have been brought into the way masculinity and femininity is being constructed. Then we will look at shifts in the notion of work which had been so central to Soviet women's identity. We will also explore the linkages between political discourse, mass media and sex industry which have contributed significantly in transforming the gender ideology and gender stereotypes current in today's Russia.

Social construction of masculinity and femininity which tells us what it means to be a woman or a man both “...reflects and contributes to the ways that societies structure power. Gender shapes how people define themselves and others, and it affects the ways that people imagine change” (Engels 2004: 2). We will also explore how changes in women’s participation in the labour force and in social reproduction have impacted on women’s perception of themselves and their place in Russian society.

Capitalist free market economy arrived in Russia with its stated aim of establishing institutionalized liberal democracy as the political system. As a political system liberal democracy extends formal rights to all groups, including those interests which were marginalised in the previous polity. Expectations of material and symbolic equality and the paucity of actual rewards offered by liberal welfare state invite competition amongst various groups and the lays the basis for identity politics.

Feminist Debates on Identity Politics

Politics based on the assertion of identities bases itself on the individual’s experiences and attempts to forge political alternatives based on their experiences of oppression. This way, identity politics claims to unify different experiences of individuals and their diverse political meanings. This raises certain questions about the transparency of individual’s experiences of oppression and can reduce multiple interpretations into certain unifying claims. Such theoretical frameworks can fix these experiences of oppression into given meanings (Scott 1992). It can render identity politics particularly prone to the trappings of essentialism. Feminist theory has consistently opposed the trends of essentialising human biology with its attendant ideology of biological determinism. This has been the source of tension in Feminist
theory with the premises of identity politics which seeks to ground the source of a woman’s identity in her biology and shared experiences of women as a result of her biological roles. Feminist identity politics takes up the task of articulating women’s understandings of themselves (and of men) without reducing femininity (or masculine dominance) to biology. Feminists have emphasized that whatever experiences women share will be experiences of femininity not necessarily resulting from a fixed sexual difference but rather from their diverse experiences of social injustice. This explains extreme caution in feminist theorizing upon any invocation of features of female bodies and attributes flowing as a result of it as a basis for identity political claims because it risks as being seen as, inadvertently, complicit with sexist views.

Arguably some feminists have made equally persuasive arguments to the contrary. Feminists like Ruddick (1989) and Irigary (1985) have emphasized on exclusively feminine traits such as ‘maternal thinking’ and ‘écriture feminine.’ They have reassessed such feminine values and celebrate them as a more authentic source of women’s shared identity. However, such arguments have been prone to endorsing existing power relations. For instance, in moral psychology, arguments related with ‘ethics of care’ have two principle premises. Advocates of ‘ethics of care’ claim that this is an exclusively feminine contribution to moral reasoning and is more powerful in enabling our negotiation with the web of social relationships. Lourdes (1984) was one of the first early African-American feminist who claimed that maternal power of women can achieve a breakthrough in the oppression of women. Gilligan (1982), amongst others, took this up further and is one of the most influential feminist theorists who has developed a theoretical framework on the moral development of women which is the source of their power and identity. She found that women find their external relationships as the primary source of their identity and that the depth of emotional connection in their external relationships signifies their roles.

Critics have argued that all women do not necessarily speak in the voice of care for instance, the behavior and ethics of women who are not oppressed might be different from those who are. This makes such basis more difficult for shared identity claims of women. Butler has cautioned that deriving a theoretical framework in the context of such overlapping and confusions between women’s oppression and construction of femininity will reinforce power relations and undermine feminist
of patriarchy. Whether to ground women’s identity in her biology or social roles flowing from her position in society has been an unresolved debate in feminist theory.

The relationship and its implications between biological sex and socially constructed gender at different points in time have been debated in feminist theory. This relationship constitutes the basis of feminist politics and has also been a salient feature in explaining how patriarchy organizes itself socially. This relationship has been informed by the understanding that sex is a fixed biological category whereas gender is subject to historical and social change. De Beauvoir (1972) was one of the first feminists to articulate that women’s oppression was not because of her biology rather it was a result of ideologies, structure and practices in society. Sex is a biologically determined physical characteristic but gender is socially constructed by the culture and society in which the individual develops. A lot of attention was devoted to the social construction of gender, gender relations and socialization of gender roles with the fact of biological sex as being natural and fixed. Walby (1989) and Oakley (1972) have worked on women’s perceptions of ‘self’ and it role in identity politics and have shown that even though gender roles determined by social practices vary from one culture to another, it still forms the axis of social organization. Ortner (1974) said that gender and sexuality are not mere reflections of human biology but are a form of cultural practices embedded in social structures.

Barrett and Philip (1992: 3) have pointed how sexual differences have been reduced to their bare essentials whereby their reproductive function has been accorded highest value in varying cultures. Gay and Lesbian rights movement also argued that sexual difference and orientation was fixed and not a matter of choice for different individuals. Rubin (1984: 307-8) combined these two positions to elaborate that, “…gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has gender-specific manifestations.” Radical feminists brought sexuality into the centre of feminist analysis of women’s oppression. They argued that this is the source of women’s identity and should not be diluted with other identity claims such as those of race, caste and religion etc. Firestone (1970: 103-120) in her work ‘The Dialectic of Sex’ argued that, “racism is sexism extended” whereby black women were subordinated to the larger race concerns of the men in their community. This would result in the fragmentation of feminist movement which is focused upon challenging
challenged the limitations of the female subject as outlined by politics of equality but nowhere perhaps was this challenge as strongly posed as it was from gay, lesbian and queer movements that questioned the sex and gender binary and assertions of similarity of experience as a premise for women's identity. It brought the hitherto salient and almost fixed category of biological sex into question and challenged the paradigm of heterosexuality from a whole new dimension.

The need to historicize sexual identity was underlined by Queer movement which took its inspiration from a very influential work done by Foucault (1980) in 'History of Sexuality.' Queer movement pointed out that such sexual identities were not naturally contingent but were very much a product of history and therefore subject to change. Apart from historicizing and contextualizing sexual identity, Queer movement also signaled a shift in the paradigm of feminist discourse by establishing deconstruction as the method of analysis. The radical implication of the post-modernist shift from stand-point feminism in identity politics introduced the political goal of subverting the given identities rather than accommodating them. This had the consequence of fragmenting the female 'subject' and a unified gender identity based on it. Their critique was that such universal claims to shared experiences of oppression of women as the bases of gender identity were inadequate and biased.

The inevitable pitfalls of post-modernist endeavour lay in the constant fragmentation of gender identity to an excessive extent. Feminists argued that this framework precludes the very possibility of making any generalization about women (Martin 1994). It undermined the roots of feminist philosophy and the overemphasis on heterogeneity, plurality and diversity was such that it rendered any possibility of establishing a stable gender identity incoherent. Young (1997), Heyes (2000) and Cornell (2000) argued for the need to develop an alternative framework which can avert excessive emphasis on finding identity claims based on shared and common experiences only. Rather they suggested that it might be more fruitful to look for non-identical connections between members of a particular community as the possible basis of alliances. However, sex-gender as a set of analytical categories continues to guide feminist thought, even though it has been in troubled and troubling ways.

Benhabib (1995) has called the decade of 90s as a decade of paradigm clash in feminist theory. One viewpoint argues in favor of women as social and political
This shift can be seen in competing attempts to define the category of gender. We have already discussed the sex and gender binary which held sex as immutable and gender as socially constructed. This binary was effectively questioned by post-structuralist and post-modernist theory. Butler (1990: 7) pointed in her work, ‘Gender Trouble’ that, “...Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or a ‘natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.” This was to say that issues like sexual preference or choice which till now had been considered as fixed or given were not so. In fact, culturally available codes shape the direction of a body’s sexual desire and orientation. Therefore, it is not just gender but also sex which is a social construct.

These formulations, though freed feminist thought somewhat from the rigid binary of sex and gender, however rendered identity as a category totally fluid. Conceptually, ‘fungibility’ of identities meant that any given identity was now replaceable and substitutable by others. Identities are constructed in a process of a struggle between classes and groups. The critics of post-modernist analysis elaborated that unlike in earlier traditional humanist discourse where the subject had an agency, now the subject as a locus of agency did not exist nor did the possibility of resisting or subverting gender codes. In this transition it seems that the female subject has been lost (Benhabib 1995).

Highlighting the limitations of identity/difference politics, Benhabib (1995: 29) has elaborated her argument and said that, “...The problematic status of the category of the subject is also evidenced in the way in which “race/gender/class” are strung together as determinants of identity which should guide empirical research paradigms. The question as to what understanding of the self one must presuppose to conceptualize the confluence of these identities is rarely, if ever, raised. Are these identities additive? Are they like layers of clothing that social actors can wear and remove? How are they experienced by a single individual who is herself a concrete totality uniting all of these into a single life-history? Categories of race, gender, and class are analytical distinctions at the level of theory; in any piece of social-historical-cultural research we have to show how they come together as aspects of identities of specific individuals. When we do such research, what kinds of models of life stories
or narratives must we develop? Within the contemporary theoretical scene of fragmentation and multiplicity, the question of the unity of the self is hardly raised. This issue is not merely of theoretical interest; for very often these identities exist in conflict with one another. The normative demands upon the individual of race/gender/class identities as well as of other self-constitutive dimensions may be conflictual, in fact, they may be irreconcilable. Unless feminist theory is able to develop a concept of normative agency robust enough to say something significant vis-à-vis such clashes, and which principles individuals should adopt to choose among them, it loses its theoretical bite and becomes a mindless empiricist celebration of all pluralities. The question of the subject is central for contemporary feminist theory and practice, and here is where I think that the influence of contemporary French theory upon the politics of identity/difference shows its severe limitations.

The implications of this theoretical shift are not just on cultural issues of self and others identification but at stake are complex issues of redistribution and state policy as well. In the contemporary context, where neo-liberal onslaught of global capitalism is forcing the retreat of welfare state towards a minimalist state, competition among divergent groups, some of whom share overlapping memberships, for increasingly scarce resources is intensifying. In the Russian context attention needs to be paid to the way in which the nascent neo-liberal state, while not visibly creating the identities of social groups, definitely encourages their formation along certain kinds of identity-related grievances while precluding their development along other lines. Why some identities are publicly recognized and acknowledged as legitimate criteria for being counted as a member of an oppressed group, or as a “disadvantaged minority” in the official vocabulary of the welfare state? What is the role of the state in encouraging identity politics, and in this process, what other options of social struggle and group solidarities are being precluded? These are questions pertaining to identity politics that emerging Russian feminist theory and practice is still grappling with.
women. Interpreting social and economic transformations, scholars tend to privilege the conservative and traditional elements of 1930s gender politics and to superimpose them on the totality of Stalinist social and cultural gender realities.” Krylova argues against such reductionist analysis of Soviet woman’s subjectivity which renders her a passive victim of unidirectional state action, bereft of any agency or contradictions.

Krylova (2004) maps the trajectories of these women and takes into account Soviet state’s policies and their, perhaps unintended, fallouts and analyses them in the context of the state’s engagement with many more contentious issues through debates carried out in the public sphere. She challenges the reductive interpretive framework applied by many gender studies methodologies and offers a more complex ground of Soviet woman’s identity from which we can better understand the scope and significance of the transformations that have been brought about by neo-liberal market ideologies in the re-conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity current in Russia.

Krylova (2004: 628) renders the woman-fighter phenomenon, Soviet women’s imagined and acted out military personalities, explicable and visible. She observes that, “...the conceivability of women’s compatibility with combat, war and violence was a product of the radical undoing of traditional gender differences that Stalinist society underwent in the 1930s. By the late 1930s, the construction of alternative gender personalities enjoyed both public articulation in press and military expert approval. The alternative femininity encompassed and redefined the traditionally incompatible qualities: maternal love and military violence, feminine charm and military discipline, military excellence, professionalism, physical endurance, courage. This new alternative was a product of a collective and uncoordinated effort of journalists, women participants in defence mobilisation campaigns, party leaders and military experts. It shaded conventional gender differences by presenting more sharing and overlapping notions of male and female being.” The instance of mixing the traditional male-female gender attributes in the context of military and combat options has been adequately problematised in feminist theory. Its implications are very uneasy, both in pro and contra arguments, which are full of essentialist trappings not to mention the problems of associating the notion of agency, particularly that of a woman’s, with the rather masculinised idea of militarist aggressive violence.
Women in Russia have inherited a legacy of a complex amalgamated Soviet citizen's identity. Soviet years were marked by a constant process of pushing the boundaries of radical political ideology of socialist feminism, undoing traditional gender norms, mixing up traditional identities. Simultaneously, there were pulls and pressures to undermine the radical undoing and taking the experiment too far. International and domestic situations in the larger context of resilient conservative patriarchal cultural resistance kept attempting to bring corrections to any fundamental deviation from prescribed gender roles and behaviour. Soviet state had to engage with intended and unintended outcome of conflicting policies regarding gender. So did the Soviet women and men. The resultant ambiguities and confusions coexisted with undisturbed naturalist sexist biases which remained rooted in the culture and mass psychology.

Perestroika and glasnost had arrived with a promise of freedom and emancipation of women and men from what was perceived as overt interference and paternalism of the Soviet state. However, as Zhurzhenko (2001: 30-31) points that, “...It is far from simple to determine today to what degree the creation of new women's identities is a result of the increased freedom of self-expression and possibilities of political participation, and to what degree it is the result of identification with models produced by mass media and new ideologies of the free market and democratization. However, for women this new system of motivations turned out to be ambivalent. The universal right of private initiative, in effect, turned out to be gender specific for it reconstructed the traditional separation of the private and public spheres. The abandonment of state paternalism and the collapse of the system of social protection caused the end of the social contract between working women and the state and pushed them in search of new life strategies and identities. In response, mass culture offered an already existing set of western identification models, ranging from the thriving businesswoman to the ideal housewife. Significantly distinct at first glance by the degree of their 'progressiveness', these identities have in effect much in common, for they are ingrained in the consciousness by virtue of the mechanisms of the market and mass cultural consumption. The emergence of these new identities, professedly or implicitly based on the essentialist understanding of women's destiny, contributes to the integration of the newly forming market society, thus creating opportunities for the social inclusion of women.
However, this inclusion is simultaneously a form of exclusion and the basis for the creation of new forms of inequality. The discourse of marketization represents this gender inequality as natural and justified by biological differences and as in no way connected with the universal institutions of the market society.” Within less than a decade of unfolding transition, even as it was in the process, such a comprehensive assessment from Russian feminism is a measure of the challenges and the immense potential in Russian feminists to meet them. It also renders the superimposition of western liberal subjectivity upon Russian women a more complex and difficult task.

Russian nation was fashioned out of the debris of Soviet Union and drew its legitimacy from an anti-socialist rhetoric of liberal democracy and freedom. It carved and continues to do so, albeit in much more blurred manner, its identity as distinct from and fundamentally opposite to that of socialist Soviet past. Socialist rhetoric notwithstanding the political and economic structures and policies have undergone an essential shift to once and for all break from their socialist legacy. All the constitutive components that go into the fashioning of this national identity and that of its men and women have been painstakingly articulated by the new interests of the market and dominant forces of the Orthodox Church and political parties. So, the conception of work which is central to survival, dignity and the understanding of one’s worth in society and self perception of both women and men has undergone a profound shift. Conceptions of sexuality and the body along with its cultural markers have similarly been revisited and reborn. Common to this project of refashioning identities is a juxtapositioning of the present with the socialist past in which Soviet socialism is reduced and simplified into overarching imageries of domination and repression and neo-liberal market democracy as the haven of freedom and consumption.

The new gender identities that emerged in post-collapse Russia were organized around conceptualisations which were anti-Soviet and anti-socialist. Such gender identities, based on transforming gender roles and behaviour, have been crucial for establishing the legitimacy and credibility of the new neo-liberal regime. Faced with mounting discontentment from the dispossessed population, these set of identities have been sought and manipulated by the dominant political, religious and economic forces for their own profit also.
Gorbachev himself laid out the ideological contours of this refashioning project. When he lamented the serious breakdown of moral values and increasing rate of divorces, it was to prepare the women to take the responsibility of neglecting their family and returning to their homes and hearth. The more explicit elaboration of the ideological shift articulated by Gorbachev could be seen in the public debates that took place in a more relaxed and uncensored media during the years of glasnost and perestroika. Soviet women were ‘overemancipated’, ‘pampered’ and ‘masculinised’ by the paternal Soviet state. Sexualization of the political discourse also contributed towards restoring the traditional models of masculinity and femininity, thereby giving an appearance of restoring some kind of a ‘natural’ order to a chaotic situation of transition. It was this ideological tone and tenor which led the emerging feminists in Russia like Posadskaya (1994), Khotkina and Elvira (1992), Rimashevskaya (1992) and others to be much more cautious in the assessment of the direction and outcome of perestroika and eventually analysed it by calling it a ‘patriarchal project’.

The transition saw a severe backlash against precisely this stereotype of ‘overemancipated, pampered and masculinised’ Soviet socialist woman. The notion of work which was central to the identity of Soviet citizen was displaced in the case of refashioned identity of the new Russian woman. This woman would replace her older sister who was over burdened, dull and sexless with a feminine woman who had the freedom to choose not to work and could freely consume and display her sexuality. While the new market ideologies immediately packaged and offered this set of identities to millions of women who were trying to grapple with the bewildering pauperisation brought into their lives, few had a real option to exercise the freedom to not work. The need to cope with a national identity crisis saw the emergence of a nationalist ideology and political discourse which fed on the sense of loss of self and power in the international arena and in their personal lives by the people of a former super power nation. This discourse rode on a heavily masculinized rhetoric of a glittering orthodox past, nuclear might and a distinct destiny of pre-Petrine Russia in which women would have a specific place and role in the gender hierarchy.

The liberal patriarchal character of reforms laid the grounds for the abolition of the Soviet gender contract. Overt calls to return the gender order to a more ‘natural’ state became increasingly bold and clear. Returning women back into their home was
the articulation of the emerging gender ideology. A pronounced nostalgia for “authentic masculinity” and “true femininity” among first-wave Russian democratic politicians was celebrated as freedom and choice. The entire democratic discourse defined itself in an opposition to the Soviet gender project. The reception to these reforms has been subject to criticism and caution by increasingly articulate Russian feminist criticism which has been from the very start sensitive to such “normal” phenomena as the removal of women from the new political institutions; appeals to ease women’s burden by returning them to their natural duties as mothers and wives; the aggressive sexualization of the female image; pornography and sex trafficking; and discrimination in the workplace. However, the misogynist reaction and essentialist stereotyping of women in media, popular culture and the political-nationalist discourse has contributed to the shifts and has itself been shaped by the transformations in gender identity.

Shift in the Notion of Work in Women’s Identity

A lot of research has been done on the relationship of women with Soviet socialist state in the context of its overtly paternalistic and what was perceived as an interfering role in the private domain. The subsequent increase in women’s work burdens led to the popularisation of terms like ‘double burden’ or ‘double shifts’ for the majority of women facing the drudgery of their work and domestic life in socialist economies. However, as Krylova (2004) pointed out the imbalance in the studies gendering the patriarchal discourse of Soviet state has arisen out of the tendency in such studies to privilege only this dimension of otherwise a very complex relationship between women and Soviet state. This has somewhat simplified the radical undoing of traditional patriarchal fixing of women and their identity in the gender hierarchy existing in Soviet Union. In the following section we will look at a crucial dimension of Soviet state’s gender policy and the profound restructuring, even undoing, of the ways in which new and complex notions of self worth and identity were forged as a consequence of this ideological thrust of Soviet gender policy.

By self definition, Soviet socialist state was a ‘workers state’. The one idea permeating all others was ‘work’. In fact, remaining unemployed without a reason
upon the exclusion of women from waged work and their subordination to men.” The private domain created a zone of confluence between the interests of patriarchy and capitalism organizing gender order in such a way that women and men’s identity could only be constructed within the binary of ‘consumption and production.’ This had a consequence of not only engaging women in the tasks of domestic drudgery, it also invisibilized large number of working women’s work in male production public sphere which they were forced to do for their family’s survival.

Hollows (2000: 122) has traced the shifts in the notion of femininity with the development of capitalism. She noted the consumption culture prevalent in U.K. and U.S. and showed that the post-second world war developments like political stability, global consensus and formation of welfare state gave a crucially needed boost to capitalism. Women’s dependence on men, legitimacy of the concept of taking household as a unit of consumption and devaluation of women’s work contributed in the construction of a negative concept of femininity which enabled a positive ascription to the concept of masculinity. Capitalism’s enhanced need to sell mass produced consumer goods in the post-war Fordist era also, “...involved the transformation of femininity around notions of domesticity, motherhood and consumption...women were primarily seen in terms of their role as consumers rather than producers. In Fordist culture, the family became the site in which ‘the spirit of modernity’ entered everyday life and in which self-sufficient family unit had to be transformed into a ‘modern consumption unit’...there was also a corresponding attempt to ‘professionalise’ the housewife’s role so that household management could be seen as a vocation” (Hollows: 123-24). The split into public and private domains, sexual division of labour and their masculinization and feminization was naturalized as the ‘normal’ or ‘the way nature intended’ heterosexist gender order.

Patriarchal and capitalist culture associated femininity and feminine values and behaviour with passivity, submissiveness and dependence. The distinction between sex and gender acquired enormous importance to naturalize the masculine and feminine roles which were actually culturally produced. This also enabled their evaluation in the frame of biological difference. Friedan (1963: 37), in her much acclaimed book ‘The Feminine Mystique’ which was also subject to critical feminist scrutiny, demystified the ‘feminine mystique’ which defined women as, “...healthy,
beautiful, educated (up to a point), concerned only with her husband, her children and her home...the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity.” She was subsequently criticized for ignoring working class women’s experiences and subjectivity and her mapping of white, heterosexual middle class woman’s location and oppression on to the differently situated black and working women. Nevertheless, this work was pioneering in revealing the cultural roots of women’s oppression in capitalist patriarchy.

Following the well researched work of Greer (1970), Faludi (1991) and others revealed the consensus between market forces of capitalism and patriarchal subjugation of women and claimed that this subjugation has been enhanced with the advent of globalisation. In earlier phase of capitalism, “…women no longer had a sense of their own identity because they were encouraged to see themselves as someone’s wife or mother. Household drudgery caused a fragmentation and a loss of concentration and led to fatigue and boredom” (Hollows 2000: 2). This femininity was so oppressive that it led second-wave feminists to conclude that this was the source of women’s oppression which was distorting women’s human potential. This assessment of femininity was considered ‘prime candidate for change’ (Barrett and Philip 1992: 3).

The attempt by feminists to wrest ‘femininity’ back from patriarchal and capitalist forces led to the construction of a redefined positive femininity. However, what those positive values would be and their implications for women’s lives and their choices and its encounter with an increasing concentration of wealth under globalisation has been subject to many debates and disputes between feminists and holds the potential to unravel the category of ‘woman’ itself. What still remains significant is that capitalist patriarchal gender order derives women’s identity primarily in terms of domesticity, motherhood and consumption. The utility and endurance of this identity is revealed in today’s mature stage of globalised capitalism in which job cuts in recession hit economies of the first world and in transition economies of post-socialist world, target women first for retrenchment and sending them back home to perform their ‘natural’ roles in the family.
Russian Women’s Work Identity in Transition

As we noted earlier ‘work’ constituted the most important component in fashioning Soviet women’s identity. Mostly studies on Soviet women have focussed on macro indicators such as education, employment, wage differentials and job segregation to analyze and to compare the situation of Soviet women with women in other social systems. What the identity of ‘working woman’ meant for them is a less researched question. As stressed by feminist scholars a potentially rich source of data in the form of letters, personal diaries, newspaper/magazine writings have not been factored into most of ongoing social science analysis. Such accounts reveal significant difference in attitudes and beliefs in Russian women which have been shaped by their experience of engaging with more than seventy decades of Soviet policy.

In some studies that have been done taking into account this kind of data sources, varied and significant results have been revealed. For instance, in a comparative analysis between Polish and Russian women, Bystdzienski (1989: 674) says that, “...Soviet women are exhorted and expected to achieve in both areas, as successful mothers and homemakers, and as socially and politically active professional women. Thus although accepting that their child-care and household responsibilities are the natural responsibilities of women they also accept the view that it is “normal and natural” to work outside the home. For Soviet women (and especially Soviet European ones, who have a particularly higher employment rate), both the occupational role and the family role appear to have relatively equal importance.” A high percentage of women reported that they would want to work even if their husband’s income is sufficient for household needs. In contrast with a more conservative attitude of their Polish sisters, Russian women expressed work as an important factor of their self identity. The value of work was expressed in terms of, “...their desire to contribute to society, to be part of a working group, and because they do not want to waste their educational qualifications...in addition to reporting feeling of self-worth and personal satisfaction, also routinely mentioned a sense of pride in being able to contribute to the wider society” (Bystdzienski 1989: 675).
Work is associated with a collective activity not only in a larger metaphorical sense but also in actual work collectives that were formed at all work places. These collectives and the relationship of mutual cooperation and aid, particularly during the times of fulfilling targets, a place of meeting friends and sharing had occupied a significant and central place in the working life of Russians. The near complete absence of life outside of working concerns made these collectives a site of enmeshing between work and the private domain in complex ways (Ashwin 2000; Kharkhordin 1999).

Not only was the workgroup the location of benefits redistribution during the Soviet era, but workers often relied on mutual cooperation in fulfilling plan quotas. During the Soviet era, and increasingly in the post-Soviet period of turmoil, hardships and uncertainties, co-workers have provided a source of mutual aid in solving individual problems as well (getting referrals for repair service, information about cheaper prices, etc). Beyond instrumental use, however, the collective is a small group comparable in its social roles (including socialization and sociability) to that of friends or family, and is often the centre of social life for many adult Russians. For women it also meant the minimal dependence on men for emotional and financial sustenance. The insignificant difference in background and professional skills along with the jobs and benefits it accrued was also fundamental to the way women perceived themselves as equal to men.

The profound implications of the shift from a non-monetary economy to a monetary market economy can be seen in ways it translated as values for its citizens and the organizing of gender relations. A study on work experience and work relations in Soviet Union and the changes it underwent during the transition by Busse (2003) revealed, "... that money neither granted status nor marks self worth; that Russians use their work speciality in constructing their self-identity; and that work is above all a social activity—with few other avenues of sociability, work becomes the place to meet friends. First, money wages played an insignificant role in the benefits of work during the Soviet era; not only was the pursuit of money as such scorned as a bourgeois endeavour, but most genuine rewards for work were made in kind (housing, day care, health care, etc)."
In Soviet Union wages did not constitute a significant portion of differentials in real standard of living or in status, and were never taken as a measure of self-worth, which is the case in liberal democracies where monetary wealth is the source of an individual’s power and status. In any case, wages were so obviously not enough to purchase goods in short supply that possession of money was not essential to obtaining status but rather a consequence of having obtained it. In the USSR, status brought goods, and often even money (Kornai 1992). Busse (2003) points to the ways in which all citizens from childhood onwards learned to identify with work or their professions. Children prepared for very specific careers which often remained with them through out their adult life. Although individuals changed jobs often they rarely changed their profession or occupational category with which Soviet citizens learned to identify themselves.

**Women in Soviet Defence Economy**

Estimates have put women's employment in defence and military arms production sector at as high as 40%. Soviet women working in defence and military arms production sector were the best qualified and in good job positions spread out in multiple sections from R&D to production of military hardware. Cronberg (1997) has problematised the shifts in the identity of Soviet women which were woven out of an intricate web of pride, job satisfaction, sense of belonging at home and best welfare services associated with military arms production and defence related jobs in the Soviet regime. These women were potentially the biggest losers in the following transition. The traditional masculine association with the military and defence sector has evolved not only because of the values of aggression and violence inculcated in combat and war but also because such sectors have almost completely marginalised women in terms of jobs. They are the traditional male bastions in which men risk their lives and protect the nation and are therefore entitled to the benefits and perks their jobs offer.

Enloe (1983: 265) and Anderson (1988: 134) have pointed out why militarisation of societies and economy is problematic, in particular, for women. Enloe has argued that, “...women serve a wide variety of military needs, not only as
soldiers, but also as military wives, prostitutes, nurses and workers in armament factories. Inspite of this, the military remains society's bastion of male identity...military spending, redistributes resources among genders when, as is the case in most countries, the employees of the army, are only or mostly men.” Anderson has pointed out that, “...neither the industries which are major employers of women nor occupations in which women are engaged have a significant military component. There are relatively few women in the armed forces, only 9.5% of the total, and virtually no women who are high executives in major military firms. The workforce in military firms is also disproportionately male. The Rockwells, General Dynamics and the Lockheeds of the world are the preserve of white males.” Heavy militarization of Soviet economy had its roots in the hostile international balance of power which held socialist Soviet Union almost always in the mindset of being under siege.

Russian revolution in 1917 and the inception of a nascent Soviet workers state and the subsequent international hostility to this socialist victory led to a situation of covert or overt threats amidst which the need to defend this historic socialist state became ingrained into official discourse. A nation which had, since its inception, kept itself ready for war had to fulfil a key task of raising generations of young Soviet citizens equipped to fight a war which could happen any day. Historically unprecedented non-military training of entire generations inculcated values of defence and aggression as positive, necessary and even glorified by the official discourse. Women’s huge participation into such activities gave birth to hundreds and thousands of trained parachutists, pilots, sky-divers along with smaller-scale initiatives like tank and military vehicle driving, military mechanic training and so on. It opened vast possibilities of an encounter between the ideals of the natural roles of women and what women were actually doing and excelling at, winning first prizes amidst much public acclaim. Thousands of women voluntarily recruited from villages and cities into such civilian training activities.

Krylova (2004: 628) has studied the historic phenomenon of complex interaction between traditional male and female attributes and their mixing in the subsequent shaping of Soviet masculinity and femininity. She points that, “...By the late 1930s, the construction of alternative gender personalities enjoyed both public articulation in press and military expert approval. The alternative femininity
encompassed and redefined the traditionally incompatible qualities: maternal love and military violence, feminine charm and military discipline, military excellence, professionalism, physical endurance, courage. This new alternative was a product of a collective and uncoordinated effort of journalists, women participants in defence mobilisation campaigns, party leaders and military experts. It shaded conventional gender differences by presenting more sharing and overlapping notions of male and female beings.” The right to admit women into combat was a heated debate between the limiting opinion of intelligentsia and women who participated in the debate in the form of letters and diaries, which were then printed, by hundreds, defending and demanding their right to train and fight in actual combat.

Documenting many women’s narratives and following life trajectories of leading women combatants and pilots who became live role models for millions of Soviet women Krylova (2004: 629) notes that, “...By the late 1930s, young women also acquired live idols – a small cohort of women military pilots in the Red Army. Omitted from academic historical narratives, they redefined the traditional notions of maternal obligations and were the first live embodiments of women’s compatibility with modern warfare, violence and redefined motherhood.” This had differing implications on the one hand for feminist understanding of essential ‘feminine virtues’ identified with love, compassion and non-violence and for patriarchal masculinist understanding on the other, which had to contend with being defended by and sometimes subordinate to a deadly woman combatant.

Krylova (2004: 636) further noted that, “...To admit young women’s compatibility with combat warfare was to initiate a process assigning qualities indispensable for military situations and which were incompatible with resilient and traditional notions of femininity; qualities such as cruelty, cold-bloodedness and the trained and calculated determination to kill.” Women were equally ferocious in arguing for their right to expand their entry and initiatives in combat. “Determined to devote their lives to the professional defence of their country, these young women did not hesitate to express their unwillingness to become mothers by arguing that ‘they do not necessarily have to be mothers while they must be pilots and officers.’ Young women’s letters uncovered two co-dependent processes in the formation of female self-perception, thus far unconsidered by the Soviet press. The identification with the
right to combat and violence seemed to ask for a disavowal of motherhood as an essential need and duty” (Krylova 2004: 640-641).

The admittance of women into army and military during second world war and the subsequent ban on their entry in the army along with similarly shifting position of the state on its emphasis on women’s motherhood and maternal roles reveals the unease with which dominant gender ideology interacted with the undoing of traditional gender identities. The significant point is that the state, socio-political actors and women themselves engaged in fashioning their identity even though it could result in contradictory and sometimes mutually conflictual roles and expectations from women. Another dimension of this legacy was post-war heavy participation of well qualified women into well paid defence jobs.

The intended and actual consequence of Soviet state policies enabling women to combine their familial tasks with such demanding professions, such as defence and military arms production sector, worked both ways. While it naturalised and invisibilised gender division of labour at home according to which women and men in the self-perception of their roles and identity naturally held women to be responsible for sick children, managing households and other domestic tasks. This then also became a reason for women to be left out of the highest and most prestigious job opportunities. Simultaneously, women also believed themselves to be equal to men in their contribution towards defending their country, being very skilled professionally and respected for their work in society.

Women with children or single mothers with dependents were not a disadvantage in the consideration for all other job positions. The enterprises, in keeping with the strict policy guidelines of the state took care of numerous needs and day off for such women to enable them to do both. Work collectives and friendship also played a role in enabling workers to fulfil their obligations. Cronberg (1997: 266-67) points how the military industry in the city of Perm heavily employing women provided, “...free day care centres, free holidays, access to health care and other goods. In 1994, one of the design bureaux in Perm still had a bakery, which provided both current and former employees with freshly baked bread each day. During the Soviet era, the bureau’s mothers had an extra day off, usually Friday, each week if they had small children. If they had older children they had a day off every fortnight.”
The sense of loss women experienced, particularly in the years immediately following the collapse, was not only because of the poverty and harshness that the suddenness of the economic reforms brought into their lives; it was also a profound awareness of increasing redundancy of their educational and work background in a market economy. As the years of the transition unfolded, women became painfully aware that their skills and work experiences had become an undesirable relic from the past in the rapidly changing profile of the market economy.

Women’s Unemployment and Shifting Identity in Post-Soviet Russia

Facing unemployment and destitution for the first time was traumatic for women previously employed in this sector because of forced deskilling, from qualified specialists to cleaning and washing jobs. Women with children or simply married women were faced with disadvantages in the job market and perceived as a liability and becoming the first ones to be retrenched. Women began their many such first encounters with overt, open and undesired facets of gender discrimination. The transition also eroded the fundamental basis of women’s identity and their sense of self worth. Life at the enterprises was not just a source of employment but it was also their social, personal life around which everything evolved. Not many women engaged with ease or without a loss of their professional specialisation, which was the cornerstone of their pride and job satisfaction, with the alternative life strategies offered by the post-transition market economy. Cronberg (1997) notes that the feeling of home in this sector was so strong for the employees that despite the year long, and in many cases more than that, mounting wage arrears, possibilities of retraining into self-help and small businesses and other such options, they stuck to the enterprises and remained in the work books for years even after they had stopped being its paid employees.

Democracy, individualism and private property as the defining features of the new political and economic system entailed a complex makeover of what had previously constituted Soviet men and women’s identity as genders and as citizens of Soviet Union. Money earned at competitive jobs encouraging racing ahead even at the cost of co-workers, differential status and living standards, and consumptive greed
totally overturned what Soviet citizens had come to see as their ethics or values for the greater cause. Consumption as an end in itself had always carried pejorative connotations for the Soviets. Women as house-wife in a household which was now being established as the unit of consumption with women in the centre of the new consumption boom was a fundamental shift from a ‘working’ identity to the market based new set of identities.

To take just one sector out of the many in which women were employed, Cronberg (1997: 277-78) says, “...The feeling of home - a defence home- was built into their everyday lives...while the end products of the women’s work were powerful engines with a masculine image, the way the production was organized had the smell of freshly baked bread...As the femininity of Soviet women is being reconstructed into Russian femininity, the identity politics of the women in the defence enterprises of Perm is built into the transformation into a market economy. Women are no longer able to see themselves as independent economic subjects, nor are they subjects of a useful mission for their country. The immobility of the older women is contrasted by the mobility of the young, who find a place in new economic structures as secretaries or housewives. History’s most dramatic large-scale transformation of female scientific and engineering identities, millions of them, is taking place without any protest from the world’s engineering organizations...become unemployed or employed into traditional female jobs...A housewife has become the symbolic asset of the new Russian (‘those who made a fortune out of economic transformation’) ...The femininity projected by the American soap operas now so popular in Russia, combined with a new openness to commercial sexuality and pornography are replacing the ideal of the working woman of the defence enterprise working for her home and defending her children.”

Such studies have problematised the notions of subjectivity, agency and their complicated interaction with ideological discourses contesting with each other for a hegemonic prescription of gender identity. During Soviet regime the outcome rarely corresponded with what the policy-makers had intended or as was intended by the women who were the subjects of such debates. Soviet women’s identity also generated a potentially shaken masculinity since the actual and prolific propaganda of fighter women challenged the clear cut vision of a woman in need of a male warrior
protector. The young Soviet woman was herself ready to defend the men. Long held male prerogatives to heroic death and military violence were disturbed by the unprecedented entry of women into this scenario.

The problematic nature of the ‘burning desire’ of the women to join the army and annihilate the enemy thereby joining the male bandwagon to heroic glory could challenge patriarchal rules up to a limit. It also suggested the potential pitfalls of the feminist equality/difference debate while arguing about feminist identity politics. The following severe backlash after the war and portrayal of women in the army as prostitutes or women out to hunt for their husbands was the betrayal of Soviet women’s sacrifices and hopes of finding a place in history books. It also rather quickly demonstrated the limits of such a paradigm for women’s empowerment. Nevertheless, branching out from actual army and combat roles into engineering, designing, public relations and other skilled jobs in arms production and research and development sector had a profound impact on women’s lives. The continued presence of women into the defence sector into well-paid jobs did not allow patriarchal attempts to succeed in relocating women’s identity back into the straight jacket of traditional ideal woman. Neither did the relationship between the state and women assume an easy unchallenged comfort.

The dismantling of Soviet Union itself and its socialist endeavour however has posed the most serious challenge yet to the possibilities of achieving the desired gender order. Strangleman (2004) explores shifts in work identity in the context of the larger global shift to a neo-liberal market work ethic and its implications for working class globally. He points to the crux of the problem as that of loss of identification with work and the insertion of cash nexus in the employer-employee relationship. He explains that the removal of more experienced older workers is a part of engineering ‘cultural change’. This is accomplished through, “...the rhetoric of the ‘dynamic, entrepreneurial, young worker’ as opposed to the ‘staid, backwards looking and inflexible “older worker”... Managers are happy to reify the committed, reliable worker of the past, who was perhaps less motivated by money. However, they are less interested in having to contend with the reality of such workers; who are able to draw on the resources of an embedded, experienced and knowledgeable employee to
negotiate the terms of the working relationship or ‘frontier of control’” (Strangleman 2004: 135)

There is a change in the relationship between workers and managers to that of subordination, powerlessness and submissiveness. Women workers are further devalued within this shift as the very conceptualisation of this neo-liberal young, dynamic, entrepreneurial individual at the centre of initiatives and freedom is a man. Single mothers and other retrenched women in post-socialist economies have found it much harder to relocate themselves in the new economy and if they have it has been at the cost of loosing their core identity of professional specialisation.

Vecernik (2003: 446–7) notes that, “...the economic transition cannot be accomplished without involving the value and cultural dimension too”. Mason and Kluegel (2000: 172) observe that during the early period of transition, many citizens of post-communist economies supported market justice norms merely in contradistinction to socialist justice norms of the communist era. “As the years pass, however, the influence of such “revolutionary zeal” has declined, opening these beliefs to scrutiny on the ground of opportunity and equity.”

Kiblitskaya (2000) and Ashwin (2000) have argued that during the periods of socio-economic transition, the role of men as main earner regained its importance as a component of masculine identity. The transition experiences of men in CEE, specifically those suffering unemployment, were reflected in health-related issues such as alcohol abuse, stress, social isolation and feelings of insufficient government support revealed the increasing pressures on men to play up to the changing role of assertive patriarchs. This led in the sociological literature to the thesis of ‘male marginalization’, both at work and in the household (Kiblitskaya, 2000). However, these studies and many others also documented the fact of women being the main decision makers in households. Since women also earned sufficiently it was in sexual division of domestic labour that men retained their advantage as the head of the household, rather than in being responsible for its maintenance financially.

The newly emerging work culture and labour market conditions have provided better conditions for male employees who have retained their role as main earner in the household some ten years after the transformation. Women have experienced a
negative impact on job satisfaction unlike their male counterparts. Lange (2008: 339, 341) noted that "...despite improving economic conditions towards the late 1990s, there was still a discrepancy in CEE between employees’ pecuniary ambitions and income realities. However, the effect is only significant for male employees, re-emphasizing the ‘male breadwinner’ argument. Results for employees who identify promotion prospects as an important aspect of a job, on the other hand, display a statistically significant, negative impact on job satisfaction only for women workers. The expectations for merit-based promotions do not appear to be met by what women employees experience at the level of the firm.” Such trends have been noted by other scholars who have elaborated upon labour market discrimination, sex segregation of job market and lack of advancement opportunities for women, which were already identified in the context of pay and educational attainment.

In a study of ethnic Russians’ demotion to working or middle class status in a Romanian nationalist environment, Chamberlain-Creanga (2008) explores the implications of new work ethics for workers which were introduced in one of the largest, last to survive cement factory and its R&D division. It was privatised and is now owned by a Fortune 500 European transnational conglomerate, EuroCim, which is the largest company globally producing cement. Workers are often too stressed and ask for a psychologist to be able to cope with individual responsibility and the absence of solidarity and collective spirit. They perceive the transition as a loss of ‘soul’ which is translated from their experience of loosing the feeling of support, cooperation and warmth which had permeated their socialist work ethic.

Chamberlain-Creanga (2008: 9-10) notes that, "...Designed in Paris skyscrapers, and translated and disseminated from elite Bucharest headquarters, such programmes are predicated on Western ideas of work and personhood. They are based on a neo-liberal ideal of privatized responsibility (or individual self-discipline). They arrive in a post-socialist context where production and personhood were once organised differently...workers fight to reclaim values that sustain a moral vision of solidarity, associated with the socialist past, amid individualising pressures...The main difference is the former was production-led, while the latter is consumption-led. One emphasizes the making of personhood through productive labour, while the other through consumption. Another difference between the two economic systems is the
place of 'the self' – or more specifically, how the self should feel – in relation to work and community.”

This ethnographic study shows how the trans-national management produces individualized, ethnicized and competitive subject. The global neo-liberal modernity’s need produces such subjects from the workers who work in such places. The idea is to discipline workers and securing their cooperation by telling them that the benefits accrued to global capital are in their interests. Many studies show that this sacrifice of ‘self’ is in opposition with the ‘self’ created during Soviet time although it builds upon the Soviet notion of sacrifice instilled in their workers in the service to homeland and state. Chamberlain-Creanga (2008: 18-19) has studied the shifts in work ethics and relationships amongst workers working in R&D laboratories. She talks about worker communities and solidarities created during work in Soviet Union and change over to the new reality, in which workers are trying to cope with social identities and meanings of work that are “becoming detached from locally embedded ideas of Soviet/Russian soul, culturedness and self.”

These studies problematise the notion of ‘self’ and ‘collectivity’ and the complicated manoeuvrings of Soviet policy to meet its conflictual goals of ensuring socialist production and reproduction. However, it is revealed that gender roles and identity that have been offered to women in the neo-liberal market environment has replaced the centrally situated ideal of ‘work’ as a crucial component of earlier Soviet woman’s identity. The alternative identities are being mediated by the market forces and are continually being reproduced in mass culture.

The transformation brought about in their social roles, behaviour, expectations and cultural representation by the market and reorganizing forces of patriarchal state and other interests has forced Russian women to evolve a response to the explosive market and consumerist interest in their sexuality that has erupted in post-Soviet Russian society. Identity as a basis for their mobilization and articulation of their desires, demands and rights has gained certain legitimacy in Russia recently. The political discourse and popular culture are fast becoming the vehicles for such a cluster of contradictory identities with a persuasive pull for women battling with competing articulations of their sexuality, independence, desire and freedom.
Reconstituting Femininity and Masculinity in Political Discourse

The democratic political parties that appeared in 1990 did not reveal any significant difference between each other; rather they reacted to each others’ statements validating their distance from, and opposition to, everything associated with communism. At the same time, their difference from each other was based on identity claims such as ‘Christian’, ‘social’, ‘liberal-democratic’ and so on. The political democratic identity was a negative one in the sense that it defined itself in relation to what was not communist. The collapse of Soviet Union and subsequent ban on the communist party of Russia had effectively demolished the ‘other’ in the literal sense of the word. Russia, unlike other emergent nations of former Soviet Union, could not blame anyone else for the imposition of communism, which by then in both national and international ideological political discourse had been established as the fount of all the ills of Soviet Union, and they could not export the guilt onto an external ‘other’. The blame had to circulate domestically and the political discourse rallied around the poles of a communist enemy versus the defenders of Russia (Denton: 2006).

Gender identity was a crucial marker differentiating between the beleaguered Soviet past and a hopeful democratic present. Russian political discourse was replete with competing claims of ‘normalising’ the past ‘abnormal’ gender roles and behaviour of ‘their women’. Formation of an identity is a process by which ‘self’ is defined in relation to and often in opposition with the ‘other’, constantly drawing boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’. Gender markers are often employed as borders demarcating between the two and is crucial to the process of inclusion and exclusion and establishing power relations. The reconfiguring of gender order entailed positioning the disempowered, uncontrolled, weak and vulnerable other as feminine and attributed empowered, controlling and authoritative self as masculine.

Riabova and Riabov (2002: 30) have studied the special role that attitudes to sexuality played in recasting gender identity in the political domain. They point that, “... One of the key elements of the anticommunist discourse in general is the idea that communism is something unnatural.” It was also associated with the gender upheaval
and the sexual transgression. Dismantling of Soviet socialist gender order was also popularised on the basis of widespread discontentment of Soviet women against the sheer drudgery and work burden in their lives.

Simultaneously, the socialist state was discredited for pampering women and stepping in the role of the man of the house because of which men took very little responsibility in domestic work and were alienated from family. Both the paternal state and women were responsible for usurping the authoritative headship role of the patriarch of the family from the Soviet man. Both were to be blamed for the ‘abnormal’ gender hierarchy up till then. Soviet gender regime and by extension communist ideology broke, “... proper, “natural” relations between men and women, and it gives rise to infantilism in the man; however, the basic condition of the ‘genuine’ masculinity is private property that may provide men's independence and responsibility” (Riabova and Riabov 2002: 30). The new economic and political order would fulfil the basic conditions lacking in Soviet time and thus restore ‘normalcy’ in gender hierarchy (Verdery 1994: 252). The acceptance of capitalist free market ideology and ‘naturalising’ private property was crucial to the project of delegitimising communism and restoring traditional gender order was equally crucial to the restoration of liberal capitalist patriarchal gender order.

The denunciations of Soviet gender order were seamlessly built onto the denunciation of the past, of communism and Soviet socialism. Goricheva (1980: 30-31) described Soviet men and women as “Sexless homo soveticus” saying that, “...We do have not an emancipated woman, but a feminized man... In a society like ours, a man can’t be independent and responsible for his actions...” Lissyutkina (1993: 284) translated freedom to choose to not work as the real freedom for women although two decades after the transition the conditions have remained such that women have to work much more in an exploitative and insecure environment. Similarly Soviet men were described as totally devalued by the Soviet past. She said, “…this probably sounds harsh, but the exchange value of Russian men on the internal market does not exceed the change rate of the rouble against dollar.” Images of the ‘unfeminine’ Soviet woman delegitimized not just communism but also devalued the notion of work which had been central to Soviet identity. Negative images of heavy physical work done by Soviet women of woman-road worker, truck driver and a
woman (baba) with a jackhammer flooded the mass-media. The shift in concepts of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ were permeated into popular culture and daily discourse of post-Soviet Russian society.

The capitalist model in which man was the breadwinner, protector and patriarch of the family and woman was the mother, housewife and dependent was and continues to draw upon the success with which socialist utopia was debunked in mass consciousness. A number of scholars have pointed to the linkages between market capitalism and disempowered position of women. Connell stated that, “...It is not surprising that the installation of the market capitalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has been accompanied by a reassertion of dominating masculinity and, in some situations, a sharp worsening in the social position of women” (Connell 2000: 51).

The political discourse perceptively cashed on this shift in lives, perceptions and mass culture of the Russian population and immediately adapted itself to an extremely sexist political language and constant allusion to exploitative sexuality. The ‘other’ was feminised and vanquished in the political discourse by an active and authoritative masculine ‘self’ as the political players positioned themselves. Riabova and Riabov (2002) note the cult of “the tough guy”, “the real man”, and ideas of inferiority of woman in contemporary patriarchal discourse. Pressure on men was renewed as those who do not perform their role as a breadwinner and did not correspond to the new standard of masculinity were blamed. Conservative backlash against the Soviet socialist past accurately pinpointed the revival of traditional, presocialist Soviet family as the main condition of reforming Russia. Lisichkin (1999) articulated this opinion when he said that, “...What is a man’s value, a husband’s value, who understands that he can't support his family. If he is a real man, he'll start to feel deficient.” The political culture resurrected the image of a strong, authoritative, masculine state and correspondingly self-sufficient, rational and strong male individual.

Ultra nationalist political leader Zhirinovskiy (1998), the leader of political party “LDPR” (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) stated emphatically, “Woman have to stay at home, to cry, to dam and to cook.” Desirable femininity is that which is at home as a good wife and mother. The actual woman is invisibilised from the
public sphere of production. However, aggressive sexualisation of mass culture and public discourse is embedded with a deep misogyny which is carried into public consciousness objectifying women and their sexuality translating into the formulation that a woman exists to bring pleasure to the man. National and international media, including Hollywood films projected the new image of the Russian woman on the lookout for a husband in the west or as the wife of the "new Russian man" or the hard-currency prostitute. Goscilo (1996: 165) has marked the trend in post-transition Russia by saying that post-Soviet woman's role as a sexual toy is also a result of the process of strengthening of the patriarchal society in Russia.

The othering of internal opposition political parties corresponds to these new gender and sexual ideals. Riabova and Riabov (2002: 32) observe that, "...Antagonists of communism, as "normal" people are claimed to correspond to these new gender and sexual ideals; meanwhile its supporters are represented as "aged, boring and asexual" "commies". The new style of life propagandized through mass-media combines in itself the adherence to democratic values, sympathy to Western democracies, anticommunism and sexuality. In comparison with the "totalitarian East", "the West" was represented as a place of absolute sexual freedom and as an example to imitate."

The political discourse sexualises the political man by equating his success as a leader with virility and aggressive masculinity which exudes the aura of authority and control. He is the patriarch of the political constituency which is his family needing his protection and control. It is displayed in the constant confirmation of the politician's masculinity, a stress on his male reproductive force to assert in his struggle for political power. Simultaneously the rival politician is feminized accompanied by aspersions on his masculinity to discredit him. Multiple masculinities and femininities are interpreted and contested in the struggle for political power (Connell 2000: 10).

Side by side with other qualities of the 'new masculinity', the political leader is attributed passion for "masculine" kind of sports, masculine hobbies, and the positive attitude to the Armed Forces. The manifestation of masculinity in political discourse includes the politician's popularity with women not only because he is an able politician working for the benefit of the people but, particularly in contemporary
context, also because he is ‘a man’ who is strong and can handle all problems as men should. It is also an implicit critique of the communist past which was the era of ‘demasculinized’ men who had to be taken care of by their women.

Riabova and Riabov (2002: 34) remarked that the all important pre-election race is fought along the axis of moral and physical male virtues. A political journalist (ORT TV-Channel) discussing the results of the first round of the presidential elections in 1996 commented on General A. Lebed's success in Ivanovo (which is traditionally considered to be a textile ‘female’ city) by saying, “The Ivanovo weavers preferred the masculine general.” The popularity of pro-presidential “Edinstvo” and its leader S. Shoigy was explained by journalists of Ivanovo radio in the same way, “Ivanovo has voted for the young handsome Shoigy.” Riabova and Riabov (2002) have given two examples which amply illustrate the growing importance of ‘manhood’ in the political career of politicians. In particular, the phenomenon of General A. Lebed whose image corresponded to women’s ideas of an ideal man (protector), physically strong, self-assured, with a strong-willed chin and with a low timbre of his voice (Lebed 2002).

Similarly, representations of the former Russian president; the theme of the female statements in his support on the eve of the presidential votes of 2000 was that he is reliable, responsible, and always carries out his promises. In one of the pre-election estimation of V. Putin Riabova and Riabov noted the comment of a common female voter it was noted that, “It is important for a woman to have a reliable, self-assured man near her on whom she would have a possibility to rely on in hard times. Then let the stones fall from the sky - it would not be terrible. Unfortunately, nowadays it is very difficult to find such men. It seems to me that Putin is a man of this kind, insignificant outwardly, but strong by spirit.” Many surveys in 2002 voted Putin as the new sex-symbol of Russia (3500 of 5000 Russian women gave their votes for him) (Putin 2000). Manly photos of Putin playing with a tiger cub or Lebed saying that, “Somebody told me that I need to raise my rating. Everything is working OK. Mine is up!” correlates political rating with male potency (Lebed' 2002).

Riabova and Riabov give some more instances of political and cultural articulations by Russian politicians or noted social personalities which indicate a realignment of gender identities. The identification of male identity and female
identity along patriarchal gender divisions is represented and consumed by its audience as a restoration of the ‘natural’ gender order which communism had temporarily disturbed. They (2002: 35) quote the actress N. Krachkovskaya and give other instances of sexualisation of political discourse, ““Russia is a country of a feminine gender, and today it is as a bride. It needs a husband...Now Russia needs a strong, strong-willed president who would be a muzhik first of all and would be responsible for his country as a man’. However she thinks that General A. Lebed is a real man, a good husband for Russia...In 1999 P. Borodin, one of the candidates for a post of the capital mayor compared Moscow with a bride and himself with a groom and optimistically invited everybody to the wedding...the plot of the TV program “Kukly” (NTV TV-Channel)...appeared just after Putin’s victory in the presidential elections of 2000. The result of voting was represented as the wedding of a happy groom, V. Putin, and a bride named “Federation”. G. Zaganov, G. Yavlinskiy and other unsuccessful candidates were submitted as the rejected grooms. The “Federation”- Russia is a passive woman who is however exhorting her groom by saying, “Do something!” The groom, who promised to make the “Federation” happy on the eve of the wedding, now feels timid. He is not sure if he can justify the expectations of the bride.”

Sexualisation of political discourse is one of the effective methods of political struggle, as far as political values correlate with specific types of masculinity/femininity as well as that of sexuality. The appeal to changing the gender order can be accompanied by the appeal to changing the dominant ideology (from that of Soviet socialism to neo-liberal capitalist one), and, on the contrary, the dominant ideological values determine type and norms of sexuality. So, political discourse is a powerful recourse of constructing sexuality which, particularly in the context of growing importance of identity politics, is crucial for reorganizing gender identities in the new economic and political context.
Representation of Gender Relations in Mass Media and Popular Culture

Transformation in popular culture was marked not just by prolific expressions of art, debate and multiple opinions. Under the rubric of freedom of expression, non-censored press and reporting also came the explosion of heavily sexualised fully or semi pornographic images of women and aggressively masculinised men. Relations between the sexes were cast and recast into a variety of modes, the most popular of which was voyeuristic freedom to enjoy objectified and heavily sexualised body of the post-transition Russian woman. The trend observed in popular culture has been to privilege white, young, male Russian over women and people of other ethnicities and social groups which are consistent with the reconstituting ideals of patriarchal gender relations.

Ortner observed that (Dirks et. al 1994: 3), “…culture as a concept, is not just shared but is grounded in unequal relations and in differentiating relations to people and groups in different social positions”. The images, anecdotes, artistic expressions and other dimensions of popular culture are permeated with competing ideologies which are not just unified into a monolithic model, rather various models contest with each other for acceptance and hegemony. Ortner (1994: 3) notes this by saying that the, “…a central aspect (of culture) has been a claim of relative coherence and internal consistency- a “system of symbols”, a “structure of relations”. But studies point to culture as multiple discourses, occasionally coming together in large systematic configuration, but more often coexisting within dynamic field of interaction and conflict…culture as emergent from relations of power and domination…as a medium in which power is both constituted and revisited.”

The tensions between conflicting commitment of Soviet state towards work and motherhood were often reflected in debates carried out in pre-transition Soviet Union. It is interesting to note that the commitment of Soviet women, despite the hardships and double burden of work in their lives, towards defending their political, economic and social identity in terms of their contribution towards building socialism contrasted with mildly resentful, muted nostalgia of conservative patriarchal opinion,
expounded by a majority of liberal democratic journalists in the 60s, which harked back towards a golden Petrine past.

A woman journalist Rudenko wrote dozens of essays in the official paper 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' about women who were, “social activists, principled Communists, collective-farm workers, weavers; examples for Soviet girls were provided in the life-stories of heroines - a Doctor of Science and a mother of ten children, who symbolized the limitless opportunities open to Soviet women.” In contrast, the conservative opinion was revealed in one of the most popular TV sketches by a renowned actor Arkady Raikin, a Russian Chaplin, on his TV shows in which he says that, “…the children in this country would be much happier if their fathers would earn a bit more, and their mothers would work a bit less!...(Azhgikhina 1995).”

The alliance between conservative patriarchal opinions during Soviet regime positioned themselves in opposition to the Soviet socialist gender ideal. It is revealing that after the collapse of Soviet Union the alliance between forces that were apparently restoring democracy and the market mediated porn industry also deployed gender to demarcate between the ‘free and democratic’ present and ‘totalitarian and puritanical’ Soviet socialist past.

The displacement of the image of ‘political woman’ or ‘working woman’ with oppositional alternate set of identities packaged into a set of images which was in consonance with the transformations in spheres of production and reproduction. The advent of really free uncensored press opened a floodgate. Ashgikhina (1995), a journalist in the magazine ‘Ogoniok’, analysed the sweeping changes in the representation of women in Russian media. She noted the ways in which market forces mediated the encounter between sexuality and profit of huge porn and other related industries. She says that, “…Censorship did not exist officially, magazines and newspapers were springing up like mushrooms after rain, and in 1992 alone more than 400 new magazines and newspapers were registered, which means more than one a day! The market economy emerged and female images turned out to provide a most profitable commodity in this new situation. As a matter of fact, this became clear earlier, when it was discovered that newspapers covering the first ever beauty contest in the country sold better than the others. After 1991, the image of the fashion model
and beauty queen came to reign supreme in the mass media, successfully replacing the “political” woman... Beauties in bikinis, their interviews and press coverage of beauty contests started to appear not only in “lightweight” publications, but also in “respectable” ones. The apotheosis of this change, I believe, was the publication in the Communist newspaper Pravda, famous for its puritanism, of an article about Julia Kourochkina, the winner of the Miss Universe contest. She was enthusiastically described as a true Russian patriot. The photographs matched the tone of the text. Today, TV programmes and publications aimed at young people provide a good deal of space and time to advice as to how to become a photo-model, rather than how to enter a university. Faces of beautiful women fill the pages of magazines and the TV screen, famous TV anchor-women and announcers emulate the new stereotypes at the expense of their own personalities, and this drastically affects the tone of programmes.”

The fashioning of such set of alternative identities being offered to women was tied together by varying interest groups who were at times conflicting. The patriarchal consensus emerging around restructured gender hierarchy was underwritten by conflicting motives of profit for free market domestic and foreign capital, conservative nationalist and ultra-nationalist political forces, religious revivalism of the Orthodox Church and the Russian state. Therefore, the marginal woman who was portrayed as ‘nymphomaniac, prostitute or criminal’ appeared side by side with an idyllic picture of a housewife and mother.

Ashgikhina (1995) also points that, “…The second most popular image is that of a faithful companion -- good housewife, mother and friend. A “girlfriend of a businessman” is yet another category mentioned in one of the TV programmes. This image appears more often in new, expensive publications intended for “new Russians”, such as “Domovoi” or “Imperial”; it is also promoted in numerous new publications for women, such as “Provornitsa”, “Sudarushka”, “Natalie”, and in TV advertising. Even the traditional “ideological” magazines “Woman-Worker” (Rabotnitsa) and Peasant-Woman (Krestyanka) have started using this stereotype more often in their quest for new readers. The third most frequently used image in the mass media is a “marginal” woman -- the nymphomaniac, prostitute or criminal.”
Ashgikhina (1995) also brings to notice the trend of denigrating ‘political and working’ women of the past and the few remaining in the present. In particular, gutter press explicitly transplants these older identities onto the new ones. For instance, “...a porno collage or drawing including the face of a famous politician...The New View (Novy Vzglyad) magazine, for instance, published an article in June 1994 which was entitled “Bitches – Big and Small”, in which all famous Russian women-leaders of the past and present were derided...”

Suspitsina (1999), in an analysis of an influential nationalist weekly newspaper ‘Zavtra’ in the year 1998 exposed deeply misogynist stereotypes of women that appeared in several issues. She says, “…The newspaper’s attitude towards women is openly misogynistic. The 28 issues of Zavtra contain no articulation or discussion of women’s economic, social, cultural or political issues and the rare references to female politicians and journalists are vicious ad hominem attacks that ridicule the women for being women. But perhaps most visible is the glaring absence of visual images of women in the newspaper. In a half-year period, Zavtra offered only five photographs of women: a facial portrait of a woman politician, a photograph of two beggars, a mother and a daughter, a photo-collage of pop-singer Pugacheva with her skirt up performing on a presidium desk in the Parliament (the caption reads “Pugacheva’s entrance onto the political scene”), portraits of the Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna and her distant descendant, and a portrait of a politician’s wife with her husband. Four of the images are not supported by the personal voice of the women depicted. In the single case in which the woman is allowed to speak for herself, she talks about her husband and is quoted as supporting her husband’s belief that “broads are stupid.” The interview with a woman-politician contains no reference to her personality or background and it effectively erases her gender. In contrast, each issue of the newspaper contains interviews and biographical articles of male politicians, economists and writers accompanied by their portraits and photographs.”

With the sole exclusion of working professional competent women, there are a set of identities which have been stereotyped into a good wife who denigrates women as a gesture of supporting her husband’s belief and obedience to him; vulnerable, dependant and helpless beggar woman and mother-daughter; nostalgic reminiscing of
the golden age in the face of Empress Fyodorovna who at once is royal, pure and mother to the future of the nation. The token politician woman is also not tolerated and is put squarely in place for attempting to fit into a man’s job.

Suspitsina (1999) notes the rapid loss of Soviet ‘working’ woman’s legacy in the glitz of sex, violence and glamour. She points that, “...The fiction section in the newspaper is more relentless to women...Most of the short stories are written in the style of a so-called “village prose” which adopts a perspective of a common rural man. Despite the fact that female characters in the stories are also polarized into good and suffering versus evil and immoral types, all women are typically signified by a common noun with derogatory connotations baba—“broad”. The male characters of the stories are depicted relishing the scenes of violence, torture and humiliation of their girl-friends, mothers and female neighbors. It is remarkable that in a country where most women work outside the home, this newspaper does not contain a single positive example of a professional woman”.

Barker (1999) captures the newfound thrill in sex, glitz and glamour emanating from Russian media even in mainstream and issue based journals like ‘Ekonomika.’ Such journals were also preoccupied with capitalising on the new found freedom of displaying women’s bodies instead of displaying any concern about the distressing effects of unemployment and removal of social security on women. Barker (1999: 34) points, “…in 1991, an economics journal, Ekonomika, displayed a bare-breasted woman on one of its covers for reasons that may or may not have had anything to do with Russia’s economic assets, while ‘Ogonyok’ has on more than one occasion used bare breasts and fleshy buttocks as lead-ins to stories that had nothing to do with the flesh proffered in the photos.”

The analysis of popular mass culture in post-Soviet Russia by Borenstein (1999) has attempted to fill the hazy outlines of the lifestyle which has been set for the Russian citizens. He analysis the society and culture that is emerging out of the debris of its past and whose makers are in a hurry to dismantle and wipe out the remnants of the past political system and ideology. Fraud, scams and greed are stamped on ‘get rich quick’ bandwagon of globalisation led by the market and big capital, policies of globalisation administered by a hard Russian state and outlined by international monetary institutions and right-wing neo-liberal economists globally. This is
culturally packaged into a variety of images that are underwritten by sexual misogyny. The common thread in all the images is consumption. The hand of the market is revealed only implicitly in its insistence on increasing greedy consumption.

Borenstein (1999) analysed the phenomenon of ‘MMM’ which was formed as a cooperative in 1988 under Sergei Mavrodi. Immediately following the collapse of Soviet Union ‘MMM’ was revealed as an investment group which was formed of a network of companies which, true to the workings of most of finance industry, was very complex and mysterious. It operated on the basis of a pyramid scheme which was an investment plan in which earlier investors were paid dividends from the money contributed by later investors. Ultimately it defrauded its clients and consumers by the millions. It fed on the anxiety and insecurity of Russians whose life savings were being wiped overnight. It offered security by campaigning that their shares were like liquid cash, bought and sold at any time and their future value was announced a few days in advance. No rational explanation was given for the profits generated from these dividends which at 3000% were even more lucrative than drug trafficking as promised by ‘MMM’ (Borenstein 1999: 53-54).

The entire dubious financial operation of MMM was hidden behind a well packaged advertisement campaign, first of its kind in Russia, which was presented to the viewers as a soap opera. There was an effective punch line at the end of each episode. This soap opera focussed on achievement of happiness in everyday life, limitless opportunities that were just waiting to be realised and quick realisation of dreams of getting rich. ‘Byit’ (every day life) rapidly expanded from buying boots for the wife to a fur coat and then a dacha culminating in the ‘Dream’ of all dreams, a holiday trip to California, America. Its campaign and public discussion of the principles of pyramid scheme as a cultural phenomenon was significant as it was offering a model of possibilities in a global capitalist free market world and was redefining Soviet socialist values and ethics of work and non-monetary fulfilment of dreams and everyday life. It channelised the socialist longing of employment and security into new avenues of individual initiative and cunning leading to success over and above fellow citizens. The ad campaign drew upon a clever mix of socialist realism with adequate stirrings of folk lore and familiar home settings which were then conflated onto a much larger canvass of radically opposing values and greed.
Lenia Golubkov is a construction worker who’s initially modest plans (to buy boots for wife) rapidly expand into his becoming very rich because of this investment scheme. Borenstein (1999: 56, 61) calls this a ‘postmodern version of Ivanushka-durachok (Ivan the fool) who was a fairy tale hero, who in its current avatar finds the way to success with no effort on his part’. Lenia is surrounded by a support cast, each character type appealing to some segment of Russian society. Gender relations are cast into familiar traditional, harmonious and conflict free patriarchal mould of the family. The new age is promising Russians of limitless opportunities of becoming very rich without having to bear the drudgery of work if they are smart about the capricious ways of the market and if they are cunning enough to exploit others in favour of making rational individual choices. It was a crash course in re-learning the market friendly values to quickly achieve the promised haven by the transition. The number of Russians who bought its arguments and were subsequently cheated out of their remaining savings later realized that this was just another harsh practical lesson in the modus operandi and values taught in the ad campaign.

Mass culture and media mediated by market forces in Russia has actively propagated and offered alternative identities in the larger context of transforming notions of masculinity and femininity. But as we pointed out these identities are not monolithic but contest with each other for hegemony. Restoring the traditional gender identities along traditional gender hierarchies is fundamental to the success of media which was just about learning the ropes of a highly competitive global market. Advertising, soaps, pornographic material gave mass media the cutting edge and the easy vehicle in which to arrive in the new world of sex, entertainment and violence. However, it played an important role in shaping the outlines of possible identities that Russian society was offering its women.

Imagery and the Body- Pornography and Prostitution

Immediately following the collapse of Soviet Union, the most glaringly visible phenomenon to have struck all those who were watching the transition was the flooding of East European markets with nude photos of former socialist women. The internet soon was overflowing with offers of blond blue-eyed teen or very young
Russian girls at very cheap prices. In a study of the “new Russian” pop culture Borenstein used the term “overkill” to describe the sensationally violent and abnormally graphic sexual nature of entertainment and mass culture in post-Soviet Russia. We will look at the feminist debates and the phenomenon of the spread of pornography and prostitution in Russia and the ways in which it has fundamentally altered gender stereotypes there and reorganized gender identities along the most pernicious gender hierarchies.

Radical feminists were the first feminists who approached politics with women’s oppression as its central concern. They asserted that women’s sexual oppression by men and their control over women’s sexuality was the source of women’s oppression. Socially constructed gender and reproductive roles restrict women’s identity and behaviour. This makes it very difficult for women to define their own sexual desires and needs and assert their own social identity. Tong (1992: 109) remarks that, “…aggression and the ‘need’ to dominate form a routine part of what is accepted as [normal] male sexuality.” Sexual violence against is legitimized ideologically saying that men are ‘naturally’ aggressive and dominant in their sexual behaviour whereas women as passive and submissive. This idea is logically extended into all social and public realms such as politics, economy and so on. However, radical feminists made this crucial argument that male aggressive sexual behaviour is not fixed and biological, rather it is socially and culturally constructed and therefore, can be subject to change.

It was radical feminists like McKinnon and Dworkin who theorized that sexual dominance was the actual source of power of men over women. They established that gender and socially constructed male domination and female submissiveness is inherent in the institution of heterosexuality. This is the reason why all stereotypes of women are sexually charged. A woman’s identity is closely bound with her sexuality. Through acts of sexual violence like rape, incest, prostitution and pornography the man takes control and wrests a woman’s sexuality away from her. But these processes are mediated through a woman’s body and it establishes that women’s sexuality is for men’s consumption and the other way round is unacceptable to this power logic.
Pornography and prostitution constitute crucial sites for such sexual domination and have been subjected to rigorous debates in western feminist theory. In the public sphere various positions have been taken on these issues. Cultural conservatives take the plank of safeguarding public morality and civil libertarians argue in favour of safeguarding civil liberties. Feminists have introduced a new dimension to this debate. Radical feminists claimed that prostitution and pornography are some of the most dangerous and powerful mechanisms of male domination which degrades women and legitimizes their subordination.

Liberal feminists have questioned the implicit moralism of radical feminist arguments. They argued taking classic liberal position of individual freedom to say that women should not be fixed into the role of patriarchal victimization. They said that women's participation in sexual practices of prostitution and pornography are like any other economic sexual activities. In fact, they went further to say that such practices challenge the 'correct and normal' paradigms of heterosexuality instead of subordinating women. However, for feminists sex markets have been an arena of abiding concern because they have historically used female service providers for male sexual consumption. Some feminists have argued that when anyone is paid for sexual service then it means that that person is engaging in this contract in the capacity of a free and equal partner who has voluntarily given up their freedom and sexuality. Others have pointed out that these sexual practices are disadvantageous for women because they carry a social stigma because of double standards of morality and negative attitudes to sex which need to be challenged.

Intense debates surrounding the issues of pornography and prostitution and the inability to come up with a satisfactory and just legal provision notwithstanding, the arrival of pornographic material in Russia has unfavourably contributed to the construction of a transformed sexuality and identity of Russian women. Placed in the context of a backlash to Soviet socialism and its 'emasculated' masculinity and 'masculinized' femininity, prostitution and pornography mediated by big stakes market capitalism purports to restore masculinity and femininity along traditional stereotypes of a submissive and passive woman whose body and sexuality were created to be consumed by aggressive, dominant and controlling men. Much of the ongoing debate in Russia amongst feminists and other social actors are very recent.
firstly since the Soviet state claimed an absence of all such practices in socialism and secondly because post-collapse this trend has become dramatically visible in new ways. The debates carried on in Russia are grappling with the complexities that Soviet legacy has introduced to such sexual practices. While it is not accurate to analyse these trends from the perspective of western feminist theory, nevertheless it is significant that a lot of conceptual framing has been and continues to be influenced by the post-Soviet Russian and East European encounter with western knowledge and theories. We will briefly take a look at the major points of debate as they have evolved in western feminist theories in so far as they will be pertinent to our analysis of the Russian condition.

Feminist Debates on Pornography

Pornography as a distinct cultural genre evolved with the arrival of printing press in 19th century Europe (Hunt 1993: 10). Historically, pornographic materials flourished along with the development of modern democratic state and industrial capitalist economy.

Radical feminists pointed towards the important distinction between 'erotica' (from the Greek eros, love or a creative principle) and 'thanatica' (from Greek thanatos, death or destructive principle) in sexually explicit depictions or descriptions. They further pointed out that, "whereas erotic representations show sexual relationships between fully consenting, equal partners who identify emotionally with each other, thanatic representations show sexual relationships in which full consent, real equality, and emotional identification is absent" (Tong 1992: 113). Thanatic materials encourage the view that men should objectify women. This is why there is an association between rape, battery and degradation of women with thanatic material. Free speech advocates argue that the causal association i.e. between pornographic material and actual abuse of women by men has been inadequately explained by feminists. Liberal feminists also argue that there is no meaning in the claim of sexually explicit subordination of women. In response to arguments that men too are demeaned and dehumanized in pornographic material, McKinnon and Dworkin replied that it is women and their bodies and not men who are the focus of
such pornographic imagination. Lourde (1984), an acclaimed black lesbian feminist, insightfully intervened in the entire debate regarding eroticization of pain, dominance and powerlessness and said that what lesbian couples do in their own bedrooms is not their own business only, rather it is everyone’s business. She elaborated her argument by saying that, “It is a phallacy of liberal individualism that any behaviour is purely personal. Whatever we do takes place in a social context and has an effect on other human beings. To degrade someone, even with that person’s expressed consent, is to endorse the degradation of persons. It is to affirm that the abuse of persons is acceptable” (Tong 1992: 122).

In other words we can say that pornography casts the sexual desires of women and men in the mould of victims/abusers thereby inhibiting any natural or free expression of sexual desire. McKinnon (1987: 190, 147) said that, “...sex is forced on real women so that it can be sold at a profit to be forced on other real women; women’s bodies trussed and maimed and raped and made into things to be hurt and obtained and accessed, and this presented as the nature of women; the coercion that is visible and the coercion that has become invisible — this and more bothers feminists about pornography ... pornography causes attitudes and behaviors of violence and discrimination that define the treatment and status of half of the population.” Thus, pornography does not merely reflect male domination but encourages sexism and is a key patriarchal component in maintaining male sexual domination over women. Rejecting liberal, conservative moralist and contractarian arguments, they pointed out that since women possess vastly unequal social power compared with men, they can never participate in pornography consensually.

Cameron and Frazer (2000: 248, 251), on a cautionary note, point towards a weak link in McKinnon and Dworkin’s argument. They ask if establishing a causal link between pornography and actual abuse will be illuminating or harmful in understanding such sexual practices and their impact on women. Such reasoning implicitly assumes a deterministic model of human behaviour according to which men loose control over their mind and blindly respond to pornographic stimuli. Saying that sexual violence is in some ways a product of pornography can relieve men of their responsibility for their actions, blaming expressive materials instead. It renders structural inequalities and cultural norms responsible for sexual violence against
women invisible and instead brings the focus on this issue as if it were some mental disease or debilitation. While being critical towards such sexual practices and developing alternative discourse, feminists must be careful to avoid promoting any problematic models of human behaviour.

In 1986, a group of feminists argued that “...the feminist movement must not be drawn, in the name of protecting women, into the practice of censoring ‘deviant’ sexual representation or expression ... Women had to learn, with the support of other women, to articulate experiences that lay outside the proper sphere of the ‘nice girl,’ to acknowledge our fantasies, and to be proud of our sexual choices ... We must speak out when we are victims, but also acknowledge what excites us, and support women who make their living providing that excitement to men and to ourselves” (Ellis et al. 1986: 6). Snitow (1986) advocated re-centering feminist sexuality discussions on a sexuality which was more centered on female pleasure, instead of focusing on controlling male sexuality. Duggan, Hunter, and Vance (1986: 73) asked “How can feminists be entrusting the patriarchal state with the task of legally distinguishing between permissible and impermissible sexual images?” In a similar vein Cornell criticizes MacKinnon and Dworkin’s model ordinance for its tendency to reinforce an old stereotype of woman in the law i.e. woman as vulnerable and in need of protection. The state and law should not be relied upon to enforce social norms and thus cannot go “…beyond those symbolic forms that have been deeply inscribed in and by the structures of gender” (Cornell 2000 b: 554). Rubin (1993: 38) has argued that “The scapegoating of pornography will create new problems, new forms of legal and social abuse, and new modes of persecution. A responsible and progressive political movement has no business pursuing strategies that will result in witch-hunts.”

Butler has also placed her reservations on radical feminists’ view of pornography and their attempts to draft appropriate legislation for banning pornographic materials or punishing those exploiting women in this industry. She says that ‘curtailing representations will produce new forms of social action rather than protect some undisturbed, preferred version of reality.’ Butler points out that effort to censor homoerotic images have led to their greater production and exposure. She concludes that, “Feminist theory and politics cannot regulate the representation of
women’ without producing that very ‘representation’: and if that is in some sense a dis-cursive inevitability of representational politics, then the task must be to safeguard the open productivity of those categories, whatever the risk” (Butler 2000: 503). According to this view, disturbing representations of “real sex” should be contested by trying to develop alternative and diverse representations of sexuality.

Whatever be the merits of ongoing debates in the West, it is important to contextualize the issue of pornography in concrete conditions of particular countries and the extent and reach of big capital and globalisation. The fact that sex industry yields more profits than drug industry and other very lucrative industries is important because it determines the contours of social action and state policies and role of state in colluding and encouraging such practices. In Russia, it is very revealing how many arguments of feminists have been appropriated by the sex mafias in promoting pornography which is packaged for its consumers in the name of democracy, empowering women, forging alternative discourses of sexuality and so on. As we will look in greater details in the specific case of Russia, we will explore whether the onset of the phenomenon of the huge entry of women in pornography and prostitution is empowering for them, providing them with alternative life strategies or if it is eroding the very basis of their dignified survival by constricting all other options. Before we explore the specific context of Russia, we will look into the crucial linkages between prostitution and pornography which, feminist debate notwithstanding; have historically shared the regulatory function for states, hegemonic religious forces and capital in prescribing sexual choices and behaviors of women and has been fundamental to the patriarchal nexus of profit and control over women’s labour and their bodies.

Feminist Debates on Prostitution

Whereas the rise of the pornography industry coincided with the emergence of mass print culture and communication technologies, prostitution, it is often said, is the “world’s oldest profession.” The historian Lerner (1986: 124-125, 133) elaborates this idea by explaining that “the most widespread and accepted explanation of the origin of prostitution is that it began with temple prostitution in places such as ancient
Mesopotamia. She argues that to understand how prostitution evolved historically, we need to understand “its relationship to the sexual regulation of all women in archaic states and its relationship to the enslavement of females.” Lerner writes, “It is likely that commercial prostitution derived directly from the enslavement of women and the consolidation and formation of classes. Military conquest led, in the third millennium B.C., to the enslavement and sexual abuse of captive women. As slavery became an established institution, slave-owners rented out their female slaves as prostitutes, and some masters set up commercial brothels staffed by slaves”. She suggests that prostitutes and concubines were used by rulers as symbols of wealth and power, and this practice was then emulated by other men of wealth and status. Also, paupers were often forced to sell children, adding to the supply of labour for this purpose. Furthermore, “As the sexual regulation of women of the propertied class became more firmly entrenched, the virginity of respectable daughters became a financial asset for the family. Thus, commercial prostitution came to be seen as a social necessity for meeting the sexual needs of men” (Lerner 1986: 134).

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asset for the family. Thus, commercial prostitution came to be seen as a social necessity for meeting the sexual needs of men” (Lerner 1986: 134). Although female slavery, concubinage, and temple prostitution are less common today, commercial prostitution and the custom of measuring a woman’s social status in terms of her virginity and monogamy carry over to contemporary societies.

Lerner’s analysis connects contemporary prostitution with historical oppressive social practices like treating women as slaves or as property to be exchanged within and out of the institution of marriage. Rubin (1975: 175) has also worked on kinship system and has traced the origins of prostitution to it whereby women were exchanged as gifts to cement the relationship between families.

As we noted in the previous section, radical feminists brought sexual oppression of women in the center of their analysis as the locus of women’s oppression. Shrage (1994: 71) articulates this understanding when she says, “...female prostitution oppresses women, not because some women who participate in it ‘suffer in the eyes of society’ but because its organized practice testifies to and perpetuates socially hegemonic beliefs which oppress all women in many domains of their lives.” Similarly, Weisberg (1996: 22) describes this process in the following way, “…men are socialized to have sexual desires and to feel entitled to have those desires met, whereas women are socialized to meet those desires and to internalize accepted definitions of femininity and sexual objectification.” As male sexual domination over women continues, it makes it more difficult for women to find and express their own sexual desire and behaviour.

Similar to the debate on pornography, liberal contractarian theoreticians like Ericsson object to feminist criticism of commercial sex saying that it is nothing more than an outdated and old fashioned approach to women’s articulation of their sexuality and their participation in casual sex relationships. Further, he says that sexual needs are basic needs and once that is recognized opposition to commercial sex will have no meaning. Selling sexual services for money is like selling your labour in the market in any other economic activity. In an elaboration of all basic liberal individualist positions, Ericsson (1980) is however, forced to admit that sexual practices like prostitution cannot be conducted in contemporary forms and that they need many reforms. Such reformed sexual practices are called by him as ‘sound
prostitution. The reforms suggested by him include legal rights for prostitutes, their right to rent a house in a suitable place, protection from violence by pimps and clients, no participation of child and teen’s sexual services and freedom from any social stigma. He emphasized on the most important condition that this realm should be available to both sexes and they should be free from any social pressure and be able to choose to participate in such practices freely at their will. Pateman (2006) responded to Ericsson’s critique and noted how contractarians extend liberal ideas of the free market, of individual freedom and equality of opportunity to sexual life.

The central feminist argument advanced by Pateman (1988: 211) was “that prostitution remains morally undesirable, no matter what reforms are made, because it is one of the most graphic examples of men’s domination of women”. She pointed that liberal contractarians exclude the analysis of patriarchy and neglect “the law of male sex right” in our society from their philosophical scrutiny. They exclude the fact that men have the power over women’s bodies and the ‘law of male sex right’ is based on the uncontrollable sexual urge of men. This becomes clear when in contemporary world we see that masculinity is understood as the male capacity to dominate women. Pateman bases her argument on Marx’s analysis of capital’s domination over wage labour and she points that the problem with liberal conceptualization of ‘free contractual relations between sexes’ is that women’s subjugation and male domination over them is both, hidden and denied.

Apart from contractarians, feminists like Shrage (1989: 357) critiqued the implicit moralism in feminist objection to pornography. She objected to the distinction being made in feminist criticism of prostitution between ‘good and acceptable sex’ and ‘bad and deviant sex.’ She also says that there is no objection to market’s involvement and there is no essential link between our sexual practices and the market. The real problem is the way sex markets are organized today which keeps women in a position of subordination and attaches a stigma to these sexual practices. Nussbaum (1999: 288-97) also agreed on a cautionary note that it is stigmatisation of prostitution that must be rejected and not the sexual practice per se. She pointed that the problems associated with prostitution are also associated with other social practices such as marriage whereby the work done by women is not the problem rather; it is the work conditions and unfair treatment by others.
Introducing a new dimension to the western theoretical debates on such sexual practices, feminists from the ‘third world’ made a significant intervention. Kempadoo (2001: 45) said the history of racism, colonialism, militarism and globalisation structure the choices of third world and coloured women in the first world. Rather than conceptualising prostitution as degradation and objectification of women, it should be understood as the labour performed by the marginalized sections of a society (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998: 4-5). Looking at prostitution as a form of labour can help feminists avoid the moralist position and unrealistic abolitionist approaches on sexuality. Instead, they can address the problems of prostitution in terms of working conditions and worker empowerment, the legal status of the work, and the occupational alternatives available to people oppressed by race, class, gender, and nationality. Taking the debate further, Anderson (2006: 386) said that prostitution should not be equated with other forms of labour. Normalization of prostitution can compromise the right to sexual autonomy.

Perkins and Bennett (1985) had also critiqued radical feminist analysis of prostitution saying that female prostitution is such a social situation in which unlike any other sexual interaction between men and women, here women have greater power. This is because prostitutes are free to set the limits to their work, they can acquire economic power and their work experience gives them better knowledge of true male sexuality. She claims that prostitutes are very different from the traditional feminist stereotype of a helpless victim.

It still remains to be seen how useful would such perspectives be in a context of a country like post-Soviet-socialist Russia where the number of women in sex industry and those infected with sexually transmitted diseases has alarmingly risen; where teenage school girls overwhelmingly are either drawn into or trapped into this trade, where women are increasingly being marginalized from organized employment towards destitution and where markets in collusion with the Russian state are explicitly offering such sexual practices as attractive models of glamorous and empowered self at the cost of banishing them out of all other avenues of employment. The claim of contractarians that the prostitute can and does enter into a contract with her client freely for wages as an individual is also put to test in the Russian condition.
where women seem to be loosing whatever bargaining power they did have before the advent of liberal democracy.

Pateman (1988: 208) in her spirited response to the contractarian argument had aptly emphasized the political relationship between sex markets and maintenance of male domination over women. The fact that it is men who can buy women’s sexual services in sex markets amply reveals its link with the power men have over women in private and public realm. Masculinity and femininity are sexual identities which are constructed during sexual activities, particularly during heterosexual intercourse. The sense of 'self' is created and maintained during sexual intercourse by men in two ways. First as men and second as women’s civil masters. The public nature of sex industry is particularly problematic because when women’s bodies are kept as commodities in the market to be sold, the original contract of men’s civil power cannot be forgotten. Commodification and sale of women’s bodies also publicly establishes male sex right law and is a public acknowledgement of men as women’s sexual masters.

Socialist feminists, Philipson amongst them, have critiqued radical and liberal feminist analysis of prostitution. She pointed that their critiques essentialised human behaviour and establish an inseparable link between human identity and sexuality. She added that both these streams do not take into account real ways of sexual behaviour, ideology and the changes, particularly in last 40 years, in values. Rather than taking into account different forms of sexual behaviour and standards, the whole debate seems to have been reduced into the frame of sexual repression versus sexual freedom. Socialist feminism warns against deploying sexuality as the source of truth and liberation and residing the core of human identity in sexuality. It should not be forgotten that modern capitalism has harnessed sexuality and sexual liberation for dehumanizing purposes. It is crucial to locate such sexual practices in the concrete context of its history and economy.

Our analysis will keep in mind the fact that contemporary sexual practices are characterized both by dominant/submissive power relations and by potential for liberation. Dworkin (1979) pointed out that profits from current U.S. pornography industry exceeded those of conventional film and record industries combined. U.S. holds pride of place in the sex industry. Astute in identifying and exploiting new
markets, the porn industry has expanded from a low yield, covert business to a ‘highly visible multi-billion dollar industry’ branching out into multiple categories of products and services. In order to avoid the oversimplifications of the radical and libertarian positions on sexuality, we need a paradigm that can be historicized because conceiving of contemporary public patriarchy as a developing system will allow us to explore the connection between and contradictions in our contemporary sexual identities, sexual ideologies, and sex industry related institutions.

Prostitution and Pornography Debates in Post-Soviet Russia

The striking expansion and visibility of sex-trafficking issues that exploded in the post-collapse Russian social arena has attracted attention world wide and has led to an increasing presence of both foreign-backed and Russian grassroots organizations, each with its own agenda and approach to lobbying concerning sex work and trafficking issues.

The Angel Coalition consists of 43 grassroots organizations from Russia and other former Soviet republics most vocally represent the ‘abolitionist’ opinion in Russia. The Angel Coalition in Moscow and its network of nine regional partners describe themselves as “the hub of rescue, repatriation and rehabilitation activities for Russian trafficking victims.” The organization is officially registered as a Russian organization, but much of the money and leadership is provided through western funds and specialists. In addition to anti-trafficking efforts, the Coalition’s work also promotes efforts to make prostitution illegal in the destination countries and fights all attempts to legalize prostitution in Russia. Although they have done a lot of excellent work the moralism of their position and understanding of prostitution as an essentialised relationship between women who are passive victims and aggressive male domination makes their stand prey to similar traps that radical feminists have been facing. Engel (2005), the Director of the Angel Coalition and herself an American, described the behaviour of a prostitute as suffering from “Stockholm Syndrome.” In an interview she stated, “…People are so emotionally and physically dependent on their pimps, it is very hard to separate them, even though the pimp is going to take them right to death. They are just hypnotically attached. It is very
with them. They insist on broadening the terms of the debate to include the needs of forced victims and those who are voluntarily in this trade by drafting comprehensive national and international legislation concerning prostitution and sex-trafficking to better protect the rights of all.

Philipson (1984: 118) most accurately has summed up the feminist dilemma on this issue. She says that "...in reacting to the moralism and absolutism of many radical feminists and abolitionists, a number of feminists seem to embrace an uncritical acceptance of pornography and prostitution. The critique of radical feminist position should be made without suggesting that pornographic sex or such sexual practices can and do embody ultimate sexual freedom...viewing the enjoyment of porn or the 'freedom to exercise one's choice' in prostitution, as "a form of resistance to a culture that would allow no sexual pleasure at all" seems anachronistic at best in the 1980s." The rejection of Soviet socialist past has extended to describing the current sexual practices as a 'revenge on a state' that had prohibited the free expression of sexuality. With pornography, prostitution and related spheres of sex trade becoming a billions of dollars strong industry in the world, with pornographic images used throughout advertising, and with the consumption of explicitly pornographic materials encouraged through their movement out of 'dirty, underground, illegal, secretive' bookstores into supermarket newsstands, cable television, and the home video market, it hardly seems accurate or believable to assert that the enjoyment of pornography is a form of cultural resistance. Such enjoyment might more accurately be seen as a form of cultural conformism.

Philipson (1984: 117) elaborated that "...in a society characterized by male domination it is impossible to want just freedom, on the one hand, or just protection, on the other. As long as women are routinely raped and battered, and such rape and battering are 'naturalized' and glorified in pornography, prostitution and mainstream media, as long as women are systematically denied equal access to jobs and earn half of what men do, and as long as women have primary responsibility for child rearing, which often causes them to live in poverty, protection is a necessary feminist demand. This does not mean we should not simultaneously work for independence and liberation from the forces that cause us to seek protection. It also does not mean that the questions of sexual fulfilment, pleasure, and excitement should be absent from
feminist discourse. It does mean, however, that we should abandon simple-minded, exclusionary categories in the discussion of sexuality and begin the difficult task of understanding the connections between behaviour and fantasy, sexual expression and object relations, and sexual activity and ideology. This is the challenge that awaits Russian feminists who seem to be grappling with either-or side of this debate as it is shaping up in their country. It cannot be denied that a huge number of young girls are attracted to various sectors of the market that routinely package and market commodified bodies of women to earn profits. The glamour, opportunities of travel and most importantly, hard cash offered by this industry is very inviting for young girls who go along with rather open sexual exploitation known commonly as ‘sexual favours’ or just ‘part of the job’.” The overall sexualisation of culture and thriving sex industry is emerging as one of the most ‘real’ options for women and young girls to ride into the new capitalist Russia. It would be an urgent challenge for Russian women to explore if this sexuality can really be the basis of their post-collapse identity that can effectively mobilize them for a better future.

The commission set by Gorbachev on December 5, 1990 charged with the task of drawing elaborate measures to safeguard the country’s morality against increasing influx of pornographic material and reports of prostitutes seen on Moscow’s streets proved to be rather irrelevant as the events that immediately followed the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 were to show. The popularity of ‘Golodnaya Utka’ (The Hungry Duck) reached its height by mid 1990s even while it was popularly known as ‘Moscow’s first rape camp’ (Avgerinos 2006: 17). It was the meeting point of prostitutes and clients, both foreign and Russian. Prostitution and pornography arrived in post-Soviet Russia as the part and package of freedom and democracy that dismantling of socialist state control in favour of neo-liberal capitalist market order had promised Russia. Russian clones like ‘Andrei’ (2: 3) of American magazines like ‘Penthouse’ and ‘Playboy’ (‘Andrei’) that appeared made precisely such a link explicit in their debutant editorial in which they declared that, “We’re certain that Andrei and its battle helped strengthen democratic tendencies in the area of social awareness and rights (Goscilo 1996).

Immediately following the collapse of Soviet Union as pornographic images inundated the previously relatively unexposed Russian society, the lack of adequate
markets and anti-Soviet freedom of expression used the means of constant reproduction of similar pornographic poses and shots in different places to popularize the idea. Goscilo (1996: 146) pointed to the phenomenon of the mixing of all kinds of news items with porn. She says that there was a, "...dizzying mix of standard porn shots, report on sexual diseases, illustrations of possible positions for sexual play, personal ads, letters from readers sharing their sexual experience, pedagogical, ‘scandals’ gleaned from Western press...comic book nudes with Venus de Milo on Playboy’s centre page with the sole common denominator being their gendered nudity.” This helped in permeating such images in the popular discourse and normalizing pornographic consumption. It even suggested that such consumption was a part of democratic opposition to the socialist past.

Goscilo (1996: 148) called the uncovered and highlighted parts of naked female body in pornographic pinups the classic “dismemberment syndrome” which ensures women’s alienation. These are women without any identity and usually faceless. When the faces are shown the woman’s eyes are either closed in ecstasy or they solicit the viewer directly. ‘Andrei’ carried an entire range of such images of women. The image of non-mutilated healthy and robust woman suggests a capacity for insatiability and epic exertions. “The Amazonian “sex machines” fantasized as ‘women robots’ ‘unchained savages’ i.e. ‘zhyenschennai robotei’ and ‘nakazaanniye dikaartei’. If the woman is frail and delicate she is coded for sadomasochistic pain and is shown with accentuated, smudged dark eye makeup that connotes bruised sexuality” (Goscilo 1996:89).

Berger in his pioneering work described the crucial difference between nude and naked. He (Berger 1972: 54) said that, “To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. To be on display...The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.” Further in pornographic pictures, women often wearing only a pout or a smile are wearing nudity as their uniform. “Male sexuality is constructed with aggrandizing devices which generate an ego-stroking, cock-inflating image of an implied (omni) potent man that facilitates the male consumer’s projection of himself into the picture”. What the publisher of ‘Penthouse’, Bob Guccione said
was precisely along these lines. He said, “women are “natural” exhibitionists; men 
“natural voyeurs” (Goscilo 1996).

In what has been termed as ‘sexualisation of Russian culture’, pornography 
has flooded the Russian market and media. Free market arrived with its logic of 
maximizing profits and accordingly rapid expansion of the highly lucrative porn 
industry disseminated hard and soft porn in almost all forms of popular culture and 
media. The ‘working’ or ‘political’ Soviet woman was successfully replaced with 
beauty queens and fashion models that proved to be a very successful market strategy. 
It popularized the idea of acceptability of pornography and female sexuality that could 
be sold as a commodity. It held an attraction for Russian women who were looking 
for ways to survive and for those who were looking for western lifestyles and 
glamour. It was also perceived as an arena of articulating and experimenting with till 
now repressed ideas of female sexuality. Women wrote letters and diaries opening the 
flowgates of repressed sexual desires and fantasies. However, this freedom was very 
rapidly circumscribed by an increasingly misogynist and aggressively male public 
sp ace which forged a more dominating discourse of women’s objectification as the 
true essence of her sexuality. It seemed that beauty contests and sexual freedom in the 
form of pornography and prostitution were glamorous, well paying; they often 
included foreign modeling contracts and most significantly, they were actively 
promoted in the mass media and by its sponsors as a part of cultural resistance to the 
unfeminine and drab Soviet past. It is remarkable how quickly Russian markets 
popularized the idea that female sexuality was essentially meant to be consumed by 
the desiring male.

Ashwin and Lytkina (2004) analysed the marginalization of Soviet men from 
the domain of family in the context of economic reforms and state policies and the 
resultant depression and feelings of worthlessness this bred in them. However, in a 
striking and revealing departure, post-collapse democracy presented pornography as a 
much needed correction to the ‘emasculated masculinity’ of Soviet men and their 
feelings of depression, worthlessness and submissiveness. As the editorial of ‘Andrei’ 
(Goscilo 1996) proudly proclaimed itself as, “The first Russian journal for men...is 
essential today, for it is precisely men who more than anything need liberation from 
stressful aggressiveness and lack of satisfaction. It vowed to combat the psychology
of "a slavish sexuality," which had been rigid, crude, hypocritical and blind. Creating an illusion the dynamic pornographic visuals claim to present both men and women but actually they are merely reinforcing patriarchal gender conventions which organize ideological import of still and pinup aesthetics. Goscilo (1996: 151) reveals that "...the power hierarchy is evident in instances of Canadian and U.S. laws which prohibits as obscene (in Canadian law) and discourages as unsettling (in US law) any shot depicting an erect penis...among publications sold in Russia during 1990-1992 the ratio of exposed (flaccid) male organs to bared pudenda was approximately 1:100. This polar binary still prevails in Russia unlike the West where it is somewhat disturbed by gay porn industry."

The former communist newspaper 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' conducted an internet poll rating Putin as "Sexiest Man in Russia" in the year 2000. This poll drew upon a radio show in which Putin talked about Chechnya, resisting NATO expansion and the usefulness of his KGB background. All this combined to draw a picture of a tough, in control and sexy man ready to lead the country. This was reported in 'Boston Globe' in an article titled "To a Russian, with Lust" (Weiss 2001). These processes of collusion between power, masculinity and pleasure and the institutionalization of resultant identities illustrate what Foucault has called "implantation of perversions" (Foucault 1980: 36-49). Goscilo (1996: 141) commented on how "...sexuality is subject to shifting social constructions with its configurations and dynamics reinforced through interest groups operating behind the scenes. Diehard skeptics 'continue to lyricise sex as the "spontaneous surge" of "natural impulses"- a perception carefully cultivated by the very ads that betray it.'" She brought advertising in the focus of her analysis which was largely responsible for the mainstreaming of pornographic values. Other mediums of mass popular culture like films have also been quick to capitalize and profit from the post-collapse wave of glamorising and romanticizing of sexual practices.

Goscilo (1996) insightfully pointed out that Kunin’s film in the perestroika period ‘Interdevochka’(‘Intergirl’), the biggest Russian domestic hit of 1988, gave the message that, “... prostitution is a fine choice of career for women throughout the world. It is that the old Soviet Union gave them no choice; everybody is forced, metaphorically, into prostitution.” Likewise Borenstein (2006: 273) argues that the
film “represents a turning point for the social construction of the Russian prostitute.” Tanya, in the film ‘Intergirl,’ is depicted in a very sympathetic light, and her choice of profession is shown to be an understandable and legitimate way of responding to the inadequacies of the Soviet system. However, Borenstein (2006: 274) also draws attention to the crucial fact that what impressed many viewers was the luxurious life that Tanya led, not her tragic end. Thus, many young Soviet women tried to follow in Tanya’s “spike-heeled footsteps,” with the hope of getting some comforts and luxuries that their past had denied them. Goscilo (1996) pointed that the text of the film was pornographic only according to its “…etymological definition (Tanya is a prostitute and pontifications on dangers of AIDS). In fact, this film deployed the Soviet view of commodification of sexuality under capitalism which was published in ‘Molodaya Gvardia’ which was the establishment paper with a circulation of nearly 100,000.”

The notable sexologist, Kon, endorsed it in an editorial in ‘Literaturnaya Gazeta’. Although there are no explicit depictions of sexual acts and vulgar words in the film, it was replete with alluring imported western brands of consumerist items which are shown as materialist western weapons which corrupt innocent Russia by tempting and then degrading her. While the film employed simplistic homilies like ‘death over dishonor’; ‘happiness cannot be found in wealth and possessions’; ‘home is best,’ the paradox lay in the fact that they achieved quite the opposite effect. Pornographic explosion overtaking Russia only proved how ineffective these homilies were and that this film, controversially, ended up giving its viewers the tempting image of western glamour and easy wealth awaiting those who would choose to go into the ‘spike-heeled’ profession of ‘hard-currency prostitution’.

Attwood (1993: 65) states that “the image of the enthusiastic clean-cut Young Communist marching purposefully along the golden road to communism was replaced by that of the unkempt, amoral cynic, as much into sex and drugs and rock and roll as his—or her—Western counterpart was said to be.” In the current political and cultural climate all those attitudes that rejected the past denoted democracy and the freedom of choosing this image. Although the harsh economic reality was that most pressing cause for skilled, educated and qualified women being drawn into pornography and prostitution continued to be their own and their families’ survival.
For instance, the contestants in beauty-and fashion shows were usually from modest families and had higher education, but were employed in low-paid jobs. The years following the collapse brought on intense insecurity and difficulties faced by women for their survival that also had a consequence of women loosing their self-esteem. In such a situation Avgerinos (2006: 24) asserted that perhaps, "...feeling beautiful improved a woman’s sense of well being and her work performance." However, many contestants soon realized that contests held hidden agendas and there was blatant sexual harassment in abysmal working conditions requiring them to provide sexual favors to everyone from photographers, agents to even pageant organizers. Bridger, Kay, and Pinnick (1996: 170) note, “Reports on several of these competitions imply that the women involved are expected at the very least to sleep with the organizers, and, if they really hope to win, probably with everyone from the judges to the lighting technicians as well.”

The sexualisation of popular culture and its permeation with pornographic imagery was effective in circulating ideas claiming sexuality as the ethical and legitimate means to success and wealth. Numerous channels of mass media propagated the idea that it was normal for men to demand such favours and for women to give them. Ashgizhina (1995) reported that, “…Man, Mister X, Andrei (a version of Pent-house), Mahaon. More respectable new magazines, such as Tovarishch, Superman, offer milder versions of porn, using basically Russian models. Women’s porn and semi-porn magazines began to appear as well -- Miss X, She; pornographic photographs are regularly published in the newspaper Women’ Affairs…There are publications like “Red Hat”, for instance, which advertise brothels and saloons of “erotic massage”, magazines for international introductions like Amour, similar programmes on TV (e.g. Aerotics in Moscow). Western Pornographic publications also appear in the Russian market; it is possible to buy Penthouse and Playboy on ordinary bookstalls, as well as their German editions, and recently a Russian version of Playboy came out…Russian society, which has not yet invented a mechanism for fighting pornography and has no experience of coping with freedom of the press, is literally drowning in this flood of low-quality literature.” Pornographication of popular culture and the sudden steep rise in sex trafficking from Russia and Eastern Europe consolidated and ‘normalized’ the changing domestic image of Russian women abroad.
The freedom of expression and much improved circulation of papers and magazines and electronic channels were most easily achieved by featuring naked or scantily clad women in the public sphere. The pressure of such materials was such that even former communist papers like ‘Pravda’ featured the transforming sexualized imagery of women in positive light. Such stereotypes were instrumental in changing the gender balance of power in Russia in which the former Soviet women were recast into role models who affirmed that female sexuality was the sole cornerstone of her social identity and her sexuality was for male consumption and it could be commoditized and sold in the market for a substantial profit.

To be able to formulate a response which is both feminist and politically correct and can address the immediate and pressing issues of women working in sex trade in the current post-collapse situation is urgent yet challenging. Nearly two decades after the transition, the institutions and laws which enable a society to function democratically are still not in place in Russia. Economic uncertainty in an economy that has been tuned to outside international fluctuations has made survival more difficult, particularly for vulnerable sections like women. It is a situation where sex trade is bringing huge profits to the mafias running it and some money to the women who are in it in whatever condition that may be. Shrinking job opportunities and marginalization of women from legal avenues of earning money is increasingly leading more and more women to even opt for such sexual services related jobs. The rising trend of violence and threat to life is a reality for a majority of women in today’s Russia. Although petro-dollars have stabilized the economy and have improved the standard of living for many, women continue to face newer forms of misogyny in Russian culture and society.

Prostitution and Sex Trade

“We have thankfully watched the fall of the Berlin Wall, but unfortunately the wall fell on women’s heads.” Comment by participant in State Duma meeting on the status of women in the Russian Federation (Piper, 2000).

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Writing an extensive report for the Division of Advancement of Women of United Nations, Avgerinos (2006) reported that Russian women ranked prostitution eighth in a list of what they felt to be the top twenty most common employment positions in the USSR. In the same year, a separate survey indicated that 60 per cent of high school girls in Moscow admitted that they would exchange sex for hard currency. She analysed that the collapse of state socialism in the late 1980s and the subsequent opening of Soviet borders to Western cultural, economic and political influences has coincided and perhaps been one of the complex factors at the root of massive changes in the government’s social and cultural policies.

Sex trade forms a crucial source of large profits for organized crime which has flourished in Russia since the collapse of Soviet Union. Terminology related to this trade such as ‘Tochka’ (‘point’) are now very much a part of popular discourse. ‘Tochka’ is an outdoor market for prostitutes in Moscow and other large Russian cities totally managed and controlled by organized criminal gangs. Their nexus with local administration and the police not only gives these gangs a free hand and is effective in intimidating and harassing women travelling alone after dark by randomly checking their documents. That is why prostitutes often carry a hundred roubles to bribe the police. Women who are lured or forced or are tempted to get into this trade run a high risk of violence, rape and even death as the tragic incidence demonstrated in which 30 decomposing bodies were discovered in the Russian town of Nizhny Tagil (Wikipedia).

The first mention of this gruesome incidence was in the paper ‘Komsomolskaya Pravda’ following which an extensive report was published in ‘The Penthouse’ by Levine and Zaitchik (2008). Henceforth this same report was published in ‘The Exiled’ in February 2008. Investigations revealed that they were bodies of women who had been kidnapped by a criminal gang who raped and murdered them for refusing to work as prostitutes. The presence of organized crime has often been documented by experts in all areas of Russian society and economy. Jenson (1998) reported that in 1996, the Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that 40 percent of private businesses, 60 percent of state-owned enterprises, and more than half of the country’s banks were controlled by organized crime. In the decade following the
transition Russian organized crime groups had in many ways replaced the state in providing, employment, protection and security.

The criminalization of the state and its institution and the lack of political will to change this situation have resulted in the state of Russia being reluctant to acknowledge that there is a trade in women. State agencies often view the women as voluntary workers or criminals a notion amply projected by the method of operation by mafia and criminal gangs involved heavily in this trade. Even by the end of one decade post the collapse of Soviet Union all efforts to pass laws aimed at stopping sexual exploitation and trafficking of women have been defeated in the Duma (Jenson 1998).

Under these conditions, trafficking in women by organized crime groups has flourished. Russian organized crime groups operate prostitution and trafficking rings throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North America (Global Organized Crime Project, 2000: 42). “In June 1996, the Russian Interior Ministry reported that 110 Russian organized crime gangs operated abroad in 44 different countries, either independently or in cooperation with foreign partners. Most of them had permanent bases abroad, and about 30 of them included prostitution and trafficking operations” (Dunn, 2000: 63-87). By 2000, the number of large Russian organized crime groups had increased to 200 groups operating in 58 countries. In recent years the countries of increased activity were: United States, Canada, Israel, Brazil, Colombia, Austria, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and Sri Lanka (Global Organized Crime Project, 2000: 7). The transnational scope of organized crime groups originating in Russia explains the distribution of trafficked Russian women in dozens of countries around the world.

The post-Soviet Russian Federation has fast become a major sending country for women trafficked into sex industries around the world. Global Survival Network reported in 1997 that Russian women are known to be in sex industries in over 50 different countries (Hughes 2002). Europe Global Monitoring Report, Russia filed in 2006 reported that Russia was becoming the new destination for child sex tourism since minors formed almost 20-25% of Moscow’s sex workers. The report claims that in Moscow alone about 20-30 thousand children have been drawn into child prostitution (Child Prostitution 2008). Bertone (2000: 6) has given the alarming statistics of sex trafficking originating from Russia which is emerging “...as a
significant destination and transit country for sex trafficking from regional and neighbouring countries into Russia, and on to the Persian Gulf, Europe, Netherland, Finland, Asia and North America. Annually thousands of Russian women end up as prostitutes in China, Japan or South Korea. In Tel Aviv the number of brothels has skyrocketed in the last decade. In Dubai and UAE, Russian women make up most of the prostitutes in the country. The ILO has estimated that 20% of the five million illegal immigrants in Russia are victims of forced labour, which is a form of trafficking.”

Russian officials refuse to take responsibility to stop the trafficking of women. Their attitude, as reported by Moscow Helsinki Group, is reflected in comments such as the one made by Mr. Goryainov, Ministry of Internal Affairs, on trafficking of women. He said, “The Interior Ministry is not particularly concerned about that problem as there are no criminal contents in it. All offences against the women who departed are committed in the territories of the countries to which they go. That means it is those countries’ problem. In general, the discussion about trafficking women has come to us from the West. The noise on that occasion is maintained by audacious feminist organizations that promise help, but do not help the victims in any way. They receive grants and for the money disseminate information that does not correspond to the reality” (Alekseeva 1999).

Blaming feminists for all ills has been a long standing practice of all patriarchal states which do not address complex gender issues facing them. The inadequacies and ineffectiveness of laws in Russia and rising violence against all women in post-Soviet Russia are problems not created by feminist organizations. Infact, the political economy and patriarchal nexus in which the state also has a stake needs to be seriously addressed by Russia. Walsh (2003) writing a report in ‘The Guardian’ quoted Elena Mizulina, an MP in Russia who was involved in drafting the law to attempt to close some glaring gaps in Russian penal code saying that, “...the profits of the slave trade are bigger than those from drugs”. He also quoted Elena Turukanova, from the Institute of Social and Economic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences said, “...At present we can only estimate roughly that about 160,000 women are trafficked from Russia alone each year. This makes the amount officially recognized of 7,500 only 5% of the total...The majority - over 50% - end up
in the sex industry. This can be open, like in the Netherlands, or it can be the underground world of strip shows, prostitution, and escorts.” She added that, “I am sceptical about the new law as it is impossible to stop this phenomenon which is deeply rooted in the economic system”. In a report filed on CNN.com/europe (2008) Kadyrova of the Angel Coalition aid agency, which rehabilitates trafficked women and children, said that, “It's because of the economic boom they are brought here...The fast pace of development in Moscow has fueled demand for a range of cheap workers, including prostitutes... human traffickers prey on the dreams of impoverished women seeking employment and opportunities for the future. Most women are young and single with little education; some are orphans and college students; others are married with children”. The report also said that Alexander Krasnov from Russia's Interior Ministry Police admitted that the government had been unable to come up with an adequate response to the alarming violation of human rights in sex trade. He put the reason of rising prostitution to open borders and badly controlled migration flows from neighbouring countries. To these he added that, “Secondly, we still don't have a basic law that defines victims' rights. At the moment, it's mostly aid agencies that deal with it.” He neither mentioned the government and law enforcement agencies' collusion with organized crime gangs in maintaining these conditions since lucrative profits are becoming a source of revenue of the huge ‘gray economy' that still occupies a place in Russia’s GDP encouraging the government to look the other way.

Bertone (2000) has pointed out that in areas centred in Moscow and Kiev, the networks trafficking women run east to Japan and Thailand, where it is estimated that thousands of young Slavic women now work against their will as prostitutes, and west to the Adriatic coast and beyond. The heavy presence of Russian crime gangs ensure their organizing and smooth functioning which includes providing security, logistical support, liaison with brothel owners in many countries, and false documents. Their modus operandi is based on luring and then trapping women in search of a better life who willingly respond to local advertisements for good jobs in foreign countries at much better wages. More often than not, such jobs never really exist in foreign countries leaving the women helpless and without any financial means to return or sustain themselves in foreign countries such as Italy, Germany, Turkey, and Israel.
This makes it easier to deny the phenomenon of trafficking by any government or law enforcement agencies.

Israel is a common destination for a large number of women from Ukraine. Prostitution is not illegal and there is a great demand for sexual services. In a write up in New York Times, Specter (1998) reported that in “…Milan, Italy, the police broke up a ring that was holding auctions in which women abducted from the countries of the former Soviet Union were put on blocks, partially naked, and sold at an average price of just under $1,000. Michael Platzer, head of operations for the UN’s Centre for Crime Prevention, Vienna, Austria, stated, “The Mafia is not stupid. There is less law enforcement since the Soviet Union fell apart and more freedom of movement. The earnings are incredible. The overhead is low; you do not have to buy cars or guns. Drugs you sell once and they are gone. Women can earn money for a long time. Laws help the gangsters.” Prostitution is semi-legal in many places and that makes enforcement tricky. In most cases punishment is very light.”

As we mentioned previously there is a lot of debate in feminist theory regarding the causal link between such sexually explicit and degrading pornographic materials and the actual harm done to women. Greater attention needs to be paid to the role of the terms of sex trade in forming gender stereotypes which not only can result in risks and threat of violence for women who are in this trade but on the ways in which these stereotypes perform normative functions as definitions of all women’s sexuality and objectification as sexual commodities designed for male consumption. Zabelina (1996: 171) points to the concrete context of Russian sex trade and reveals some linkages between the negative discourse about women and their increasing presence in sex trade. She says, “Women are blamed for aggravating many social and demographic ‘problems’ - divorce, the movement towards smaller families, the fall in the birth rate, the rise in juvenile crime, prostitution, the spread of AIDS, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases and even for the increase in unemployment and the depreciation in the health of the nation.”

Patriarchal stereotypes centrally project women as masochists who desire, or at least do not mind, violence and humiliation, and secretly would like to be raped and therefore, excuse or justify discrimination and violence against all women. Issues of violence suffered by women in sex trade taken as ‘natural’ and that ‘these women
deserve it or want it' without addressing the terms of this trade which are inevitably unfavourable for women. Such stereotypes enable the 'nauralisation' of violence as 'this is what all women want'. According to Zabelina (1996: 173), “The dominant stereotype of women as second-class citizens is encouraged by the fact that they are seen primarily as sexual objects whose role is simply to please men, both at home and at work.” The “sexual terror” experienced by women in the post-Soviet labour market is part of the emerging overall social climate which has become increasingly sexualized and hostile to women. Women are usually expected to tolerate sexual harassment as part of their jobs, and often provide sexual services to their bosses. Job advertisements often explicitly list one of the requirements of the job as “no hang-ups,” meaning the woman should be sexually liberal in the workplace (Hughes 2002).

Scholar Shlapentokh (2003: 121, 140) argued that the “new Russians,” who obtained their wealth through connections, speculation and corruption rather than through labour, created the “spirit and conditions for which prostitution could thrive.” They happily and eagerly associated themselves with the West and their (mis)perception of Western liberal sexuality. They had no hesitation in flaunting the newly acquires westernized image make over. Consequently, prostitution was fully incorporated into both the public and private life of the post-Soviet elites, who were often found in expensive night clubs surrounded by call girls. Shlapentokh contends that “…the accumulation of money was not driven by the need to accumulate investments but for the sake of pleasure, and sexuality was one of the major manifestations of this pleasure… Buying love was now the most desirable way to attract the opposite sex.”

We have already mentioned the role played by mass media and popular culture in reinforcing and consolidating the image makeover of former Soviet women. Kunin’s film ‘Interdevochka’, fashion and beauty contests, mail-order brides, escort services not only sensationalize and normalize these trades but are also effective in actually easing women into sex trade. They reveal the explicit links between market forces, perceptions of glamour, and (mis) perceptions about the sexually liberated western life styles. They are also effective mediums through which it becomes easier to change gender stereotypes of the previous Soviet regime and replacing them with the idea that achieving such lifestyles is risk free and based on individual
entrepreneurship. Borenstein’s (1999) analysis of ‘MMM’ was very revealing in exposing the unified interests of profits of the market, organized crime running sex trade and popular culture.

Popular culture has been perceptive and quick to explore the dark underbelly of prostitution and sex-trafficking. The self-explanatory title of The New York Times (Specter 1998) article, “Traffickers New Cargo: Naïve Slavic Women,” implies and reinforces the patriarchal stereotype of women as helpless victims or too naïve who need to be protected. Similarly, images of girl victims of sex-trafficking racket such as in Moodysson’s film ‘Lilya 4-Ever,’ with graphic details reinforce the same images. Malarek’s (2003) book blurs the distinction between sensationalizing sexual practices such as pornography and prostitution along with the prostitutes and objective reporting. Avgerinos (2006: 31) points that, “...Such reports, which vividly describe the girls’ sexual bondage, further exacerbate the problems of sex-trafficking by appealing to the sexual fantasies of potential customers, for whom the allure of prostitution is often one of sexual domination. For example, the recent Lifetime special, “Human Trafficking,” follows the stories of several different women who were trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation across the globe. In one scene, the sex-traffickers make an attractive young Ukrainian girl strip down to her sexy lingerie. Although this scene is meant to show the brutal treatment that the girls endure, the fact that the girl is shown as powerless victim in lingerie can be said to have a strong sexual appeal. A more extreme example of this was seen in Moldova: newspaper reports describing the trafficking of Moldovan women abroad included the fully-nude photographs of the women, which had been used by their pimps as advertisements. This is more than just sexualizing the women’s plights: it is pornography.” The fact that an incidence of violent and tragic kidnapping and murdering 30 women coerced into prostitution found its way in ‘The Penthouse’ in an extensive report by Levine and Zaitchik (2008) exposes the trend of sensationalising sexual violence against women in the Russian and international media.

The debate in Russia is coming to a full circle. It had a Soviet socialist legacy of egalitarian rights, for all, to fundamental securities and needs in life, a collective identity not fragmented on the basis of differing categories of race, class, gender and so on. The neo-liberal open market economy was brought in after the dismantling of
socialist command economy with its principles of individual liberty and maximizing profits encouraging competition amongst various social groups for increasingly scarce resources from a state committed to fully withdrawing from social sectors.

The attempt to reconcile ‘feminist desires’ of economic, social and political empowerment with ‘feminine desires’ which are in contemporary conditions of globalized capitalism heavily mediated by market interests has resulted in reshaping of the female image in varied and often contradictory ways. The attempted reconciliation suggests that the two were essentially exclusive in the past and that the act of their merging can only be complete in present open market liberalized conditions. While employing the memory of feminism in the shape of its slogans, central demands and struggles, the new political and economic order in Russia fundamentally proposes a politics of sexual identity as the cornerstone of women’s liberation. With a market aestheticisation of the political what is happening is in Rapp’s words, ‘the reduction of feminist social goals to individual “lifestyles”’ (Dubrofsky, 2002: 278).

‘Sexualization of culture’ meant the arrival of a culture that was openly celebrating femininity solely in a sexual form divested of any political, working component. Sexuality became an affirmation of women’s identity, liberation, truth and empowerment. Kim (2001: 324) has argued that post-feminist sexual liberation has been an “...act of masquerade based on self-objectification. Self-objectification does not necessarily achieve subjectivity, and it can be a false freedom.”

This was explained by John Berger when he said, “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male; the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object and most particularly and object of vision” (Berger 1972: 47). How viable would such a construction of sexuality be as the basis of gender identity politics in contemporary Russia remains to be seen? It stands a great risk of being appropriated by the very forces that have been hegemonic in its construction.

In such a context, it might be pertinent be look at what Benhabib (1995: 34) asks of the women’s movement in the world today. She says, “…Is it obvious that the
group-identity based system of social and economic redistributionism is preferable to a model of universalist social justice which indexes certain income levels rather than racial, gender, ethnic identity as the relevant criteria for receiving certain kinds of social benefits? Would not a guaranteed annual income for the poor have saved many a welfare mother from the humiliating examination by state officials of her sexual practices and work habits”? In critiquing both radical feminist and post-modernist positions of feminism on the merits of gender identity politics she says, “...Identity/difference politics whether in the essentialist version defended by MacKinnon or in the constructivist version defended by Butler, has not opened up the space for this kind of new questioning: the first kind of paradigm in feminist theory fails us by dogmatically freezing women’s identity in the role of the victim; the second paradigm fails us by undermining the normative principles around which identity-transcending group solidarities would have to be formed. The time has come to move beyond identity politics...that is, by learning its lessons, rejecting its excesses, and moving to a new synthesis of collective solidarities with plurally constituted identities... This is the vision of a social feminism which accepts that the furthering of one’s capacity for autonomous agency is only possible within the confines of a solidaristic community which sustains one’s identity through mutual recognition”. However, each country has its own history of marginalisations, repressions and homogenization which lead to legitimate (in concrete historical and eco-political context) demands organized around group identities. It would still be too early to say if women should totally give up their struggles based on gender identity claims. But, it would be pertinent, in the context of a country like Russia, that there is a unique potential for utilising their historic legacy of collective solidarities to achieve their goals while sustaining their identity and capacity for autonomous agency.

Russian society is increasingly being polarised along the traditional gender hierarchy and women are proving to be the biggest losers of this ‘gender correction’ which is enthusiastically being applied by the market which is retrenching women from lucrative jobs. The sex industry is reaping unimaginable profits and the Russian state is currently most concerned with the ‘demographic bomb’ waiting to explode. The dominant forces of Orthodox church which had never reconciled to the ‘unnatural deviation’ of ‘masculine Soviet women’ and mass media is coming of age by using more subtle arguments to frame women in ‘either/or’ category in their choice to be
'feminine/feminist'. The current discourse consolidating the agenda and demands of women around the pole of gender identity stands the risk of eroding the vastly solidarity identity that women had as equal citizens in the previous gender regime. In the current situation of renewed challenges it would be crucial for the as yet developing women’s movement to ensure that women can maintain their distinct gender identity without being frozen or essentialised into it and denied the benefits of being full citizens of their country.

In the next chapter we will look at the ways in which women continue to be deployed as a symbolic resource in nationalist iconography and are subject to negative stereotyping as revealed in the experiences of Russian women migrating abroad. The link between gender identity in Russia and abroad reinforces and perpetuates the reformed gender regime in the new political and economic order as we will explore in the following chapter.