and Maharbharat and their reception to suggest the complex contexts within which these are situated. Her capacity to negotiate with several
contradictions simultaneously and to locate herself firmly within the narrative suggests that it is possible to negotiate the fraught dilemmas of attempting such ethnography.

I am also very struck by the methodological questions raised by Kamla Visweswaran (1996) in her work *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. She raises critical issues regarding the practice of feminist ethnography. She discusses in detail concerns regarding who speaks, does not speak, what they say (reveal)/do not say when they do speak, how they construct realities, the politics of those who refuse to be subjects of ethnography, concerns regarding the location of complex identities and the politics of naming which construct those identities. She asks: "How do we arrive at what we call the "truth"? And conversely, what is the truth produced by a specific kind of epistemology?" (Visweswaran, 1996:48).

Also, Visweswaran argues that "a woman-centred ethnography need not sacrifice relationality, the virtue of a decentred approach. But rather than foreground men's relationships to one another (which classical ethnography does quite well) or women's relationships to men, perhaps a feminist ethnography could focus on women's relationships to other women, and the power differentials between them" (Visweswaran, 1996:20). This brings home to me the fact that some of the ways in which I present my study foregrounds women's relationships with men and with various patriarchal institutions and actors. It tends to elide women's relationships both with other women in their class as well as perhaps more importantly lower class women. I am aware that a quest for a more radical understanding and construction of female sexuality which neglects to discuss these class structures or seeks "choices" for middle-class women at the cost of the livelihoods of poor women not only lacks validity but also ignores the principles of justice on which feminism as an ideology is premised. I am still grappling with questions of how to incorporate these concerns as an integral part of my research agenda.

Visweswaran (1996) also points out, very relevantly for me, that the relations of power do not disappear when one is a member of the group researched.
Visweswaran, 1996:139-40). Angela McRobbie (1991) also cautions that the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched parallels in its unequal power that of social worker and client, or teacher and pupil. She points out that feminist researchers have been particularly aware of the exploitative possibilities of these relationships. She argues that "feminism forces us to locate our own autobiographies and our experience inside the questions we might want to ask, so that we continually do feel with the women we are studying… That said, feminism should not be taken as a password misleading us into a false notion of 'oneness' with all women purely in the grounds of gender" (MacRobbie, 1991:70). This is a timely reminder for me that I need to reflect further on my own role as a researcher despite the fact that as a middle-class, educated, sometime employed, heterosexual woman I share a broad location with my subjects.

1.7 Limitations of the Thesis

The thesis examines the construction of a particular form of heterosexuality in the new spaces of consumption in Mumbai focussing on middle class women in relation to concerns of spatiality and the right to inhabit public spaces as well. I use the term middle class broadly but focus in reality on a small group of women. While many of the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed has a relevance beyond this group, I do not claim to represent a larger phenomenon. Though it shares various defining features, lower-class sexuality is often constituted differently in the public discourse than that of the middle-class. Social variables impact differently, are negotiated distinctly, by members of both the classes. A sustained engagement with the politics of lower-class sexuality is therefore beyond the ambit of this thesis.

The thesis also focuses on hetero-normative middle-class sexuality in the new spaces of consumption. While it does not explicitly deal with homosexuality, it nonetheless has implications for how homosexuality gets constructed. This however merits a separate study.
In my interviews I spoke only to an English speaking group though interviews conducted in the malls and coffee-shop particularly with the staff were often conducted in Hindi or Marathi.

The ethnographic research in malls and coffee-shops ended for the most part in 2006 and since then there have been many more malls at least in the city and the malls studied have also metamorphosed in various ways which the thesis does not address.

The ordinary and extraordinary ways of the possibilities of being a Feminist consumer, the expansion and the circumscription of our choices as women, the possibility of slippage between societally produced and individually claimed gender-roles, are some of the more demanding phenomena that I have tried to address and explore. As is obvious, these phenomena can be critically appraised, understood and explicated using diverse filters provided by distinct disciplines. I have tried to use a multi-disciplinary frame to comprehend these phenomena and phenomena such as these from diverse viewpoints; however, one can only arrive at a series of partial connections even as one is interpreting semiotically saturated experiences.

The study is located in the city of Mumbai and reflects the specificities of its context. It is also located in the new spaces of consumption and as such is a limited endeavour.

1.8 Chapter Plan for the Thesis

This introductory chapter has laid out what the thesis sets out to do and the contemporary contexts and concerns in relation to questions of sexuality, spatiality and consumption that it seeks to explore. It also frames the central concerns of the thesis, the methodologies, and the contribution it makes towards understanding the field of sexuality in contemporary urban India. It also locates the thesis geographically in the city of Mumbai and temporally in the early 21st century.
The second chapter lays out the socio-historical and theoretical context of debates on sexual modernity examining the various constituencies which have sought to articulate their positions in the last two decades. It also intellectually locates the study within theoretical debates of consumption, sexuality and spatiality including concerns in regard to a more inclusive architecture.

Chapter three explores the new spaces of consumption and display in Mumbai: malls, coffee-shops and nightclubs and focuses on the ways in which both class and heterosexuality are constructed in these contexts. It examines some of the assumptions of modernity that are implicit in women’s presence in these spaces as consumers and shop-assistants. It argues that the presence of women in these spaces, is significant to the projection of Mumbai as a global city, in that visible women signal a particular kind modernity, one that fits into the vision of a capitalist consumer economy.

Chapter four is located particularly in those spaces in shopping malls where lingerie is displayed and sold. It focuses on the ways in which the display of lingerie contrives to demonstrate a global modernity though a particular kind of visuality while simultaneously asserting a sense of monogamous heterosexuality. It examines the assumptions of heterosexuality that underlie these spaces in terms of how the advertising around lingerie is framed. Using the window and mall displays and the advertising of lingerie, it asks questions about the kind of gendered sexual performances and exercise of agency that is facilitated by these displays. It also asks questions about the implications of the market-led emergence of lingerie from the metaphorical closet? Do these displays, and the performances that they might facilitate, unsettle the public-private boundaries that circumscribe female sexuality or do they in fact reinforce them?

Chapter five explores the construction of a particular kind of heterosexual intimacy in these post-globalisation spaces of consumption. Examining the architecture of these spaces, the chapter explores the simultaneous transparency and privacy afforded by the use of glass and particular lighting. It explores how interior design and décor are used to create a space that is both public enough and
simultaneously private enough to offer a kind of respectability that permits public displays of affection.

Chapter six the final chapter will attempt to bring the various threads of the arguments from the chapters together to make a somewhat coherent broader statement about contemporary sexuality in the city of Mumbai. It will contextualise sexuality against the other narratives and seek to explain why sexuality is so incendiary in our times. It will bring all these ideas together and also point to future directions for research.