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Writing the Modern Body:

Discursive Constructions of the New Indian Woman

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Geography Department

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Abstract

This thesis explores the discursive construction of embodied modern womanhood in contemporary India. Two key sources of public textual discourse provide the primary data for this study: contemporary narratives written by Indian women, and the newsmagazine *India Today* 2000-2006. The representations of the modern or 'new' Indian woman in these discourses are a fruitful way into the questions of how modernity may be understood as both explicitly gendered and non-Western, in contrast to the gender-blind and Western-centric conceptualisations of the modern that have been and remain dominant in social theory.

An attempt to understand the public discursive construction of the new Indian woman demands close attention to the body, since the female body as represented in such sources is both a major site and important agent of the production of modernity. The substantive chapters of this thesis address in turn three sets of processes through which the female body and femininity are produced as modern within a specifically Indian imaginary: transgression, consumption and violation. These themes are explored through textual analysis that is conducted from within a feminist and postcolonial theoretical framework.

This thesis does not aim to provide a definitive portrait or analysis of the modern Indian woman. Rather, it seeks to explore through close analyses of specific, prominent sources of public discourse, some of the most powerful ways in which notions of modern Indian womanhood are made meaningful. Through close attention to the boundaries that are drawn around the female body, the nation, tradition and modernity in these sources, the thesis suggests some specific ways in which modernity may be conceptualised beyond the theoretical paradigms that are dominant in contemporary social theory.

Declaration

None of the material included in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at Durham University or at any other university.

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Contents

	Page
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Re-thinking Modernity	11
The Roots of Modernity	14
Multiple Modernities	19
Conceptualising Modern Womanhood	28
Masculine Modernities/ Feminine Modernities	31
The New Indian Woman	33
Modernity and Tradition	36
Conclusion	43
Chapter Three: Making the Body Modern	45
Western and Eastern Bodies	47
The Corporeal Turn	51
Feminism and the Body	55
The Body as a Becoming	61
Discourse and the Body	75
Conclusion	79
Chapter Four: Methodology	81
Troubling Methodological Boundaries	82
An Ethic of Reading	93
Situating the Production of Knowledge	95
Chapter Five: Transgressive Bodies	98
Transgressing Spatial Boundaries	101
Aggressive Women	112
Sexual Transgressions	122
Conclusion	132
Chapter Six: Consuming Bodies	134
Eating India	137
Fatness and Femininity	140
Feeding Others	146
Fasting, Feasting	149
Fashion and Feminine Individualisation	152

Page

India in Fashion..... 160

Conclusion..... 162

Chapter Seven: Violated Bodies..... 164

Violation and Representation..... 166

Violation and Modernity..... 168

Monstrous Men, Normal Urges..... 174

Hapless Women, Risky Bodies..... 181

Writing Women In: Counter-discourses of Violation..... 194

Conclusion..... 200

Chapter Eight: Conclusion..... 202

Bibliography..... 208

Appendix One: List of Interviews..... 224

Appendix Two: List of Novels Cited..... 226

List of Figures

Page

5.1 Khajuraho Sculptures..... **100**

5.2 The Chosen..... **105**

5.3 Power Goddess cover..... **106**

5.4 Power Goddess illustration..... **108**

5.5 Femme Fatales..... **120**

5.6 Ladies Coupé..... **126**

5.7 The Sex Report..... **131**

5.8 Sex and the Single Woman..... **131**

6.1 Serving Crazy with Curry..... **139**

6.2 Getting There..... **141**

6.3 Monsoon Diary..... **146**

6.4 Fasting, Feasting..... **150**

6.5 India in Fashion cover..... **161**

6.6 What's Hot and Cool cover..... **161**

6.7 Consumer/ Consumed..... **161**

7.1 Patriotism Rules cover..... **170**

7.2 Rape cover..... **175**

7.3 The Rape Nightmare cover..... **175**

7.4 Man in Shadows..... **176**

7.5 Attacking Hands..... **176**

7.6 Listening Now..... **181**

7.7 Cracking India..... **181**

7.8 Home..... **181**

7.9 The Dark Holds no Terrors..... **194**

7.10 The Binding Vine..... **194**

List of Tables

5.1 Tradition/ Modernity binaries..... **99**

7.1 'Attacking Rape'..... **193**

representative of sound *Indian* values, and continue to be so regarded by both men and women, as Jyoti Puri has shown (1999). Cultural expectations of the 'correct' behaviour of Indian daughters, brides, wives and mothers are reinforced through religious stories and ceremonies, domestic duties, beauty rituals and clothing styles. While this embodiment of national cultural identity in an explicitly female figure is of course nothing new, it is markedly intense in India, exemplified by the worship of 'Bharat Mata' or 'Mother India' as an incarnation of the Devi, the timeless, formless, omnipresent being who gives life to the universe. The new Indian woman is both a reaction against and a perpetuation of such investment of nationhood in womanhood. Both the history of the woman as a repository of national cultural identity and the deeply heterogeneous social context of contemporary India complicate the question of how the new Indian woman is imagined or constructed and how she thus comes to constitute a meaningful idea or image in the public imaginary.

It is against this backdrop that I ask my primary research questions: How is the new Indian woman imagined in contemporary India? More precisely, how does new or modern womanhood become meaningful in this context? These questions are located within the broader debates of how womanhood and femininity more generally come to carry social meaning, but their juxtaposition or combination with the entanglements of modernity raises new and productive problems. The question of how modern Indian womanhood comes to be meaningful speaks directly to the question of what modernity itself might be, and approaches the latter from an angle that is substantially different from those most often taken in contemporary social theory. Modernity thus constitutes the first conceptual pillar of this thesis, and the questions of modernity that I address here are located in an overlap between two debates that have lately become central to the question of what it means to be modern.

Asking how modern Indian womanhood is publicly imagined demands a recognition of the ways in which modernity is produced and defined according to the factors of class, gender and culture. This thesis consistently challenges the implicit assumptions in much social theory that modernity is a definitively Western and masculine enterprise. The first major debate around which this research revolves, therefore, addresses the question of how to reconcile the definitively modern projects of Western imperialism with the contemporary modernity of postcolonial nations such as India.

With its origins in the Enlightenment and the related processes of colonial domination, the standards of Western modernity were in a very real sense defined against colonised peoples, with their cultures and ways of life deemed to be non-modern. The

standards of modernity that hold sway today, in India as universally, continue to be defined by this Western trajectory of development, foregrounding individualisation, economic growth, increased mobility, and advances in science and technology as definitively modern ideals. Given its history of domination, however, the relationship between Western and Indian modernity is a troublesome one, begging the question of whether postcolonial nations such as India can be defined as modern only within this Western framework, despite having emerged from social, cultural and political histories that are in many ways radically different to those of America, Britain, or Western Europe and are often in tension with them. Lila Abu-Lughod encapsulates this problem in her question: 'How are we to think about those discourses [of modernity] that borrowed from Europe, were supported by Europeans, or were shaped in response to colonial definitions of the "backwardness" of the East?' (1998: 6).

The realities of Indian modernity, and modern womanhood, are inevitably coloured by the legacy of colonialism and the enduring relationships and conflicts that it has engendered between nations and cultures. The politics of everyday life in urban India are bound up in both an acceptance and a rejection of Western norms and ideals, in both an active embracing of what is perceived as Indian tradition and a renunciation of the same, and in a myriad of ongoing attempts to define modern India and its values, all of which are strongly and powerfully gendered. As thus simultaneously modern and the Other of dominant modernity, contemporary India may offer insights into how the almost universal characteristics of modernity can vary substantially in their everyday manifestation and may therefore be imagined differently by those seeking to conceptualise the meaning of being modern in the twenty-first century.

Theories of multiple or alternative modernities, propounded by such theorists as Dilip Gaonkar (2001) and Charles Taylor (2001), offer one framework for such a re-imagining. They reject a paradigm of modernity as a necessarily convergent set of processes or the singular end-point of those processes. Rather, as S.N. Eisenstadt puts it, 'The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs... One of the most important implications of the term "multiple modernities" is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only "authentic" modernities' (2000: 2).

While it is impossible, and unproductive, to conceptualise a modernity that is entirely outside of a Western framework, it is my argument that attending to the specificities of

different trajectories of modernity can open up our understanding of it. To this end I explore in this thesis the ways in which Indian modernity is manifested though specific classed and gendered discourses, asking how their particularities may illuminate what have come to be the almost universal characteristics of modernity. The contradictions as well as the continuities between the two categories of modernity are strikingly illustrated in discursive imaginings of the new Indian woman. This figure both consolidates and disrupts the categories, revealing contemporary India to be both distinct from and reliant upon Western definitions and ideals in the production of its own modern identity. Unpacking these specificities is a step towards understanding how we might begin to create a different language with which to articulate the meaning of being modern, one that is able to deal with the dramatic changes in a nation such as India without limiting them to the pattern of modernity constructed by the West and thereby cemented as definitive.

This thesis therefore attempts to explore some of the characteristics of a specifically feminine, middle-class Indian modernity, drawing on my own experiences of living in urban India and speaking to middle-class, 'modern' Indians, as well as more deeply on prominent sources of Indian public discourse and the representations of modern womanhood therein. The first discursive source forming the primary research material for this thesis is a body of contemporary narratives by Indian women. The number of texts being published by Indian writers has exploded in recent years, and women are in the vanguard of what might be called an emerging literary sub-culture or sub-genre. Typically exploring the nature of middle- to upper-middle-class Indian womanhood in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a time of dramatic change in the country, contemporary narratives by Indian women are playing an undeniably important role in the construction of the new Indian woman and her presentation before both an Indian and a global audience.

The second source for this thesis is the newsmagazine *India Today*. Like English-language narratives by Indian women, newsmagazines constitute a relatively recent phenomenon in India, and *India Today* is both the most widely read and arguably the most influential of these magazines. Given, in addition, its strong focus on the changing roles of women in contemporary society, again focusing particularly on urban middle-class women, the magazine is a key area in which the Indian public imaginary is discursively made manifest.

A third discursive construction of the new Indian woman is evident, though not explicitly analysed or discussed, in this thesis. Rajneesh Kapoor's cartoon strip, *This is Our Life*,

appears as a kind of masthead at the start of each chapter. Through a small cast of characters, Kapoor comments on everyday life in urban India, dealing with many of the issues that are central to this thesis, including women, consumption, media, politics, and more. The strip runs in a number of newspapers in countries that include India, Dubai and the UK, is reviewed in a number of weblogs, and also appears on Kapoor's own website each day.[5] Kapoor's work has also been published in book form, and is generally agreed to be an example of India's finest cartooning. These short, graphic texts are intriguing as particular forms of public discourse in their own right, and although they do not directly inform my research, I include them in the thesis as illuminating and enlivening discursive productions of 'modernity' in addition to the more formal texts that constitute the primary sources of data for this research. As such, they provide an insight into an alternative discourse on modern India that adds to the discussions in the thesis through their positioning as epigraphs to each chapter.

Like the goddesses, beauty queens, dowry deaths and female foeticide victims that I mentioned earlier, the new Indian woman in these sources represents a distinctively Indian phenomenon and it is in this discursively produced figure that some of the multiple realities of Indian modernity are crystallised. Some of the major characteristics of that modernity that I identify in this thesis – such as sexual openness, increased consumption, and the apparent freedom enjoyed by modern women – are clearly resonant with the kinds of modernity defined by American and other Western cultural media as early as the late nineteenth century. Again, therefore, it should be noted that it is impossible to discuss these and other aspects of Indian modernity without referring also to the realities of Western modernity, even as we attempt to re-cast our understanding of the relationship between the two.

The second major debate into which this thesis enters, follows on from the first one and focuses on the specific aspect of gender within such an understanding of modernity as multiple and culturally specific. While not diminishing the importance of a culturally sensitive conceptualisation of modernity, theorists such as Rita Felski (1996) and Ann Ardis and Leslie Lewis (2003) argue that the predominant phallocentrism of modernity theory has erased the significance of women's experiences and agency in the production of what we understand as the modern. As part of the larger recuperative project of feminist writings, such scholars engage in textual and ethnographic research into women's experiences and productions of modernity. This is not, as Julian Yates cautions, an attempt to assemble 'a parallel or alternative gendered text of modernity' but rather the telling 'of an entirely different kind of story' (2003: 272).

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[5] www.rajneeshkapoor.com

This 'entirely different' story is at the heart of this project, which seeks to draw together a cultural understanding of modernity with an appreciation of its gendered nature. In this process the two debates outlined above will be shown to connect and entwine with one another so as to demonstrate the necessity of including each in the articulation of the other. As I have already outlined, the particular lens through which these issues are examined is the public imagining of modern Indian womanhood. More specifically, I suggest that many of the questions surrounding that imagining converge upon the *body* of the middle-class woman, which thus serves as a pivotal point for the cultural construction of the new Indian woman.

The female body is consistently represented in numerous cultural media and in everyday discourses such as conversation as a key locus of the modern Indian nation, as well as (often simultaneously) the medium through which ideas of womanhood are made meaningful. Many of the most immediately apparent characteristics of modern womanhood are emphatically 'bodied'. Women's appearance, sexuality, consumption practices and behaviour or even simply their presence in public or masculinised spaces are popularly ascribed to and thought definitive of their modernity, and I deal with all of these deeply bodied attributes in forthcoming chapters, asking what kind of modern womanhood it is that they produce. The body thus constitutes the second conceptual pillar of this thesis, and is also taken as the tangible starting point for my exploration of the connections in my empirical data between questions of the nation, modernity, and womanhood in contemporary India. In chapter three I sketch a conceptualisation of the body which will underpin the textual analyses that constitute the major work of this thesis.

There are, then, at least three reasons why reading the publicly constructed body of the new Indian woman is a valuable process in an attempt to understand what modernity might mean in the twenty-first century. Firstly, such an explicitly classed, cultural and gendered reading allows a new mapping of modernity's spaces, revealing how some of the practices of individuals and groups that are more usually excluded from both scholarly and popular accounts of what it means to be modern, can indeed be recognised as contributing to the production of that modernity. For example, by positioning womanhood as a lens through which to read modernity, scales and practices of social life usually associated with the feminine, such as the domestic realm and familial activities, may be brought into an understanding of how the modern is produced through the everyday. Similarly, a culturally sensitive reading of specifically Indian modernity may offer insights into some of the everyday negotiations between

dominant (Western or 'first-world') and alternative ('third-world') modernities that transform the realities of both, by challenging the superiority of the former and validating the latter as indeed modern.

Secondly, reading modernity in this way offers not only the possibility of illuminating and redressing certain omissions in mainstream social theory, but also enables an empirical journey to the discursive boundaries of both the modern nation and modernity itself more generally, such that the exclusions perpetrated by their everyday production may be made apparent. Reading the absences as well as the presences of modernity renders visible both its limitations and those placed beyond its boundaries. This process of recognising those who are thus marginalised is fundamental to both postcolonial and feminist politics, which together underpin the theoretical frame of this thesis. However, such a reading does not merely acknowledge these absences but also highlights some of the ways in which modernity in fact depends for its definition and enactment upon such exclusion. In so doing it interrogates the basic and definitive association between modernity and the freedom and agency of the individual, and seeks to actively recognise and unpack some of the factors – gender, race, class – according to which modernity is defined in everyday practice.

Thirdly, reading modernity in terms of the body – which Adrienne Rich has famously called 'the geography closest in' (1986: 212) – allows for a concentrated focus on the individual subject who is at the heart of what has come to be called the modern. Where the micropolitics of the embodied human subject and everyday life may be at risk of sliding out of view in discourses of modern technologies, economies and the effects of globalisation, close attention to the body refuses any implication that modernity may be anonymous and compels a recognition of the human agency that engenders and sustains these large-scale effects. In so doing, a focus on the body, especially when taken together with the attention to the classed, cultural and gendered factors that I have described, insists also upon a recognition of the differences between individuals and groups as well as the similarities that situate them together under the banner of modernity. The heterogeneity of modernity is thus foregrounded even as we recognise the commonalities that enable us to discuss it as a category.

Informed by the conceptual framework outlined here and elaborated more fully in the next two chapters, the primary aims of this thesis may be expressed thus: to map certain key public discourses that perform the female body as modern in contemporary India and in so doing to articulate the relationship between modernity and embodied Indian womanhood. The overarching aim here is thus to develop a conceptualisation of

modernity that is not simply inclusive of gendered and non-Western perspectives but recognises such difference as fundamental to understanding what it means to be modern in the twenty-first century. Implicit in these aims is the desire to address (and redress) the phallocentrism and ethnocentrism of dominant conceptualisations of modernity, and to demonstrate the importance of discourse to the process of making the body, and indeed all materiality, meaningful. This thesis proceeds according to a further, methodological aim, which is to destabilise the disciplinary boundaries that divide the humanities and social sciences from each other. Through the use of textual material that includes imaginative writing, I highlight the many connections between disciplines such as literary and media studies, cultural studies, and human geography, and seek to stimulate increased conversation across their borders. This integrated approach, I suggest, may offer fresh ways of seeing issues that are occluded or seemingly exhausted within single disciplines.

In order to fulfil these aims I focus on two key sources of public discourse – women's narratives and *India Today* – that play a major role in constructing the new Indian woman. From a theoretically informed perspective that is sensitive to difference, especially that of gender, I examine these sources and what they produce as the defining features of an embodied, modern, Indian womanhood. Within an explicitly feminist framework, therefore, I explore the figure of the new Indian woman that is produced by these sources, seeking to articulate the complexities, contradictions and absences in the discourses that produce 'her'.

Including this introduction, the thesis comprises eight chapters. I begin in chapters two and three by addressing in turn the two conceptual pillars that I have introduced here: modernity and the body. Each of these chapters traces the major developments in the debates around these concepts and elaborates upon my own engagement with and contribution to these existing bodies of theory. Chapter four identifies the methods undertaken in this research and explains their roles and their contributions not just to this piece of work but also to the larger project of developing a culture of true interdisciplinarity in the social sciences. Chapters five, six and seven are all concerned to address the central question of how womanhood is imagined as modern in contemporary India. Each draws upon empirical discursive data to identify and unpack, through close analysis, one of three major themes in public constructions of the embodied new Indian woman.

The first two of these chapters seek to understand two major sets of processes by which womanhood is discursively constructed as modern: transgression and

consumption. Through various types of transgression, including spatial, behavioural and especially sexual, the Indian woman comes to be defined as modern. I ask in chapter five how such transgression may be read from a feminist perspective and what the public emphasis on such transgression as fundamental to women's modernity says about the meanings of modernity for both women and men in India. In chapter six I explore the quintessentially modern practice of consumption through particular narratives and suggest that the profoundly gendered nature of consumption discourses highlights the gendered politics of modernity more generally. I suggest in addition that such discourses may have more sinister implications, constituting a significant violation of the female body.

In chapter seven I continue with and expand upon this theme by addressing some of the ways in which Indian modernity both produces and excludes the violated female body. In this chapter I approach one of the boundaries of modern Indian womanhood and seek to identify some of those excluded from its sphere. I attempt here to articulate and carry out an ethical reading practice by remaining attentive to the absences of the texts in question, and to the question of whether public discursive space may be allowed for the violated female body to be modern or if the modernity and agency of some indeed depends upon the non-modernity or passivity of others. Finally, chapter eight concludes the thesis by drawing together the strands of thought spun in preceding chapters and suggesting what the implications of this research might be for future work on the question of what it means to be modern.

Chapter Two

Re-thinking Modernity

> Modern India is home alike to the tribal with his anachronistic lifestyle and to the sophisticated urban jetsetter. It is a land where temple elephants exist amicably with the microchip. Its ancient monuments are the backdrop for the world's largest democracy where atomic energy is generated and industrial development has brought the country within the world's top ten nations. Today, fishermen along the country's coastline fashion simple fishing boats in a centuries old tradition while, a few miles away, motor vehicles glide off conveyor belts in state-of-the-art factories.
>
> (Tour India: http://www.tourindia.com. Accessed 26/01/2006)

The question of what it means to be modern carries a great deal of weight in contemporary India where, as Martin Fuchs puts it, 'the problem of modernity has always been more complex – contradictory, conflictual and distressing – than [in] the West' (cit. in Smith 2003: 21). As a set of experiences, histories, projects, identities, becomings – modernity is not one single 'thing', coherent in its aims and effects. In India, and particularly middle-class urban India whose landscapes, pastimes, ambitions, fashions, and sense of identity have all been transformed in recent decades, modernity is in some ways a genuinely new phenomenon. At the same time however, it is rooted in the past, founded upon the colonial relationship in an entanglement that continues to shape the materialities of the Indian present.

The reality of that present, of contemporary 'modern' India, is itself also an entanglement of different realities. While the country's mobile, communicating, consuming middle-classes have grown, so have the inequalities in India. P. Sainath points out that while the media in the 1990s covered the story of how 'thousands of Indians flocked to clinics to address the problems of excess weight, millions were hungrier than before'; that while there was 'a deluge of cover stories on the many new automobiles gracing India's roads', the rate of growth in manufacture and sale of bicycles, a more reliable indicator of rural well-being than the automobile, had slowed; and that while world-class Indian education institutions and rising executive salaries

made the news, the 'over seventy million Indian children who do not go to school' and the falling real wages of agricultural labourers, went largely unreported (Sainath 1996: 1-2).

An explicitly gendered exploration of modern India reveals yet more complications, since inequalities along the lines of gender are among the country's most visible characteristics. Statistically, female Indians are placed at a disadvantage from the moment of conception: the outcome of the widespread desire for boy- rather than girl-babies has been India's high rate of female foeticide and infanticide and its consequently warped gender ratios (the number of females per 1000 males is 933 nationally, according to the (most recent) 2001 census). In addition, issues of dowry and dowry death, sati, and the problems associated with widowhood are prominent in both Indian and Western media. These gender inequalities are often mapped onto dichotomous ideas of modernity and tradition, placing the female body at the centre of questions of what it means to be a modern Indian.

A useful example of this centrality of the body to the imagining of modern India is the common positioning of the exposed, semi-clad or naked female body as a powerful symbol of modernity, while a female body hidden under shapeless folds of fabric is often read as traditional or old-fashioned. (Such symbolism is of course finely nuanced: an old woman in a rural setting, wearing her sari in a traditional style without a blouse, thus providing little concealment for her breasts, is clearly not a symbol of modernity.) While a young, attractive female body is the epitome of progressive, liberated Indian modernity, it is also the image of idealised Indian tradition when adorned with a sari and fresh flowers, often with a child at its side. Tradition and modernity are therefore constantly shifting concepts whose articulation is deeply ideological. Through numerous everyday practices, images and discourses, the female body has become a symbol, a site, and an agent of both these concepts together, and attempts to conceptualise Indian womanhood must therefore necessarily refuse their framing within a relationship of opposition.

Both old and new, both progressive and regressive, Indian modernity and modern Indian womanhood are politically troublesome concepts. My aim in this chapter is to begin to build a conceptualisation of Indian modernity that allows a deep examination of the ways in which Indian women are constructed as being modern in contemporary Indian society. Such a project immediately runs up against two major challenges that have already been hinted at above. The first challenge is the ethnocentrism of modernity. The question of how to conceptualise a modernity that is not 'always

already' Western is a difficult one given the rootedness of the concept in Western European history and contemporary American cultural dominance. The West, in a very real sense, constitutes both the origin and the definitive example of what it means to be modern. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, one cannot think modernity without concepts such as 'citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on', concepts which 'found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century' (2000: 4). The reality of this 'global heritage' (ibid.) begs the question of whether the East or global South, as the 'Other' in relation to which the modern West is often constructed, is therefore by definition non-modern.

The second challenge to this project is the masculinisation of modernity, as the very notion of modernity is rooted also in masculinist thinking that privileges reason, objectivity and detachment over emotion, intuition and embodied experience. This is not to say that femininity is inherently or necessarily emotional, intuitive and more embodied than masculinity, but rather to argue that masculinist theories of modernity largely ignore these and other attributes that may offer much to the conceptualisation of modern society. A gendered, explicitly feminine or woman-centred, approach offers a way into these aspects of modernity that may be able to refresh contemporary theoretical debate around the concept. With this aim in mind, a small number of feminist theorists have begun to ask what a feminine modernity might look like. Rita Felski, at the forefront of these debates, has posed the question 'How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women?' (1995:10). This focus, as Felski adds, 'might well throw some significant new light on... the aesthetics and the politics of modernity' (ibid.).

Additionally, modernity privileges the new rather than the past or the 'traditional', but as I have already suggested, the expression of Indian modernity through representations of embodied womanhood cannot be divorced from notions of tradition. I aim therefore in this chapter also to unsettle the dichotomies of modernity/ tradition (which are themselves tied into those of West and East) that underpin dominant notions of what it is to be modern. As these challenges imply, I follow Abu-Lughod in a suspicion 'about the way modernity is so easily equated with the progress, emancipation, and empowerment of women' (Abu-Lughod 1998: vii) while tradition is cast as oppressive and constraining. Although some of the most fundamental principles of modernity are individual freedom, autonomy, and choice, this is not to say that the processes and

structures of modernity necessarily feed into notions or practices of a liberated womanhood. Nor is it to say that the links between social structure and agency that some theorists, such as Anthony Giddens (in Giddens and Pierson 1998), identify as being in opposition to those of modernity, are not a fundamental aspect of the ways in which modern womanhood is in fact constructed.

The driving question behind this chapter, then, is this: How can we conceptualise modernity in such a way as to productively acknowledge its multi-dimensional gendered and cultural nature? In this chapter I try to steer what Abu-Lughod calls 'a measured course between glossing over and over-emphasising the role of the West' (ibid: vii), acknowledging a debt to Western notions of modernity but also interrogating and challenging certain problematic assumptions and constructions therein. Through a focus on modernity not as a set of autonomous structures and/ or processes, but rather as ways of being in the world, I suggest that the principles of Enlightenment modernity should be critically evaluated with a culture- and gender-sensitive eye. In the final section I argue for the importance of acknowledging the relationship between tradition and modernity so that the latter is not mistakenly conflated with that which simply appears to be new and different, but rather is recognised as comprising processes of transformation and evolution. In my discussion of each of these points, I engage with various Western theories of modernity but also and especially with feminist and postcolonial work, which has begun to destabilise Western masculinist paradigms of modernity.

The Roots of Modernity

If theorists of modernity agree on any one point, it is that the origins of modernity cannot be definitively pinned down. As Rita Felski argues, 'Rather than a precise historical periodization, modernity... comprises a constantly shifting set of temporal coordinates' (Felski 1995: 12). Narratives of modernity, therefore, do not all begin 'once upon the same time', but I would suggest that the so-called Age of Enlightenment in Western Europe is fundamentally important in understanding the development of the principles of modernity that are globally dominant today. In this section I highlight some of the ideas arising from Enlightenment thinking that will be most useful in helping to build an understanding of the public imagining of modern womanhood in contemporary India. It should be noted however that my exploration here of some of the key markers of modernity in the context of the Enlightenment is intended only to point out certain fundamentals of one dominant narrative of modernity, rather than to homogenise either the Enlightenment or modernity itself.

Like modernity itself and like any movement or era, the Enlightenment cannot be neatly bound within any century or distinct group of people. As Peter Hamilton points out, the ideas that characterise the Enlightenment as a distinctively new period of thought and intellectual endeavour, have their roots in periods 'as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the works of such figures as Bacon, Hobbes and Locke'. However, he suggests 'these ideas received their most effective expression in the mid-eighteenth century' (1992: 18), in the work of the *philosophes*, among whom Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau were prominent, as were Scottish thinkers such as David Hume. Although these men were by no means always in complete agreement with each other, their work gives rise to a general paradigm of Enlightenment thought, within which some of the most important threads are those of reason, empiricism, science, universalism, progress, individualism, freedom, and secularism (ibid: 21-22). From these ideals emerge the models and understandings of the state, citizenship, democracy, capitalism and the public sphere that are dominant in the Western world today.

The emphasis on scientific reasoning as *the* way to know the world constituted a clear move away from the Christian church and forms of knowledge that had been established by religious authority. The world was to be known through experience and critical examination rather than mythical, mystical, or religious explanations. Traditional world-views thus became associated with oppressive superstition, irrationality, and prejudice. In the narratives of modernity that spring from Enlightenment ideas and ideals, and even those that seek alternatives to these ways of thinking, this idea of a break with tradition remains central. While the latter is associated with the ignorance – or sometimes more charitably 'innocence' – of the past, the modern world-view is seen to be better given its future-oriented, progressive, enlightened state. I return to these problems of tradition in the final section of this chapter and suggest an approach to them that seeks to reclaim the usefulness of tradition for analyses of modern womanhood.

Central to the Enlightenment positioning of reason as humanity's most superior attribute, is the notion of the independent self, and selfhood continues to occupy a pivotal position within ideas of contemporary modernity. As Gerard Delanty suggests, 'The foundation of modern culture is the doctrine of the autonomy of the self and its project of self-determination' (2000:3). More specifically, as Jerrold Seigel argues, 'the modern West has made the debate about individuality and selfhood a central question – perhaps the central question – of its collective attempts at self-definition. Hence those who belong to this culture, or who are moved to conceive themselves in relation to it –

even if the relation be one of rejection – have much reason to care about the self' (2005: 4).

It is not just the existence of the self as an entity, but specifically the freedom and autonomy of that self that is of primary importance in Enlightenment thinking, as it is in dominant understandings of contemporary modernity. The modern self is not merely a distinct individual but an individual agent, a subject – 'an active agent, a thinker of thoughts, doer of deeds, or bearer of properties, identifiable through its relations to its contents and qualities, yet remaining independent of them, so that it persists as they change or fall away' (ibid: 14). Enlightenment thinkers were by no means the first to emphasise these aspects of the self, much less to create the notion of an independent self (selfhood is central to ancient philosophies in both Europe and India) but the developments of scientific empiricism and analysis during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in Britain, lent a distinctly new impetus to these debates. Immanuel Kant encapsulates the agential importance of the modern self in his famous imperative: '*Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding!' (1784: 58), which he called 'the motto of the Enlightenment' (ibid.).

Following Brian May, I should again qualify this reading of 'the roots of modernity' by noting that:

> this claim arises from a certain definition of 'modernity', a particular demarcation of a complex cultural phenomenon. But no literary historian [and of course no-one at all] can grasp modernity in its totality and essence; each must choose between its various synecdoches. The synecdoche to be discussed here, nevertheless, is one that many would regard as a central issue of modern life in the West: namely, individuality.
>
> (May 2001: 242)

Questions of selfhood and subjectivity are as central to feminist thought as to the main tenets of the Enlightenment and those of contemporary modernity. As Morwenna Griffiths points out, 'Self-identity and questions of the self have been central to the Women's Movement from the first' (1995: 4). Most particularly, the centrality of agency to the realisation of the self in feminist thought reveals a significant overlap with Enlightenment ideals. From Mary Wollstonecraft onwards, feminists have founded their claims to gender equality upon the premise that 'ideals such as "reason" and "virtue" [are] innate in, or attainable by, all human beings' (Outram 1995: 82).

Feminist writings both draw upon and challenge Enlightenment philosophies of the self, and feminists have been instrumental in re-directing mainstream theorisations of

selfhood and identity and indeed in formulating new ways of exploring the politics of self. One of the most important contributions of feminist theorists to debates around these issues has been an insistence on the multiplicity of the self, in contrast to the unified self imagined by Enlightenment theorists such as Descartes (1988) and Kant (1784). An example is to be found in the work of Jane Flax, who argues that 'People are not enclosed, finite systems... the unitary self is an effect of many kinds of relations' (1993: 78).

A debt, or at least a link, should be acknowledged here to postmodern and poststructuralist theory. The emphases in these theoretical fields on the subject as a constantly shifting, conflictual, disunified and even indefinable site have arguably had vitally important implications for feminist theorisations of the political potential of the seemingly mundane, the realities of fragmented identities, and the dismantling of grand narratives. However, what (if anything) is owed here is a topic of heated debate in feminist theoretical work, a point to which I return shortly.

As the quotation above from Flax's work suggests, if the formation of the subject is of fundamental importance to modern feminist thought and a feminist reading of the modern, so too are the multiple projects of domination, engendered and sustained by the modern, that act to repress and oppress women's agency. To put it more generally, the development of the self is always and inevitably tied into a construction of the Other. As Derek Gregory puts it 'Modernity produces its other, verso to recto, as a way of at once producing and privileging itself. This is not to say that other cultures are the supine creations of the modern, but it is to acknowledge the extraordinary power and performative force of... modernity' (2004: 4). The extremities of this aspect of the 'dark side' of modernity are illustrated by Zygmunt Bauman's reading of the holocaust – against what he sees to be the dominant sociological message of the holocaust as 'a failure, not a product, of modernity' (1989:5) – as an always-present possibility inherent in modernity. This understanding, Bauman argues, forces a major revision of the established models of modernity, heretofore drawn with a 'complacent, self-congratulating attitude' in social theory (ibid: 3).

Addressing the questions of the modern self, its freedom and autonomy, thus raises additional questions not only about the ways in which manifestations of modernity limit and delimit the agencies of certain subjects, but of how discourses of modernity erase and occlude some individuals and subject positions while privileging others. Strategies of resistance against such boundaries are a major theme in theoretical and experiential narratives of modern womanhood, but the question must be asked – to what extent are

agencies and resistances written out of modernity and indeed what spaces are there within modernity for those who cannot articulate their resistance? I address these difficult questions more fully in chapter seven, through an exploration of narratives of violation and the discursive spaces opened up (or not) for the agency of the modern female self therein.

Before turning to an exploration of how we might begin to conceptualise the multiple constructions of modern, gendered subjecthood in a globalised context, it is important also to consider the notion that modernity as a period or a process of being has come to an end. The contemporary age has been labelled by some as being postmodern, implying an era that not just succeeds the modern but that is also distinct from the latter in terms of its prevailing world-view and principles of social life. The nature of postmodernity (and 'postmodernism' as the social and artistic movements arising from this condition) is the subject of intense academic debate and conflict, but takes as its foundation stone the idea that grand narratives should be dismantled because in a world characterised by diversity, multiplicity, and fragmentation there can be no absolute truths.

The label of the postmodern is challenged by philosophers and other theorists who argue that we cannot be postmodern since we have never in fact been modern (Delanty 2000; Latour 1993). As Delanty argues, 'The reinvention of the Self under the conditions of difference is one of the central tasks in the new "social" postmodernism, a project which in fact can be seen as a return to the modern discourse of the Self' (2000: 3). Central to the work of postmodernism, then, according to Delanty, is a return to what is definitively modern, and since the modern work of understanding or realising the self remains incomplete, a suggestion that we are now postmodern seems premature, to say the least. Therefore, while acknowledging certain debts to elements of postmodern theory, I take the view that the characterisation of our contemporary age as postmodern is not the best way forward in understanding this age or in articulating a politics of Indian womanhood in this context.

A significant part of the reason for this position is that one logical outcome of a postmodern perspective for feminist thought is the potential dissolution of the human subject, a move against which numerous feminist critics have warned. It is important that we heed the warnings of these feminist writers as to the potentially unproductive and even implosive political nature of elements of postmodern thought and the cultural relativism to which they can lead, since too close a focus on heterogeneity can collapse meaning in on itself. As Nancy Hartsock asks in an oft-quoted piece, 'Why is it that just

at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?' (Hartsock 1990: 163). Similarly, Alison Assiter (1996) criticises the post-modern feminism of certain theorists whose emphasis on a disunified subject can, in her view, dissolve the impact of a universalised feminist project. The potential of postmodernist logic to thus immobilise political action renders the postmodern a precarious scaffolding for feminist theory. In addition, insofar as it may be read as itself a grand narrative whose primary aim is the deconstruction of grand narratives, postmodern theory threatens ultimately to undermine its own foundations. Therefore, refusing the 'absolute relativism' (Latour 1993: 113) which may well be the ultimate end of postmodern thought, I consider it more productive to retain a framework of modernity rather than postmodernity upon which to construct a 'relationist' (ibid.) understanding of what modern womanhood may mean.

Since our contemporary modernity is different in significant ways to the period of Enlightenment, and even to the first half of the twentieth century, a label is perhaps needed. The notions of late or high modernity, offered by theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Scott Lash (1994), or even tertiary modernity (Smith 2003) are useful here for the sense of connection and continuity they confer as well as the transformations they acknowledge. In addition, references to late modernity do not suggest, as can postmodernity, that while much of the West has moved on to the next big thing, the rest of the world languishes in a modernity that has paradoxically become passé. Working with this notion opens up the possibilities for understanding more fully both the lived realities of modernity and their discursive manifestations in the determining contexts of nation, culture, gender and class.

Multiple Modernities

Although the ultimate aim of this chapter is to develop a conceptualisation of modernity that will open up ways of speaking about the modernities of Indian womanhood, it must be recognised that these discursive spaces are necessarily opened within and around the enduring elements of Western theory outlined above. There are least two reasons for this. Firstly, as Dilip Gaonkar explains, it is 'virtually impossible' to abandon Western academic discourses on modernity, since the very notion of modernity is one that has travelled 'from the West to the rest of the world not only in terms of cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements, but also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present' (2001: 14). Nair and John, following Madhava Prasad, suggest that the general influence of Western theories goes even deeper, determining

'"at an unconscious level, the reading practices we bring to bear" on our work' (Prasad 1998 cit. in Nair and John 1998: 6).

As the previous section emphasises, the very idea of modernity is in many ways a Western one, and the term almost always refers at least in part to practices, structures and attitudes that have originated and been defined in Western cultural arenas. In this way the West has come to be seen as being in many ways the standard of modernity to which all countries and cultures should aspire. The notion of development as a fundamental aspect of modernity illustrates this, the Western model of liberal democracy, capitalism, and progress through industry and technology having come to represent a standard by which other (developing or undeveloped) nations are judged within Western theory (often implicitly), as well as in both Western and non-Western everyday assumptions and practices.

The realm of urban, middle-class popular culture in India offers another example. In the Indian cities I have visited, every impression is given of the referents of contemporary Western – and particularly American(ised) – popular music, lifestyles, intellectual traditions, clothing and accents being valued for their reflection of a cool, successful and modern cultural identity. The American-style coffee shops and shopping malls that have proliferated in urban India in recent years and their piped music (often 'gangsta rap') and electronic jukeboxes, provide just two illustrations of this trend. It is of course also true that Western cultures borrow freely from other cultural traditions, an exchange that is most evident in the world of fashion and the popular media by whose representatives Indian, Russian, and African cuisines, clothing and therapies have all been appropriated in some form in recent years. This does not however necessarily imply a lessening of the Western power to name and 'own' modernity.

While the powerful association of cultural and intellectual modernity remains with the West, the theoretical idealisation of Western norms and paradigms have come to be contested within the context of the academy, both in India and the West. Theorists such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) and Stefan Andreasson (2005), following Edward Said's powerful arguments against Orientalism (1978), have criticised the universalisation of Western models of modernity and development, but these notions remain prevalent and even dominant in theoretical narratives, and are reinforced by contemporary discourses and practices whose point of origin is often to be found in ethnocentric principles of an imagined ideal modernisation.

It should be emphasised therefore that although notions of the nature of modernity are embedded in certain processes specific to certain historical and geographical loci, such as the eighteenth century in Western Europe, and continue to be associated in large measure with the West, it is important to avoid the teleological view of history and modernity, characteristic of discourses both past and present, that construct the West as the pinnacle of modernity in the way I describe above. This exclusionary perspective limits modernity to just one story when there are many to be told about different, perhaps contradictory, engagements with the modern.

The writings of scholars such as Dilip Gaonkar (2001), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, 2002), Charles Taylor (2001, 2004), and Paul Gilroy (1993) are useful in helping to build an understanding of how the paths that different societies may take towards modernity can be, have been and continue to be widely divergent. While Western ideas of what is modern remain fundamental to understanding modernity in a culturally differentiated global context, theorists such as these have offered conceptualisations of 'multiple modernities' that may be defined according to alternative social, cultural, political and economic patterns. Of course it is not only the paths taken towards constructing a society that may be called modern which vary, but modernity, as individual ways of being, which is itself manifested differently in different contexts. As Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge put it, the experience of modernity 'is as varied as magic, marriage, or madness' (1995: 1).

When modernity is understood in this way, as comprising multiple and diverse processes of transformation rather than as an ideal end, the projects of domination in which modernity has long been implicated are displaced. Such projects of domination are exemplified by the colonial agenda, and David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* offers an in-depth analysis of the complex ways in which 'non-Europeans were conscripted to modernity's project' (2004: 9). As Rita Felski explains: 'In the discourses of colonialism..., the historical distinction between the modern present and the primitive past was mapped onto the spatial relations between Western and non-Western societies. Thus the technological advances of modern nation-states could be cited as a justification for imperialist invasion, as the traditions and customs of indigenous peoples were forced to give way to the inexorable path of historical progress' (Felski 1995: 14).

As John Jervis puts it 'if I am enlightened, it is my *duty* to enlighten you; Enlightenment becomes a mission, necessarily intolerant of otherness' (1998: 7, author's emphasis). Jervis draws here on Zygmunt Bauman's vociferous condemnation of modernity's

'desperate search for structure' in which the author, following Spinoza, expresses this notion thus: 'if I know the truth and you are ignorant, to make you change your thoughts and ways is my moral duty; refraining from doing so would be cruel and selfish. Modernity was not merely the Western Man's thrust for power; it was also his *mission*, proof of moral righteousness and cause of pride' (Bauman 1992: xiv, author's emphasis). As suggested above, certain contemporary development discourses can echo this idea of rescuing primitive peoples from themselves and saving them out of their ignorance. The problematic image that emerges from these narratives of modernity is one of a parental West disciplining and guiding an infant Third World to maturity.

A second and more specific reason for building a theory of multiple modernities on the shoulders of Enlightenment and Western philosophy is that it is not fruitful to position the West and the East, in this case India, as entirely discrete or opposing entities. Both as 'a particular geographical place, and a *relation*' (Nair and John 1998: 6, authors' emphasis), the West is connected with India in a web of complex historical and contemporary relationships of power. What Derek Gregory (2004) calls our 'colonial present' pervades Indian cultural realities in numerous ways, influencing issues of Indian identity on multiple levels and through innumerable factors which include language, education, business and political practices, sports and fashion, to name just a few.

It is perhaps a truism that, notwithstanding the important literature that has been produced on the idea of reverse cultural flows or currents (Said 1983; Amireh and Majaj 2000: 3), the balance of power between India and the West (and particularly the Anglophone West) has never been equal. This relationship of inequality does not, however, preclude the contribution of Western theories to Indian scholarship or to the understanding of Indian realities. This notion itself constitutes an act of epistemic violence in that it re-positions India as Other to the Western norm or ideal. As Nair and John put it 'the very conception of the other of the West as being something to which western concepts do not apply (or only as an act of violation from which one must be redeemed) is itself a western legacy. Such constructions of cultural difference leave the West firmly in command' (Nair and John 1998: 6; see also Narayan 1997).

Rather, this connection between India and the West, which thanks to ease of global travel and communication is more accurately described as a dynamic and increasingly large web of connections, points to the ongoing mutual, if unequal, exchange between the regions. It therefore emphasises the need to take a global perspective on questions

such as those surrounding modernity, while remaining sensitive to cultural differentiation and the complex and shifting relationships of power between individuals, institutions and nation-states.

By thus drawing attention to the importance of Western theory in thinking about gendered manifestations of modernity in contemporary India, I do not mean to reinforce a core/ periphery binary that privileges the West as central and all else as marginal. Rather, following Charles Taylor (2004), I insist on the understanding of dominant Western theories of modernity as being selected stories among the many that can be, and are being, told about what it means to be modern. They are not universally true, nor more valid than others, and beginning with them is only the first step in a longer journey that constitutes a move beyond them, to readings of other stories about being modern in other ways and in other places, in order perhaps to return to them (with) an enhanced sense of the heterogeneity of what it means to be modern.

Although it is, then, 'in some sense, a category of Western history and reflexivity', modernity is today in many fundamental ways, 'a global experience' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 1). This recognition demands both an acknowledgement of modernity's historical context and the opening up of spaces in which to think beyond it, and in order to think beyond Western conceptualisations of modernity, it is necessary to think 'through and against its self-understandings... to think with a difference – a difference that would destabilize the universalist idioms, historicize the contexts, and pluralize the experiences of modernity', as Dilip Gaonkar puts it (2001: 15). Although Gaonkar aims primarily to think towards a cultural understanding of modernity, his comments are equally relevant for an attempt to think with 'a difference' that is gender. Thinking modernities thus, through specific culturally contextualised and gendered processes, forces the reassessment of abstract theorisations of modernity and in so doing opens up space for both a broader and a more specific sense of what it means to be modern.

Attempting to open up space for multiple modernities requires a strategic bounding of the idea of the modern, since as Felski points out, 'modernity can mean something very different in the work of political theorists, literary critics, sociologists, and philosophers, to take just a few random instances' (1995: 12). In addition to this disciplinary diversity, 'the concepts and images which have been derived from the simple notion of modern constitute an amazing cluster of related ideas' (Taylor 1999: 13). Most prominent among these are 'modernism' and 'modernisation', as well as 'modernity' which constitutes the focus of my attention throughout this thesis (most often in adjectival

form as my aim is to try and grasp the idea of 'modern Indian womanhood'). The historical and geographical locations, and key characteristics of the first two terms can be briefly summarised, although they are of course far more complex in expression than these broad brushstrokes may suggest.

As an artistic movement arising in Europe and America in the late nineteenth century, modernism challenged the traditions of romanticism and realism, and sought to question representation through aesthetic self-consciousness and the foregrounding of ambiguity and fragmentation in literature, architecture, music and visual art. Modernisation, in contrast, is a concept more prevalent in the social sciences than the humanities. The term refers to 'the complex constellation of socioeconomic phenomena which originated in the context of Western development but which have since manifested themselves around the globe in various forms: scientific and technological innovation, the industrialization of production, rapid urbanization, an ever expanding capitalist market, the development of the nation-state, and so on' (Felski 1995: 13).

'Modernity' is harder to define, and not only because it encompasses both the above terms while contributing further meanings of its own. There are three primary senses in which 'modernity' is most used in contemporary social theory: Firstly, it is used as a periodising term, often to denote the approximately two hundred years since the large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation of Western Europe in the nineteenth century, or alternatively the four to five hundred years since the European Enlightenment. Secondly, 'modernity' is used to refer to a social order governing collective human behaviour and the public imagination, arising particularly out of specific socioeconomic changes such as the rise of capitalist societies, mass consumerism, and burgeoning new technologies. Thirdly, and this is the sense of the word that I argue opens up the space to think beyond the other two, 'modernity' is used to describe the state, or rather the process, of 'being modern'.

All of these usages, as well as the two sketched out above, are related in that they share a common base, 'the condition of living in a modern society' (Taylor 1999: 15). At the same time, however, each kind of 'modernity' refers to a slightly different sense of engagement with that condition, and it is important to distinguish between them in order to focus effectively on the specifics of any one. In my exploration of how women's bodies are represented as modern, and the role these representations play in constructing India itself as modern, I focus on the notion of modernity as it refers to what it means to *be* modern. Such a conceptualisation draws our attention to some of the most important principles of modernity: freedom, choice, agency and autonomy,

and opens up spaces in which to understand modernity beyond the processes and products of science and technology that often dominate such discussions. This is not to say that these aspects of modernity are unimportant, but to advocate a re-focusing of attention on them such that they are seen to be effects and agents within a 'modernity' that is not reducible to them but rather runs far deeper into the individual and far further out into society.

A focus on being modern, then, opens up the spaces of modernity to include experiences that may lie outside the boundaries of specific historical periods, and beyond the purview of the kinds of socioeconomic and technological factors that are generally considered to be essentially modern characteristics. For example, it prompts a shift from 'science' as an autonomous process or project, to the scientist, a bodied human being whose material realities and conceptual work are enmeshed and inseparable, as the focus of attention. This focus draws attention therefore to the variety of ways in which newness and change are experienced and brought about, contingent upon the complex cultural, racial, national and gendered identities of the subjects in question.

An enquiring emphasis on modernity as what it means to be modern has at least two important and inter-dependent implications for an investigation into the concept that is sensitive to multiple experiences and productions of modernity. Firstly, such an emphasis is indicative of a move away from a notion of modernity as an anonymously authored project that is imposed upon people, a notion that constructs everyday life as being mapped out by modernity, and ordinary people as objects to be shaped by it. The second implication follows on from the first, and constitutes a move towards a new vision. A perspective on modernity as a process of being makes it clear that the ways in which modernity is experienced and constructed are dependent on numerous factors that extend beyond the logic of periodisation or social order, and sees people as engaged subjects who are actively involved in the construction of their own modern lives and identities, their own modernities, through everyday practices. The ways in which being is represented, documented, enacted and experienced all play a role in making up modernity within this conceptualisation.

There are resonances here with Charles Taylor's call for greater attention to 'cultural' understandings of modernity rather than the 'acultural' theories which have dominated Western academic thought of the last two centuries (Taylor 2001: 173-175). To Taylor's notion of culture as a determining aspect of modernity, however, I want to add the important factor of gender. As Dorothy Hodgson has pointed out as recently as 2001,

'Despite a growing literature on the articulation of global processes like modernity, capitalism, and development with the formation of local individual and collective identities, these works have paid little attention to the centrality of gender in these articulations. Yet the assumptions, processes, experiences, and consequences of modernity have been deeply gendered' (2001: 2). Hodgson remarks further that 'Modernity not only presumes and promotes such gendered binaries as nature/ culture, domestic/ public, past/ future, and tradition/ modern, but it genders them, usually rendering the first, devalued term, female' (ibid: 9).

The gendering of modernity is of central concern to a handful of other theorists. I have already mentioned the importance of Felski's interrogation into the idea of a modernity that takes female experience as paradigmatic. Felski's question becomes the basis for Ann Ardis and Leslie Lewis' edited collection of explorations into women's modernities as they are manifested in practices as varied as 'selling and shopping, travel and world expositions, political and social activism, urban fieldwork and rural labour, and radical discourses of feminine sexuality, as well as experiments with literary form' (2003: 1). In this collection, Alpana Sharma suggests that gender can work as a 'destabilising category' within the modern moment. Focusing on the 'risk-ridden, in-between, yet productive' nature of the spaces of female postcolonial identities, Sharma argues that reading the gendered hybridities of modernity 'makes possible not another totality but another time, within whose pauses a certain interrogation is rewriting the universalism of modernity and man' (ibid: 109).

In addition to the understanding of multiple, including gendered, modernities foregrounded by this focus on being, this viewpoint allows for a deeper foray into the contradictions and conflicts that are sewn up into the fabric of modernity in all its senses. It is only through an appreciation of the diverse experiences and productions of modernity as being that a conceptualisation of multiple modernities can be developed. It is important also to note that individual or cultural expressions of modernity are not simply incidental or additional to an imagined unified modern subject, but are rather entirely bound up together in the production of the heterogeneous global modern, complicating and challenging a reading of its manifestations as characterised primarily by their ultimate convergence upon a predetermined endpoint (Gaonkar 2001: 17). That is not to say that it is never useful to generalise about the modern, or that there are not commonalities between culturally diverse experiences of it. To speak of multiple modernities is to insist on difference but it is also to recognise the continuities and similarities, of which an emphasis on individual autonomy is just one, between the

many nations, objects, practices, and concepts that we think of as, or that claim to be, modern.

An emphasis on agency, on *being* modern in an everyday and bodied sense, can thus be seen to lead down paths of understanding that are laid very differently to those that stem from the Enlightenment and have dominated both theorisations of modernity and its practice in projects of modernisation. Most significant is the emphasis this approach places on the need for an appreciation of modernity's multiplicity, and the recognition of this means that the importance of explicitly situated study is foregrounded. In this way the partiality that is by default present in every narrative of modernity, including those to be found in Western histories and discourses, is made clear and can be worked with as an instrument of inquiry rather than an obstacle.

As theorists such as Donna Haraway (1988), Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (1994), and Charles Taylor (2004) have argued, all knowledge should be recognised as partial, even and especially those forms of knowledge that have become so embedded in our individual and collective unconscious that they are often no longer recognised as constructed rather than 'natural'. Far from imposing limits on understanding, such declared specificity of local context opens up a treasure chest of investigation into the many shapes and textures of modernity and in so doing enables a deeper understanding of its global implications. The importance of recognising the situated nature of all knowledge will be dealt with more fully in chapter four.

Such a reading of modernity, while making it possible to think outside of the historical boundaries of time periods, the structures of institutions, or the development of specific socioeconomic and technological processes, also enables a focus on the ways in which people make sense of what it means to be modern, making meaning out of the processes and newnesses of modernity and in so doing, shaping their own modernities. In other words, reading modernity as a process of being foregrounds human agency and recognises the parts played by the actions of 'ordinary' people in the production of the global modern. This understanding of modernity thus enables a more direct interrogation of what it means to be a subject, which as I suggested earlier lies at the heart of modernity. Not only are ideals of individual agency embedded in the Western Enlightenment notion of a rational, autonomous individual as the most basic element of society, but they continue to inform all contemporary theorisations of modernity. Most particularly they imbue feminist work, of which my own is a part, on the representation and lived experiences of women. Such work seeks to reveal and create

spaces that are both feminine and modern, re-thinking and reworking the historical exclusions of women from the domain of the modern.

Conceptualising Modern Womanhood

Having established that a cultured and gendered perspective is desirable and productive for an attempt to theorise the heterogeneous realities of contemporary global modernity, an important question remains for the specific project at hand. How are we to read narratives of modern Indian womanhood in the context of their attendant politics of patriarchal and (post)colonial power structures? Since modernity, Indianness, and womanhood are all contested and complex ideas even when positioned separately, bringing all three together results in a triply vexed notion that demands attentive framing and exploration. In this section I address some of the most important questions raised by the idea of modern Indian womanhood. While I cannot claim to answer them in any definitive sense, I hope to systematically unpack and frame them in such a way as to usefully structure the analyses that follow in later chapters.

The question of reading narratives of womanhood, particularly in a non-Western, postcolonial context such as India, is situated within at least two major sets of politics – the first of which is the politics within which the production of such narratives is ineluctably embedded. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan puts it 'femaleness is constructed... the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism), and... therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves' (1993: 129). The patriarchal ideologies that thus determine the frameworks of gender construction are deeply embedded in language, as has been discussed by numerous theorists since feminism's so-called 'first wave'. One of the pioneering critics of the patriarchal basis of Western discourse was Kate Millett. Writing in the 1970s, Millett was one of the first feminists to critique the implicit misogyny of canonical Western literature. In close readings of such supposed literary greats as D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer, Millett 'formulates a systematic overview of patriarchy as a political institution' (Millett 1969: xi).

Such critiques of patriarchal discourse have been taken to the heart of language itself by numerous psychoanalytic feminist theorists, often writing with and/ or against Jacques Lacan's (1982) Freudian theorisations of the woman as defined by lack and the impossibility of a feminine space in discourse. Luce Irigaray, for example, insists upon 'the necessity of "re-opening" the figures of philosophical discourse – idea, substance, subject, transcendental subjectivity, absolute knowledge – in order to pry

out of them what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them "render up" and give back what they owe the feminine' (1991: 123).

These ideologies that pervade the production of discourses of modern Indian womanhood as thoroughly as those of any others, place the reader in a position of ethical responsibility. The second set of politics therefore, is that surrounding the ways in which these narratives are consumed or read, since a feminist reading of Indian womanhood demands a critical awareness of the patriarchal structures of discourse such that we do not replicate, and indeed rather endeavour to read against, the innumerable discursive violences enacted against women as Other. This is not to imply that constructions of womanhood should always be read in an attempt to locate sites of resistance, but rather that the possibilities for such sites should always be left open; that absences as well as presences, silences as well as voices, those erased as well as those written in, should be listened for; and that the potential for transformation and re-making notions of womanhood lies within the same ideologically charged structures of discourse that are dominant in contemporary discourses of all kinds.

To this end, it is necessary to read Indian womanhood with a mindfulness that is informed by the extensive body of work carried out by postcolonial feminist theorists, whose writing emphasises the importance of attentively examining issues of difference and identity in an attempt to theorise women's subjecthood. The numerous overlaps between postcolonial and feminist thought place the two fields in constant dialogue with each other over common critiques, ideals, aspirations and political projects. For example, both women and colonised subjects have been constructed in various ways as an Other to the norm that is a white Western male, and both postcolonial and feminist studies seek to recover the marginalised voices of this Other through intensive interrogations into the structures of power that exist between the (broadly conceived) coloniser and colonised. Feminist writers working within a postcolonial framework have further complicated this notion of 'Other' by introducing the concept of the doubly Othered, or the 'doubly colonised', to better understand the complex positioning of women within colonised and previously colonised societies (Spivak 1988; Ashcroft et al 1995: 250).

One of the most important warnings offered by postcolonial feminist writers is against the danger of universalising notions of women's experiences, oppressions and agency. Influential writers such as bell hooks (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1995), and Audre Lorde (1984) have critiqued the universalising tendencies of many Western feminist theories, challenging their blindness to the intersections between gender and

other structures of power, such as those determining relationships of domination and control along the lines of race, class, religion and sexuality. They have pointed out the tendency of Western feminists to subsume all women within the same (implicitly heterosexual 'WASP') category, and have denied any simple notion of a global sisterhood within which all women fight the same battles against the same oppressions, insisting instead that the emphasis in feminist theorising be shifted towards a recognition and analysis of difference and the multiplicity of women's experiences and agency.

Lorde writes: 'the failure of academic feminists to recognise difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower' (1984: 112). These powerful critiques have been widely accepted in contemporary theoretical writings but they demand an ongoing vigilance and continued work within specificities as part of a universal feminist project. As Mohanty puts it, 'feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle' (2003: 501). Mohanty's most influential piece of work, an essay entitled 'Under Western Eyes' (1984), draws attention to a second blind spot in Western feminist writing. This essay exposes a tendency for feminists to construct women outside the West as an undifferentiated Other. Mohanty thus makes the (at the time striking) point that not only do all women not experience the same oppressions in the same way, but neither are there only two categories into which women fall: Western and non-Western, liberated and oppressed. In so doing, 'Under Western Eyes' exposes and dismantles the monolithic 'Third World Woman' implicit in much Western feminist theory, and calls for explicitly site-specific work to be carried out as a conscious part of a global feminist project.

This focus on plurality and difference should not however be read as an over-eager embracing of multiplicity for its own sake, or even as an absence of generality in order to avoid falsely universalised ideas. Such an uncritical embracing of difference can lead to the adoption of a cultural relativist position which simply ascribes differences between women to variations of 'culture' and implicitly validates all cultural positions as equal (Mohanty 2003; McEwan 2003). This perspective produces a framework that is lacking in universal values and thus unable to take a moral stance against oppressions of any kind, rendering impotent any postcolonial or feminist project aimed at positive transformation, whether in a local or universal context. *How* we work with this idea of difference, therefore, and to what end, needs careful consideration and does not necessarily imply either the erasure of the global in favour of the local or the impossibility of a common global postcolonial and/ or feminist project.

Rather, what is needed in any attempt to engage with feminist principles is an awareness of the vital importance of the local and the particular, but always as one part of a larger project that seeks an understanding of global commonalities. Closer to what Latour (1993: 113-114) calls a position of 'relative relativism' or 'relationism', this is an investigative attitude which truly values the networks and hybrids that make up social realities. It recognises 'that the local and the global... exist simultaneously and constitute each other' (Mohanty 2003: 521). It is therefore within the webs of connection between the local and the global, the multiple and the universal, that I read in forthcoming chapters the specific public narratives of womanhood that circulate in contemporary urban India.

Masculine Modernities/ Feminine Modernities

Adding modernity to the mix of Indian womanhood, as I suggested earlier, further muddies the theoretical waters, though the new mud is of a similar composition to the old. The central problem of conceptualising *modern* Indian womanhood, as I hinted in the introduction to this chapter, is the fundamental and pervasive masculinisation of modernity in almost all its dimensions. In terms of both theorisations and cultural symbols of modernity, masculinist models predominate. One of the most problematic aspects of such masculinisation is perhaps the attendant universalisation of these implicitly gender-biased conceptualisations of modernity, which a number of feminist theorists have held up for critique in recent years. Highlighting the omissions and erasures in the work of some of the most prominent modernity theorists, they reveal the ways in which women's experiences contradict certain assumptions implicit in their analyses of modernity, or offer alternative ways of reading modern social life.

For example, Linda Murgatroyd criticises Anthony Giddens' social theory for its elision of the importance of gender in 'a supposedly broad social theory' (1989: 147), arguing that his omissions in this area result in false and limited and reasoning elsewhere. Her point is illustrated by Giddens' outline of the four institutional dimensions which together, he believes, constitute or at least characterise modernity: capitalism, surveillance, industrialism and military power (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 96; Giddens 1990: 55). All of these dimensions are profoundly gendered in that they are represented, orchestrated and experienced very differently by men and women. Indeed seen from a woman-centred perspective, these dimensions of modernity may not take such primacy. Giddens, however, as he himself admits (Held and Thompson 1989), does not adequately address these implications.

Similarly, Lisa Adkins questions the 'radical de-traditionalisation thesis found in analyses of reflexive modernity' in the work of theorists such as Giddens and Scott Lash. These theorists argue that reflexive modernisation entails a 'detachment or disembedding of individuals from social categories such as class and gender' (Adkins 2000: 260). Adkins argues to the contrary that traditional structures are being replaced by 'new, yet traditional' (2000: 260) forms of structures such as class and gender, therefore suggesting that what is occurring is the re-traditionalisation of social rules and expectations and the re-embedding of traditional norms. While not uncontested – Rajeswari Sunder Rajan refers to this notion as 'nonsensical' (1993: 129) – Adkins' thesis resonates with the readings of modern Indian womanhood that I undertake in later chapters.

Like Murgatroyd, Adkins grounds her theoretical argument in the material reality of women's experiences in specific areas of social life, as well as foregrounding the importance of inter-personal relationships in understanding women's modernities. This emphasis converges with Rita Felski's suggestion that when modernity is viewed from a woman-centred perspective, 'intimate relationships emerge as a central arena within which the contradictions of the modern are played out' (1995: 3). It is also in line with other contemporary work mentioned earlier such as that of Dilip Gaonkar (2001) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), which stresses the importance of site-specific work in reaching an understanding of multiple realities in order to conceptualise and implement more general and perhaps even universal principles. An explicit attentiveness to femininity and feminine modernities together with a focus, that is also necessarily explicit, on masculine experiences and productions of modernity, is vital in such a project, as is the imperative that we not lose sight of the sites at which each encompasses and blends into the other.

This approach to the question of how best to theorise modernity in order to understand specific discursive manifestations of modern womanhood thus represents a shift away from the ideas of de-traditionalisation that have become dominant in Western social theory. It is in line with a more general and increasing resistance, attributed in large part to feminist and postmodernist thought, to a reliance on binary oppositions such as tradition/ modernity in conceptualising the social world. The question of what it means for women in particular to be modern can be much more fully answered if we understand modernity as comprising first of all a dynamic set of lived processes, and second as an engagement with the past and tradition as well as with ideas about the future.

Indicating as I have done a separation between masculine and feminine modernities, is not to imply that a gendered reading of modernity produces two incompatible stories. Women's modernities are necessarily implicated in men's (and vice versa) without being reducible to them. The specificities of what it means for women to be modern, neglected in mainstream academic debate, require attention if the illusion of master narratives is to be dispelled. The hybridities and border-crossings of modern womanhood refuse a notion of absolute difference but equally, they insist upon the existence of distinctively feminine traits within the heterogeneity of the modern.

The New Indian Woman

Within the context of India, a number of feminist scholars have remarked upon the emergence of the 'new woman' and her appropriation by various groups as a symbol of the nation's modernity. As such, the figure of the new Indian woman is a powerful example of modernity's gendered nature. The Indian 'new woman', unlike certain other examples of new womanhood that I discuss later in this section, is not new in the sense of leading an emerging feminist activism, as such activism has been a part of the reality of Indian women's lives for many decades. Numerous sources detail the significance of women in the nation's freedom struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,[6] and as Maitrayee Chaudhuri points out, India has produced 'a very rich body of writing on women's activism' (2004: xi). The new Indian woman, however, constitutes a strikingly different image to that of the swadeshi activists of the Gandhian era.

Often challenging or rejecting the positions and ideals of these women, the new Indian woman is a construct of only the last two or three decades. She represents both a space within which certain feminist demands are articulated and a site for the rejection of feminism (at least nominally) in favour of an already achieved liberation, sometimes labelled by the media with the (mis-)appropriated term 'postfeminist'. In fact the new Indian woman often encapsulates what is clearly a troubled relationship between 'real' Indian women and the idea of feminism. A certain antagonism towards feminism and its labels is expressed perhaps most famously in Madhu Kishwar's 'A Horror of "Isms": Why I do not Call Myself a Feminist' (1990). In this article Kishwar condemns 'the intellectual regimentation demanded in the name of solidarity in the women's movement' (ibid: 268). She refuses to identify herself as a feminist because 'being labelled a feminist puts you in tight box. People expect you to have no other concern, no other opinion, other than that of women's equality' (ibid: 273). Maitrayee Chaudhuri, outlining the process of writing an overview of Indian feminism, remarks that: 'locating articles which explicitly used the term "feminist" or "feminism" was difficult. Moreover

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[6] See Mohanty (1996).

when used there were always clarifications, qualifications and occasional disavowals of the term and its unavoidable association with "western feminism"' (2004: xi).

Comments posted on an ongoing messageboard entitled 'What's feminism to you?' begun in May 2004 on the *India Together* website,[7] provide a powerful illustration of the ambivalence towards the label. While most of the women whose comments are posted on the messageboard are clearly pro-feminist, many view the label and its proponents with suspicion. One poster writes, 'Feminism! I think the word itself is used to make a statement. That is, it tries to reverse the conventional power roles of the sexes' (mandakini: 20/6/2004). Another poster says 'I do not see [feminism] as sexual licence – unlike the so-called "feminists"' (18/7/2004). Pallavi Bhattacharya comments, 'The word "feminism" definitely holds no place in my vocabulary though I do believe that men and women should be treated equally in situations where equal treatment seems reasonable... I wouldn't ever like to join a feminist group' (14/8/2004). Another Pallavi writes, 'Feminism will never succeed because it is based on theory of reductionism (finding piecemeal solutions in isolation). In fact, Feminism can harm women greatly on a [sic] long run' (5/2/2006). Amruta Prakash is more vociferous: 'After experiencing the hollowness of the present feminist movement I have came to an [sic] conclusion that these so called feminists are nothing but hypocrites who are very much a part of the traditional patriarchal system and have not been able to go beyond it' (3/6/2005). Kamini claims that 'To me the word "feminist" has always evoked an image of an uncontrollable woman who fights for what she wants. No matter what the most extreme feminist says, however, women need men' (3/12/2005). These women's comments highlight the difficulty of labelling or defining the new woman.

Although the 'real' women cited above represent new Indian womanhood in some ways, 'the' new Indian woman is primarily an abstraction, a symbol both of modern Indian womanhood and modern India itself. It is important to remember, as Shoma Munshi points out, that 'The "modern woman" is not a "real" but a potential subject position, one that is always in progress' (Munshi 2001: 6). Therefore, as 'a discursive ideological space' (ibid.), the new woman can mean different things in different contexts, and be used to support a number of ideological positions and aspirations, sometimes significantly divergent. She may represent a fantasy, an aspiration, a caution, or a judgement, depending on the political agenda of those who imagine and articulate her. Situating this figure of modern womanhood in a wider context both historically and geographically may help to identify some of the key characteristics of 'new' womanhood and illuminate some of the contradictions this notion presents.

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[7] This messageboard is accessible at http://indiatogether.org/interact/2004/itr-000018.html

The idea of the 'new woman' is often associated with the fin-de-siècle in Western Europe. In Britain, as Juliet Gardiner points out, this was when 'the word "feminism" first gained currency' (1993:4). Gardiner encapsulates the sense of this new British woman thus:

> The eloquent 'New Woman', who campaigned publicly for educational opportunities and claimed the right of professional recognition and sexual freedom; who took on the medical Cassandras in challenging the essence of 'womanliness', chancing that her body would not wither on the vine if her mind was allowed full exercise, who advocated "rational dress" and the freedom from constraint symbolized by wearing the clothes that enabled her with ease to mount and ride the newly introduced bicycle – this woman was in the vanguard of an unsettled and unsettling middle-class minority, some of whose number turned their minds to the plight of their working-class sisters.
>
> (ibid.)

In France too, an ideology of new womanhood distinguished the end of the nineteenth century, manifesting itself through the actions of a group of women who chose to live outside of the gendered cultural rules of the period. Despite their differences these new women, as the title of Mary Louise Roberts' book *Disruptive Acts* suggests, all 'challenged the regulatory norms of gender by living unconventional lives and by doing work outside the home that was coded masculine in French culture' (2002:3). While there were important differences between the figure of the new woman and that of the feminist, as Roberts points out (ibid: 8), the members of each group played major roles in transforming the public and private spheres by actively questioning the definition of the self according to established structures of gender.

Not only in Western Europe but also in Russia (Attwood 1999), America (Matthews 2003) and Japan (Sato 2003), to name just three countries, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of a new woman and the accompanying ideologies of women's freedom and modernity. The new Indian women of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is necessarily juxtaposed with these earlier manifestations of modern womanhood, and reveals certain parallels as well as some important contrasts with them. Constructions of the new woman in the texts mentioned above display a marked focus on the discourses of liberation and progression that are tied into the newness of fin-de-siècle womanhood. The image of the new woman in contemporary India offers insights into this link from a different angle.

Reading narratives of modern Indian womanhood in later chapters, I suggest that while defined in large part by notions of freedom and progress, modernity is not necessarily unequivocally, or even primarily, progressive or liberating for women. A consideration of the ways in which women's bodies are implicated in Indian modernity must address the ambiguities and contradictions entangled in the politics of modernity peculiar to this context. For example, narratives by Indian women often relate the ways in which women may collude in their own oppression, or in the oppression of other women such as their daughters, in a bid to reap some of the rewards of modernity. To erase this agency by constructing such women as mere victims of a patriarchal system would be a mistake, a denial of the complexity inherent in the processes of becoming and being modern. Equally, to acknowledge only the freedoms of choice and ignore the imposed limits and social expectations placed upon women through discourses of modernity would produce a lopsided narrative. Oppressions and liberations are both bound up in the production of modern gendered subjects, and are moreover not always as dichotomous as they may seem. The discursive sites upon which modernity is produced therefore need careful analysis to unpack the multi-directional circuits of power that operate through them.

A number of analyses of the new Indian woman have been published in recent years, most of them addressing the dramatic rise in the numbers of Indian women winning international beauty pageants, or the construction of women in media such as magazines and television (Reddy 2006; Ahmed-Ghosh 2003; Runkle 2004; Thapan 2004; Oza 2001; Sunder Rajan 1993). The authors of these critical texts are deeply suspicious of the ways in which the idea of the new Indian woman is employed in the promotion of a nationalist agenda and the reinscription of patriarchal boundaries under a guise of real changes in the structures of gendered power relations. While I share their suspicions, I would suggest that alternative public narratives of modernity are circulating that offer a more conflicted view of the new woman, and that these merit deeper analyses, against the backdrop of the social changes in contemporary India, than they have heretofore received. From chapter four onwards I identify and closely examine two such sources, tracing specific themes within their narratives of modernity and demonstrating the impossibility of an easy appropriation of the new woman either by feminists or those opposed to a feminist project.

Modernity and Tradition

The final aspect of modernity that I want to address in this chapter is its articulation with regard to the past and the principles of tradition within the discursive spaces of modern womanhood. In reading modernity as a process of being, the past is profoundly

implicated. John Jervis hints at this with his emphasis 'on the past as source of the present, the roots of contemporary experience' (Jervis 1998: 1). I suggest here that when read through notions of modern womanhood, tradition can be seen to be a dynamic process that is continually being transformed, and as sets of everyday practices and beliefs is itself transformative and indeed in some ways constitutive, of modernity. I argue in this section that in order to grasp the multiple realities of modernity, we need to acknowledge the dynamic relationship between them and those of tradition. We should, as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it: 'respect the past and relate critically... to tradition' (2002: 47). What is needed is a recognition of how the categories of tradition and modernity become meaningful by being actively knitted together through lived processes of transformation or becoming. This is neither to glorify nor damn tradition, but rather to say that it is fraught with many of the same ambiguities and difficulties as the modern, and that its place in the contemporary should be acknowledged.

This runs counter in some ways to the work of theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Stuart Hall, and Arjun Appadurai, who have offered influential outlines of the defining characteristics of modernity that take into account its various constituent processes – particularly the social and cultural but also the political and the economic. Prominent among the formulations of modernity constructed by these and other theorists, is the idea of de-traditionalisation and of the modern as a definitive departure from the past. Modernity has thus been articulated as: discontinuous and characterised by rupture (Appadurai 1996; Jervis 1998), 'the decline of the traditional social order' (Hall 1992: 6), a 'revolutionary break from tradition' (Turner 1990: 4), a 'distinct and discontinuous' period of time (Friedland and Boden 1994: 2), 'a displacement of everything that has gone before' (O'Brien 1998: 15), and antonymic to tradition (de Man 1983: 144).

This emphasis on rupture and discontinuity is problematic in that it displaces the flows and connections that characterise the meaning-making of everyday social life. Taking a cue from feminist theorists who argue for the importance of concepts such as fluidity, cyclicity and fragmentation in making sense of femininities and women's experience, I suggest that the tendencies to regard modernity as a break from the past constitute a further masculinising of modernity theory, and therefore need critical revision. This is not to reinscribe a binary by saying that feminine experiences are fluid while masculine ones are rigid, but rather that feminists have foregrounded alternative understandings of social processes to those that have long been dominant, and that these are productive in building more sensitive and detailed accounts of our social worlds.

With Latour therefore, I ask 'Why do we get so much pleasure out of being so different... from our own past? What psychologist will be subtle enough to explain our morose delight in being in perpetual crises and in putting an end to history?' (1993: 114). Replacing the emphasis on rupture with a focused awareness of the continuities and evolutions of tradition and modernity, it is important to recognise that seeing modernity as a break from the past is not necessarily the most productive perspective, and indeed is one that can limit our understanding of the ways in which modern womanhood comes to be a meaningful element of the public imaginary. Furthermore, this perspective can erase the fact that certain ideas of what is modern depend upon the oppression of women's bodies, which runs counter to the modern principles of individual freedom and autonomy.

An exploration of the complexities of tradition will help to forge these conceptual connections. 'Traditional' is often conflated with 'old' or 'unchanging', but understood through the processes of being, and making that 'being' meaningful, it becomes clear that tradition and traditions are not static practices but necessarily dynamic and flexible, transformable and transformative. They are created and used by people in everyday social contexts, sustained in a particular form for as long as they continue to contribute meaning to life. Like every social structure, traditions are constructed and can therefore be dismantled, and indeed it is the argument of social theorists such as Anthony Giddens (1994) that modern society is characterised by the dismantling, dissembling, or even destruction, of tradition. As I will show, however, the best way into an understanding of modern womanhood is not through a characterisation of modernity as the systematic destruction of tradition but rather through a recognition of the continuous engagement between the new and certain traditional principles and practices. We need to acknowledge the way modernity depends upon the challenging, reinscribing, and reformulating of traditional principles, and in fact the development of new 'traditions'.

It is therefore a mistake to uncritically conflate ideas of the 'traditional' with those of age or long endurance. As Hobsbawm and Ranger point out in *The Invention of Tradition*, '"traditions" which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin' (1983: 1). However, it is equally important to point out that although not necessarily actually old in the sense of having been passed down from generation to generation, tradition always carries a profound association with notions of the past and as such with a sense of stability and continuity. Necessarily collective, and characterised by ritual and repetition, tradition invokes what Giddens calls 'formulaic truth' (1994: 64) in a process of 'organising... the past in relation to the present' (ibid: 63). Through the formalisation of certain acts and patterns of behaviour, tradition therefore acts as the

moral and emotional 'cement of group cohesion' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 12). Part of the purpose of tradition, then, is to offer 'a measure of ontological security to those who adhere to it' (Giddens 1994: 65).

Inscribed upon the body of the woman, certain principles of tradition can clearly be seen to ground the changes of modernity in the familiar. Representations of womanhood in contemporary India foreground the profound implication of ideas about the past and about tradition in the production of modernities. Deeply implicated in questions of nationhood and national identity, religion, domestic ritual and familial and other social structures, notions of tradition and modernity in India are powerfully gendered, and as I will discuss in more detail in forthcoming chapters, these categories are all constructed in some way upon the female body. As the bearer of tradition, one identity often inscribed upon woman, the woman is constructed as the repository of 'authentic' national and cultural identity. A safe discursive space is thereby created that can be read as enabling, by making less risky, an engagement with the insecurities of the new and different.

This is not very different from Partha Chatterjee's explanation, which I discuss in more detail in chapter five, of the way in which the 'women's question' was resolved according to a nationalist agenda in the late nineteenth century in India. Chatterjee argues that by locating the 'inner, essential, identity of the East... its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture' (1990: 238), in the woman and the home, the material aspects of modernity or modernisation are able to be adopted without threatening the national culture. The image of the woman as bearer of tradition, and therefore by extension as herself quintessentially traditional, is thus not antithetical to the modern but an integral part of it.

In order to provide this sense of security in the midst of change, tradition cannot simply be an uncritical acceptance of principles handed down by our ancestors and the mechanical implementation of them in our lives. Rather, it is 'necessarily active and interpretative' (Giddens 1994: 64), and serves to ground the fleeting, insecure and constantly changing present in the known. Like modernity, tradition therefore cannot be a set of anonymously-authored projects but rather practices that are flexed and transformed by bodied and situated human beings to fit and make sense of the new in the active process of becoming and being modern. The particular transformation of tradition in our late modern age has been interpreted by theorists such as Giddens and Ulrich Beck (1994) as the destruction of tradition (Giddens 1994: 91), and as being characterised by the emergence of post-traditional societies wherein the sense of the

sacred and the symbolic domain, upon which the meaning of tradition depends, has been lost. However, reading tradition through narratives of womanhood focuses our attention on the continued and even increased relevance of the symbolic in the everyday processes of being modern.

The importance of tradition to the process of making ourselves and being modern hinges on a notion of transformation and serves as a map by which we navigate the present. Tradition is not only itself being transformed through a modern interrogative perspective on the world, but at the same time it functions as the medium through which 'modern social imaginaries' (Taylor 2004) are produced through the transformation of beliefs and behaviours. Modernity can perhaps be defined as the process by which we, as embodied and situated subjects, locate ourselves in the present by means of engagement with the known and believed past, and so actively anticipate the unknown future. As changes occur in the world, so our engagements with the past are continually revised and reinterpreted, 'invented and reinvented' (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 129), in a process of making sense of the present.

The notion of transformation is one that is often used, especially in feminist theory, to denote a positive move towards the realisation of feminist aspirations. For example, in the introduction to *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, Bronwen Levy is quoted as defining transformation as 'a magical concept, alluding to change, disguise, life, growth, power, agency' (cit. in Ahmed et al 2000: 1). The editors of this collection focus both on the kinds of transformations needed by contemporary feminism and on what it is that feminists are seeking to transform, but they do not interrogate the notion of transformation itself as possibly more complex, less simply positive, than the progression of gender relations towards a feminist ideal. I am therefore reworking to some extent the most common sense of the term, stripping it of its automatic connotation of only steps taken closer to a feminist utopia, and imbuing it with a more open-ended sense. The transformations of tradition and modernity are not taken automatically to mean progress in a feminist, or indeed in any, sense; rather they may just as accurately describe loss, absence, regression. Jenny Robinson is one of the few feminist theorists to draw attention (albeit as an afterthought) to this double-sided nature of transformation. She points out that 'the nature and direction of transformation is inherently unpredictable. This is as true of psychoanalytic accounts, as it is of economic, social or political analyses of transformation' (Robinson 2000: 298).

Transformation in this sense is also more of a sure thing – where human subjects are actively creating and making sense of their world, they and the world are inevitably

being transformed, for good or ill. The vocabulary and ideas of the theoretical literature on becoming, outlined more fully in the next chapter, is useful here. Referring to ongoing mutual exchange of affect between bodies, theorists describe becoming not as a linear progression towards an already given or anticipated end, but the creation of webs of connections, through, between, around and outwards from situated and bodied human subjects in a fluid and ongoing movement. The language of becoming thus provides us with a new way of understanding how modernity is made meaningful, particularly through its construction via the body of the woman. While the idea of transformation here may not by default mean a realisation of feminist values, it does create more potential for the understanding of the everyday ideological negotiations that take place on every scale of social life in the production of the modern.

The notion of transformation appears not only in feminist theory but is hinted at also in writings on modernity, as we see in Giddens' notions of the transformation of the role of tradition, the 'transformation of intimacy' in and through modernity, and ideas of the world as being 'open to transformation by human intervention' (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 94-130). Ulrich Beck too, speaks of '"nature" [becoming] transformed into areas of action' in the context of modernity (1994: vii), and Charles Taylor refers to the gradual infiltration and transformation of social imaginaries by particular modern theories of moral order (2004: 28). The sense of transformation here is closer to the open-ended one I advocate in thinking about the lived production of these categories and indeed the potential it suggests for an infinite variety of outcomes is central to understanding the relationship between womanhood and modernity. The emphasis on modernity as transformation allows us to read change as evolutionary, continuous, cyclical, and connected, rather than as a series of breakages. Both spatially, from the local to the global (Giddens 1994: 58), and temporally, from the past to the present (with an eye to the future), lived modernities are about connection. This connection is hinted at even in theories that foreground rupture as the defining feature of modernity, but becomes far more visible and productive when modernity is understood through what the body does and how it becomes.

It is important to note that it is not only an explicitly gendered perspective that is able to recognise the significance of these links. In fact my notions of transformation draw on Charles Taylor's non-gendered ideas about the gradual production and growth of modern social imaginaries, to which I have already made reference. In speaking about the influence of theories on everyday life, Taylor suggests that 'what is originally just an idealization grows into a complex imaginary through being taken up and associated with social practices, in part traditional ones but *ones transformed by the contact*...This

process isn't one-sided, a theory making over a social imaginary...the theory is given a particular shape as the context of these practices' (2004: 29, my emphasis). The part played by theory in Taylor's paradigm can be substituted for notions of the modern and the new. As ideas of what is modern and novel come into contact with tradition and other aspects of the past, both undergo certain transformations. These connections are crystallised in representations of modern Indian womanhood, where public discourse interweaves elements of the traditional with the new and offers the potential for an alternative understanding of what it means to be modern.

To a large extent, however, it is work by certain contemporary feminists that most powerfully highlights this increased visibility of the importance of connection and transformation. Angela McRobbie considers feminism to be a fundamentally modern movement in terms of its orientation towards a better future (1984: 130-131), to which I would add that the modernity of feminism is only strengthened by the equal weighting it places on the past with regard to the importance placed on the recovery of women's histories, voices and stories, and the focus on the importance of memory and tradition in contemporary times in theoretical as well as autobiographical and fictional writing. As Ahmed et al suggest, a key aspect of feminist projects is the process of understanding 'how aspects of the past may enter into the future without either destructive repetition or denial of those features of the past which such projects might... leave behind' (2000: 6).

Similarly, as I have already remarked, Lisa Adkins' work on gender relationships in the workplace (in Britain, Germany and Japan) shows how a process of re-traditionalisation re-embeds traditional structures of power along the lines of patriarchal family structures. Adkins insists upon the importance of understanding the overlaps between the spaces of the present in which we make ourselves modern, and the spaces and practices of the traditional and the past. Alison Blunt, in her reading of modernities, memories and nostalgia through questions of home in the lives of Anglo-Indian women, shows that the past is in many ways inextricable from processes of being modern. She argues 'that a nostalgic desire for home... is oriented toward the present and the future as well as the past' (2005: 14). This echoes Rosemary Marangoly George's ideas of home (1996), with all its associations of entrenched patriarchal hierarchy and fixity, as also mobile and intensely political, and as such a key space in which modernities are produced.

These framings of modernity are different in important ways from the masculinist modernities highlighted earlier. The dimensions of modernity that Indian womanhood

foreground contrast dramatically with the four that Giddens identifies, and reinforce instead Felski's argument that modernities for women are often grounded in intimate relationships. This more open notion of where modernities are to be found allows for different experiences and constructions of the modern and rejects the implicit assumption that it is something to be imposed upon those who not fit its pre-determined mould or pathway. The notion of multiple divergent journeys rather than a single destination becomes the structuring metaphor at work.

This theorisation of the kinetic links between the ground*less*ness (or the new and unknown aspects) of modernity and its ground*ed*ness in tradition (Lash 1999) draw inspiration from Charles Taylor's idea of 'creative adaptation', the process by which the transformations and transformative narratives that constitute modernity are brought about by people 'drawing on the cultural [and also, I would of course argue, gendered] resources of their tradition' in order to take on the new practices of modernity' (2001: 183). While resisting the implosivity of postmodern theory, it also draws upon the notion within that (vast) body of work of the political potential inherent in everyday discursive performances, arguing that in the ordinary actions of daily life is located the possibility for the realisation of political, including and perhaps especially feminist, ideals. While the transformations of tradition that at least partially constitute modernity are by no means an automatic evolution towards a utopian ideal, the everyday negotiations between the traditional and the new in the processes of being modern comprise a space in which women's appropriations of the principles of modernity – freedom, autonomy, and choice – may better be seen. An attentive account of this aspect of the production of multiple cultural and gendered modernities will take the possible implications of all kinds of transformation into account, resisting agendas that prescribe stories of either victimisation or triumph, and offering instead a nuanced analysis of some of the often conflicting realities of modernity.

Conclusion

Like the category of gender more generally, that of modern Indian womanhood is one that can never be finally defined but is necessarily always in progress. The discursive spaces in which the concepts of modernity, womanhood, and national identity are made meaningful are determined within the dynamic structures of society and are therefore always flexible and open to transformation. In this chapter I have tried to think through the ways in which these concepts may be articulated so as to allow for the recognition of agencies that tend to be excluded from more mainstream theoretical paradigms.

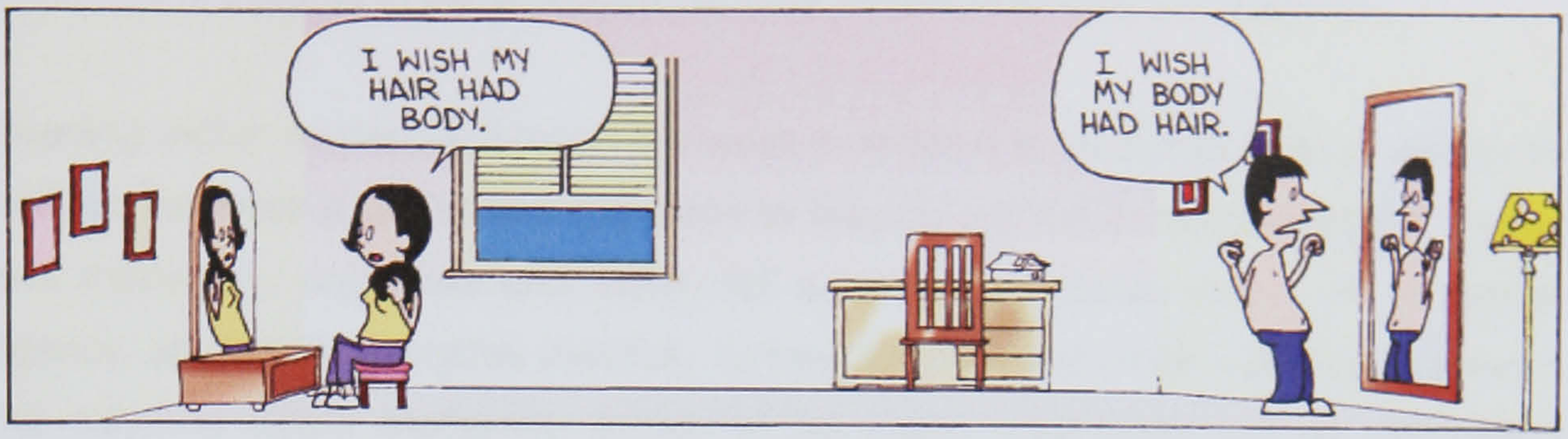
The Enlightenment emphasis on the self and subjecthood as central to questions of modernity remain profoundly influential today in the West as well as in countries such as India, where senses of being modern are taking shape that are distinctively different to those of the West but share a number of fundamental Western principles of being. While the multiple modernities model is a useful one in challenging the teleological trajectory of Enlightenment thinking and building instead an understanding of the many culturally determined manifestations of modernity in the context of twenty-first century globalisation, I argue that an explicitly gendered approach would expand and enrich such thinking. Responding to the work of both multiple modernity theorists and feminist scholars who call for attention to the gendering of modernity, I suggest that drawing the cultural and the gendered elements of modernity together in an integrated analysis can illuminate questions of what it means to be modern.

Reading modernity through contemporary productions of Indian womanhood offers a way into the ambiguous relationship between modernity and freedom, particularly on the scale of the individual. The complexities of modern womanhood make it impossible to construct an easy association between modernity and women's emancipation. Similarly, an exploration of modernity in the context of India troubles its privileged definition and articulation in the West and exposes the multiple connections and inequalities in ongoing relationships of coloniality. In addition, this strategic reading of cultural and gendered modernity interrogates the conceptualisation of modernity as characterised primarily by rupture and discontinuity and foregrounds instead the processes of evolution and transformation that make modernities meaningful within the everyday.

These questions are crystallised in the discursive spaces where the new Indian woman is constructed. I have hinted in this chapter at the centrality of the female *body* particularly in representations of modern Indian womanhood, and in chapters five, six and seven I unpack the particular thematic elements of that discursive positioning of the body as simultaneously a symbol, a site, and an agent of modernity. Laying the conceptual ground for these analyses, I explore in the next chapter how the body might be most productively theorised so as to understand its meanings as a primary expression of modern womanhood.

Chapter Three

Making the Body Modern



As recently as 2000, Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling have noted that 'While the conditions of modernity and postmodernity have come under intensive scrutiny in recent years..., relatively little attention has been devoted to the *corporeal constituents* of these conditions' (2000: 1, authors' emphasis). This lack, they argue, 'acts as an impediment to a satisfactory sociological understanding of modernity' (ibid.), since the corporeal lies at the heart of society and indeed makes possible the very existence of the latter. It is my argument here that the living and dynamic body – physically and culturally produced – is central to modernity or the condition of being modern. The body constitutes not just the site upon which the individual comes to be, but the individual him/ herself, rendering the modern human subject indivisible from the body. Taking the body as the gateway into questions of what it means to be modern, then, constitutes a turn to what is in many ways the very basis of modernity, the point from which modern structures and institutions, modernisation projects and modernising movements originate.

Reading modernity through the body makes it difficult to ignore the gendered nature of the former. Although many analyses manage to occlude them, imagining an implicitly generic or androgynous body, the most immediately apparent characteristics of most bodies are the ways in which they are gendered. Understanding modernity as profoundly bodied therefore demands that we also recognise the ways in which modernity is produced according to masculinities and femininities, and recognise its resultant heterogeneity. I suggested in the previous chapter that women's bodies in particular are deeply implicated in meanings of modernity, and indeed underpin certain notions central to both its theory and practice. The female body has of course long served as a representation and a crystallisation of dominant social values and ideologies, and this remains true in the context of the modern. The female Indian body, which is my central concern here as a site of the production of modern Indian womanhood, is powerfully illustrative of this. As a body that is veiled or exposed,

sexualised or deified, modified, adorned, and idealised, the body of the Indian woman is deeply embedded in religious, moral, cultural and nationalist value systems, all of which are implicated in the production of both Indian modernity and tradition.

Reading Indian modernity through the ways in which it is produced through and by the body is therefore a productive approach to teasing out the entanglements of tradition and modernity, and East and West. As a multi-dimensional site – of symbolism, agency, aspiration, everyday practice, cultural identity, and more – the body is key to the ways in which modernity comes to be made meaningful not as anonymous processes but rather as ways of being and becoming, as outlined earlier. The modernities that are read through the lens of the body are not divorced from the everyday realties of human agency but inseparable from them, and their variegated patterns along the lines of gender, race, class, and so on, are more easily recognised and productively problematised.

To begin to identify and explain the multiple roles of the sexed and gendered human body in the production of modernity, it is necessary to explore just what is meant by 'the body', and what it is about the body that provides the most fertile ground for an understanding of what it means to be modern. The centrality of the female body to the production of Indian modernity is neither self-explanatory nor easily articulated. To begin with, the body is a contested concept which is fundamental to both Western and Eastern philosophies of the self and has been receiving ever-increasing amounts of attention in recent social theory. As Kathy Davis puts it: 'Conferences on the body abound and no annual meeting in the social science, cultural studies or humanities would be complete without at least one session devoted to the body. A whole series of "body" books has emerged' and questions around the body can now also be addressed in a dedicated interdisciplinary journal, *Body and Society*. It is evident that the body has clearly captured the imagination of contemporary scholars (1997:1).

This academic interest in the body has perhaps only deepened the sense of mystery that surrounds it. Gayatri Spivak hints at the theoretical unapproachability of the body when she says 'If one really thinks about the body as such, there is no possible outline of the body as such... The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it' (Spivak 1994: 177). Many scholars have however approached the question of the body, what it is and what it does, and offered conceptualisations of the body that can illuminate the ways in which we think about the self, about individual autonomy, about our connectedness to the world. In this chapter I seek to draw from and build upon these theoretical models of how we might understand the body and its

importance to understanding the social world. I aim to develop a conceptualisation of the body that will help to equip the analyses in later chapters of how the female body comes to be constructed as modern in the public imagination of contemporary India.

To this end, I begin this chapter by tracing some of the most dominant strands of body philosophy in both Western and Indian schools of thought. These patterns of thinking help to inform the following two sections, which address the place of the body in contemporary scholarship, both in general social theory and specifically within feminist theory. In this sense the first quarter, or thereabouts, of this chapter is structured for the sake of clarity more along historical or chronological than thematic lines. After a section addressing some of the specifics of the body within feminist theory, the second half of the chapter focuses on the idea of the body as a becoming, a characteristic of some of the most recent theorisations of the body and one that in fact resonates with aspects of certain much older theories of the body and the self that I highlight in the next section. Finally I offer a way into the body that seeks to avoid some of the more unproductive debates (often in the sense of ending in stalemate) on what the body is, and suggest instead how we might re-focus attention so as to usefully read the ways in which the modern female body comes to be meaningful in contemporary Indian society.

Western and Eastern Bodies

In contemporary academic enquiry, the question of how to approach the body in the context of India, like that of modernity in the same context, needs to be situated at least partially against the backdrop of Western theory. In this section I juxtapose dominant Western conceptualisations of the body, seen as originating primarily around the Enlightenment, with Indian philosophies that have been pervasive and enduring over centuries. This is necessarily a brief outline and I aim mainly to draw out specific aspects of each that will be useful in developing later in this chapter an understanding of how womanhood is constructed as modern upon and through representations of the body in contemporary India.

Any attempt to theorise the body within a broadly Western context cannot escape the need to acknowledge the profound influence of the seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes on this field, whose dualist philosophies have been some of the most enduring ideas in the history of Western academic thought. Although there is great debate as to whether the influences of Cartesian dualism are fairly attributed the writings of Descartes, there can be no doubt that dominant narratives of Western philosophy position his work as the primary source of these ideas. Following Susan Bordo's understanding of the feminist critique of Cartesian thinking, I therefore note

that the object of such a critique is 'the dominant cultural and historical rendering of Cartesianism, not Descartes "himself"' (Bordo 1999: 2).

This rendering is summed up by Desmond Clarke thus: 'human beings are composed of two distinct substances, a material substance and an immaterial substance, and the latter is a necessary and sufficient condition for (most) mental events' (2003: 1). This conceptual separation of the mind or soul from the body is encapsulated in what is Descartes', and indeed also arguably Western philosophy's, most famous pronouncement: 'Cogito ergo sum', or 'I am thinking (je pense), therefore I exist' (1954: 31). Descartes goes on to argue that 'even if the body were not there at all, the soul would be just what it is' (ibid: 32). The elevation of the mind over the body is thus central to Cartesian thinking and, as I discuss later in this chapter, has particular import for feminist work since the linking of the woman to the body, and the body to nature, continues to have significant impact on both academic and popular discourses.

Stanley Clarke neatly articulates the effect of the celebration and prioritisation of reason on the social positioning of women:

> On one side, it explicitly permits reason to justify equality of treatment for men and women, simply because reason is present in all of us. On the other side, this very same reason is defined in such a way as to exclude consideration of any characteristics historically associated with women. The result is a repressive equality on masculine terms and the obliteration of gender difference. The differences that women historically exhibit result in their being classified as less than rational and remove them from the requirements of equal treatment justified by Cartesian reason.
>
> (1999: 83-84)

Cartesian notions not only underpin understandings of gender hierarchies through their positioning of the mind and the body as parts of the self, but have even contributed to shaping the disciplinary boundaries of much Western scholarship. That is to say that an emphasis on the superiority of reason and objectivity over experience and intuition is key to the separation of arts and humanities disciplines from those of the natural sciences in contemporary academia. Modernity and Cartesian dualism are thus intimately connected, but that is not to say that the latter offers the only conceptual route by which to reach an understanding of the former.

In the second half of this chapter, therefore, I offer a reconceptualisation of the body in the light of certain new philosophies of the body that offer an alternative vision. It is my argument that the dualisms that dominate contemporary theorisations of the body can

limit the recognition and understanding of its political potential, particularly in the context of a feminist project of expressing a woman-centred vision. The question of agency as a necessary part of being modern, and as central particularly to a feminist politics of modernity, demands that the rendering of the body as the passive element of the self is not perpetuated. As Susan Bordo has argued, it is important to note that a 'philosophical acknowledgement of the limitations of the masculine Cartesian model... [does not imply] that detachment, clarity, and precision will cease to have enormous value in the process of understanding. Rather, our culture needs to reconceive the status of what Descartes assigned to the shadows' (Bordo 1999: 3).

Although the Cartesian paradigm of the body has dominated Western theory, both specifically in thinking about the self and far more broadly to the very structuring of academic disciplinary system, it was by no means the only one available even in Descartes' own time. A number of contemporary theorists who seek to understand the body outside of Cartesian boundaries, and with whose work I engage more deeply in the last sections of this chapter, trace a theoretical lineage back to Descartes' contemporary, Baruch Spinoza, rather than Descartes himself. In contrast to Descartes' dualism, Spinoza takes a monist view of the world. In Part I of *The Ethics* Spinoza lays out what Elizabeth Grosz calls his 'most fundamental assumption' (1994:10): that 'only one substance can be granted in the universe, and that substance is absolutely infinite' and indivisible (Part I, Prop. XIV). This infinite substance, which is God, comprises an infinite number of attributes, of which only two are known to human beings. These are thought and extension, which correspond respectively to mind and body.

Since mind and body are of a singular substance in Spinoza's paradigm, they cannot be conceived of as separate. Furthermore, the body can be known not through its essence but only through its modifications, or the 'modes... whereby the parts of the human body, and consequently, the human body as a whole are affected' (*Ethics* Part II, Prop. XXVIII). Grosz expresses this idea thus: 'the body must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being. The body is both active and productive, although not originary: its specificity is a function of its degrees and modes of organization, which are in turn the results of consequences of its ability to be affected by other bodies' (1994: 12).

Spinoza's conceptualisation of the body has resonances with elements of ancient Indian philosophies of the self. The two bodies of thought that are of most interest here are Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. Under those deceptively simple headings are

numerous and often divergent schools of philosophy, but again I aim here merely to trace particular dominant strands of theory that are relevant to my overall aim in this chapter, while seeking to avoid false generalisations. Hindu and Buddhist thought share a common origin in India, but are crucially opposed on the central issue that is the question of the self. For the conceptualisations of the body in these two schools of thought, the concept of atman or the Self serves as the point at which these two major schools of thought diverge.

Hindu thought, broadly understood, understands the mind and body to be both forms of matter, or prakriti. Prakriti is the feminine principle of life governing the universe while purusha is the masculine principle of spirit, or pure consciousness. Although not visible or tangible, the mind is, according to the Bhagavad-Gita, of the same substance as the physical elements: 'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason and egoism - these constitute the eightfold division of My Nature' (VII-4[8]). This union of body and mind in Hindu philosophy is however part of a fundamentally dualist worldview, in that the matter that comprises body and mind is essentially different to the soul. Body and mind are temporary and neither enters into the soul's cycle of reincarnation. The soul, or 'atman', also and perhaps more accurately translated as the self, is what occupies bodies and minds in each successive incarnation. A popular analogy for this understanding is that of the body and mind as a suit of clothes that sits upon the atman, but can and will eventually be changed for another (and another and another until the attainment of Nirvana).

Atman is considered to be of the same substance as Brahman, the eternal, infinite, transcendent and all-embracing principle that is the ultimate reality, beginning and end of everything. The Hindu philosopher Sankara of the Advaita Vedanta school of philosophy, narrates in the voice of atman, describing the self as 'ever free, ever pure, changeless, immovable, immortal, imperishable and bodiless I have no knowledge or ignorance in Me who am the nature of the Light of Pure Consciousness only' (*Sankaracharya* cit. in Halliburton 2002: 1126). Therefore, despite the shared unity of substance or matter between body and mind in Hindu thought, there remains a problem in these philosophies that is similar to that which remains in Western theory due to the legacy of Cartesian dualism. Although the 'body is never rejected in favour of mind as the authentic self' (Koller 1993: 47), it is in fact together *with* the mind thus rejected, while the true self is one with Brahman and is therefore transcendent. 'Thus, whereas modern Western philosophy faces a problem in trying to relate body and

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[8] An online version of the Gita is accessible at http://www.krishna.com/gitaframeset/gita_frameset.html.

mind, in the [Hindu] tradition a similar problem appears in trying to relate Self and body-mind' (ibid.).

In contrast, Buddhist thought is characterised, indeed perhaps even defined, by its fundamental rejection of the doctrine of atman-brahman. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the first Buddha or Enlightened One, represented an explicit 'revolt against... brahmanism as it spread eastwards along the Gangetic valley' (Mohanty 2002: 3). In contrast to the foundational Hindu concept of the true self, or atman, Buddhism is founded upon the doctrine of the no-self. There is no soul, indeed no person, rather 'Every "personal" event appears in accordance with past conditions (previous events) in a "stream" of successive elements. The "person" can be found neither in any of the particular elements of this "stream" nor in some "essence" beyond it; it is the stream itself' (Hoffman 1980: 61).

Buddhism then, is non-dualistic not only in that it sees mind and body as one, but in that it understands also the individual self to be one with the 'other'. The central idea is of a constant flow of consciousness, the 'stream' that Hoffman describes, which constitutes all life and is to be understood as processual or evolutionary, as Robin Cooper shows in his analysis of Buddhism and the evolution of the mind (1996). This is markedly similar to Spinoza's understanding of bodies becoming affected, emphasising again the potential for bodily agency in non-dualist philosophies of the self (or indeed the no-self).

Although thus fundamentally different, Buddhist, and to a lesser degree Hindu schools of thought both have certain resonances within the new Western philosophies of the body, which I discuss in the second half of this chapter, in their understanding of the body and mind as united in 'a living process that integrates a complex variety of mental and physical processes' (Koller 1993: 45). With Grosz, I want to suggest that a focus on the continual becoming suggested in both these and more contemporary philosophies 'may prove more fruitful and useful for feminist purposes' than the Cartesian narratives that have been dominant in scholarly thinking about the self. In particular, conceptualising the body as active becoming may allow greater space for the recognition of the ways in which the female body serves as an agent of modernity rather than its passive object.

The Corporeal Turn

Notwithstanding the Western and Eastern theorisations of the body discussed here, social theory as a modern discipline has not placed much emphasis on the body as a

subject of enquiry until recently. From this existence as 'something of an absent presence' (Shilling 1993: 11) in social theory, the body has unfolded into late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholarship as an intensely contested idea. It should be noted that the relative absence of the body in theoretical writing has not been absolute; Bryan Turner (1991) remarks upon the fact that anthropological studies since the nineteenth century have placed significant emphasis on the human body as an important lens through which to regard and explore social and cultural worlds. It is only relatively recently, however, that the body has been directly problematised, as worthy of study in its own right. The implicit question driving much of this enquiry has been simply 'What is the body?'.

This is a question whose difficulty seems to increase almost in direct proportion to the amount of investigation undertaken into it, as Turner indicates in the introduction to the first edition of his seminal work *The Body and Society*:

> In writing this study of the body, I have become increasingly less sure of what the body is... The body is a material organism, but also a metaphor; it is the trunk apart from head and limbs, but also the person (as in 'anybody' and 'somebody'). The body may also be an aggregate of bodies... There are also immaterial bodies... persons with two bodies... heavenly bodies... The body is our most immediate and omnipresent experience of reality and its solidity, but it may also be subjectively elusive... The body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing – a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity.
>
> (1984: 42-43)

Before I outline very briefly some of the ways in which social theorists have begun to approach the body in the simultaneous materiality and intangibility that Turner describes, I offer some reasons for the lack of attention paid until recently. Part of the reason for what Shilling famously calls its 'absent presence' in pre-1980 academic writing, and in some ways even in contemporary theory on bodies and embodiment (a point I will address shortly), may be a more fundamental absence of the body. Drew Leder describes the nature of the body as both 'the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives', and also as being 'essentially characterised by absence'. Leder qualifies this idea of absence by pointing out that it 'is not simply a deficit but a constitutive principle of the real. The inexhaustible depth of the perceptual object, ever promising more than I can see, is precisely what lends it the texture of reality, distinguishing it from the flat image or hallucination' (1990: 13).

This reality-producing aspect of the body's absence notwithstanding, the lack of theoretical attention paid to the body may therefore be explained at least in part by the unconscious, everyday assumption of our bodies as stable entities, fixed points of reference in a constantly changing world. Leder describes the body with reference to 'the Husserlian notion of the *nullpoint*', explaining that 'No matter where I physically move, and even in the midst of motion, my body retains the status of an absolute "here" around which all "theres" are arranged' (ibid). The body is thus simultaneously the origin and terminus of perception, thereby itself eluding a position as object of that perception .

If the outcome of this absence of the body from our everyday perception may be described as its 'passive' omission from the general consciousness, the second is perhaps a more active or deliberate omission, or even an erasure. In everyday discourse as in academic theorisations and disciplinary divisions, the body has been systematically positioned as inferior to the mind in a hierarchy most often attributed to the philosophy of Descartes, as described in the previous section. Cartesian dualism is generally seen as the primary reason for the absence of the body in the Western social sciences, but Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco advise caution since a hasty labelling of Descartes as the '*malin génie'* denies what Gordon Baker and Katherine Morris suggest is a largely fictional relationship – in the sense of 'a superstition [rather than] a mistake' (1996: 2) – between this version of dualism and the actual writings of Descartes. Whether this dualism can be directly attributed to Descartes or whether it should be understood as what Baker and Morris call the 'Cartesian Legend', it cannot be denied that, as I remarked in the previous section, this notion has had and continues to have enormous impacts on the ways in which we conceive of the body. It is these impacts that are of particular interest rather than the 'correct' origin of Cartesianism.

As I hinted in the introduction to this chapter, numerous social science disciplines in the Western academy have in the last few decades been characterised by a burgeoning of interest in questions of corporeality and embodiment. This move has come to be called 'the corporeal turn'. Among the very first sociological texts marking this theoretical and empirical turn to the body is Bryan Turner's *Body and Society* (1996). In his introduction to the text, Turner points out that 'few social theorists have taken the embodiment of persons seriously' and that the result of this is 'a somewhat ethereal conceptualization of our being-in-the-world' (ibid: 37). To begin to remedy this, Turner seeks to articulate how the body might be approached as a focus of sociological investigation, and numerous theorists have since taken up his call to do the same. In

fact, in the two decades since this work turned social theorists' attention to the productive problem of the body, the number of academic texts on the topic has exploded, and the body has become a hot topic of discussion in the disciplines of sociology, philosophy, theology, geography and literary studies, among others.

The foregrounding of the body in these disciplines marks an significant shift from the assumption that the body belongs primarily to the natural sciences. Rather than a mere physical object, albeit a fascinating one, the body has become a major subject for social and cultural enquiry. The contexts of modernity no doubt prompt and sustain such enquiry, as the meanings surrounding the body within these contexts are constantly and rapidly proliferating. As Chris Shilling remarks, however, 'It is important to note that interest in the body is not new' but that 'the position of the body within contemporary popular culture reflects an unprecedented *individualization* of the body' (1993: 1, author's emphasis).

Such individualisation involves body modifications through relatively subtle processes such as exercise, diet, and the use of skincare products and makeup, as well as through more extreme changes such as tattoos, piercings, and cosmetic surgery. All of these serve to mark the individual body out as socially important in multiple cultural contexts. Consumer culture, fashion, and an emphasis on sexualities dominate public discourses of all kinds, while violated bodies are an almost unavoidable part of the everyday in narratives of war, terrorism, and risk. As Hancock et al put it, the body makes itself

> ever-present in social and political life, be it in the shape of a battered woman, a terminated fetus, a victim of torture of televised war, a proud celebration of womanhood, disability, colour or homosexuality, an organ in transit for transplantation, a human-machine stepping on the moon, a sample of DNA under the microscope, a man who was a woman or vice versa, a body transformed by diet, exercise or the surgeon's knife, a homeless person camped on the streets of the world's richest nation, a mass grave, or another world record smashed.
>
> (2000:10)

Social research into questions of corporeality and embodiment and their representations and implications, have addressed all of the above substantive topics and more. Contextualising such individualisation in India, however, highlights the distinctly classed nature of such processes and theoretical interest in them, and of course of modernity itself. While the individual bodies of members of the middle- and upper-classes are increasingly foregrounded in India, the massed bodies of the

destitute more often slip under the radar of modern individualisation processes. Exploring the body within the specific context of Indian narratives of modernity may thus illuminate some of the darker spaces of enquiry into these questions, but whether in the context of India or elsewhere, all forays into the issues of corporeality implicitly raise the question of what it means to have, to be, or to become a body. These issues, and indeed the corporeal turn itself, have particular impetus within the realm of feminist discourse where the explicitly articulated politics of sex and gender further intensify the already energetic debates around the body. The specific role of the female body in the formation and articulation of the self is of course of primary importance in this thesis too. For this reason I begin in the following section to identify and trace the importance of the body within feminist theory in order to fulfil this chapter's aim of developing a conceptualisation of the body that may provide greater potential for sympathy towards a woman-centred perspective than dominant theories have been able to do.

Feminism and the Body

Both within and beyond the corporeal turn of the social science disciplines listed above, the body has long been a central focus of feminist political thought and action. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott suggest that 'since the 1970s, the body has figured, at least implicitly, in feminist work' (2001: 10). Because the body, both material and imagined, has always been so central to women's oppression, 'it is hard to come across feminist writing that *is not* at some point connected to issues of the body' (Brook 1999: xi, author's emphasis). Therefore, while in terms of social theory as a whole the contemporary emphasis on the body may have been seen relatively straightforwardly as a (re)turn to or 'a recuperation of the body' (Witz 2000: 2), in the context of feminist theoretical and political projects the body has had a far more complex role than that of a concept simply neglected or embraced.

In fact, prominent among the social transformations peculiar to the period of 'late' or 'high' modernity that have been offered as contributing factors to the corporeal turn in academia, is the politicisation of the body which owes a great deal to feminist writing and activism. The foregrounding of women's bodies as sites of oppression and patriarchal control has been a key factor in focusing attention on the importance of bodies in everyday life and on the lack of theoretical attention paid to them in non-feminist writing. The dialogue between feminist theory and more general social theory has however been one of mutual (if not always mutually beneficial) exchange. While feminist work has had significant effects on the ways in which social theorists conceive of the body, the dominant Cartesian paradigm of corporeal analysis has also played an influential role in the structuring of feminist thought. Cartesian dualism has played a

significant structuring role in the ways in which women have been represented, understood and positioned in Western and other societies. This is true not only in the sphere of academia but also in the wider social realm. Consequently, feminist theorists who have sought to address these realities of women and womanhood are not only themselves embedded in these patterns of social construction but also engage with them directly in academic debate.

The legacy of Cartesian dualism has particular implications for feminism, in that the 'historical privileging of the conceptual over the corporeal' (Longhurst 1995: 97) to which it has given rise, is manifested in the gender hierarchies that have long dominated both everyday life and feminist analyses of social structures. Women have been identified with, and indeed reduced to, particular understandings of the female body. They have in many cultures been understood to be governed and defined by the reproductive cycles of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Feminist scholars have pointed out the inherent misogyny of much public discourse that imagines women's bodies to be essentially 'leaky', 'sticky', even 'dirty'. As Raka Ray points out, the onset of menarche remains traumatic for many women in contemporary urban India due to just such discourses. Although the public rituals marking this event 'no longer exist in most of urban India', the menstruating female body is seen as a 'nonhygienic private body that requires products of modernity to keep it adequately clean' (2001: 492).

Following the Cartesian, or more generally the Enlightenment, philosophy of the self that I outlined earlier, the attributes of their messy bodies tie women firmly to nature (which is definitively separated from the mind or the soul), such that women are rendered incapable of transcendence into the realm of rational thought and activity. Therefore, as Robyn Longhurst points out, 'woman is not merely subject to the body' but 'woman *is* the body' (ibid: 99, author's emphasis). For man, in contrast, the body is understood to be a mere container, a receptacle for his reason, consciousness and active intellectual engagement with the world and with nature. Man is able to perceive more purely and understand more clearly because of his ability to function as what is implicitly a disembodied being, and he is thus 'naturally' superior to woman.

Although such constructions may be thought of as mediaeval and decidedly pre- or non-modern, they persist in contemporary symbols such as 'Mother Earth' or 'Mother Nature'. Other clear associations between woman and nature are exemplified in everyday references to the earth or to nature as 'virgin', to land as being 'fertile', 'raped' by 'man', or as 'nurturing life'. Some eco-feminists have reinforced these associations

through an insistent claim that women have a privileged role in environmental restoration. One example of such arguments is to be found in the work of the Indian feminist Vandana Shiva, who is at the forefront of these debates. Shiva argues that 'Women, as victims of the violence of patriarchal forms of development, have risen against it to protect nature and preserve their survival and sustenance' (1988: xiv-xx) Furthermore, she locates this struggle within the force that is prakriti, which as I have already described is the essentially 'feminine principle from which all life arises' (ibid: xviii) in the Hindu worldview. In this way, Shiva clearly argues for an understanding of womanhood as inherently privileged to understand, protect and sustain nature and by extension to 'make justice and peace possible' (ibid: xx).

Shiva's standpoint has been criticised by many who see as problematic her 'often explicit and often implicit equivalence between women and nature, as if all women are by definition conservationist, life-enhancing and equity-seeking' (Kothari 1988: ix). The connections between the figure of the woman (either as victim or as saviour) and nature that are evident in her writings are however repeatedly inscribed in multiple discourses, and this is apparent within both sets of the interweaving cultures that constitute my main concern in this thesis – Indian and Western.[9] It is largely because of this historical conflation of woman with nature and the body, and the consequent devaluing of women that is evident in both theoretical writings and in the lived materialities of women, that the body has long been a site of conceptual struggle for feminists seeking to validate women's experiences and agencies in the public arena. However, while feminists have long challenged the gender hierarchies that are the effect of the power relations operating through the mind (or soul) and body divide, the dualisms lying at the root of these hierarchies have only recently become the subject of particularly intensive interrogation and re-conceptualisation.

Feminist scholarship in the West has been characterised by its tendency to operate at either end of the dualistic tension between mind and body, an opposition which has also of course characterised more general theoretical work on the body. Broadly speaking, Indian feminism has had a markedly different history and thus different focal points to that of the West. Women's movements and feminist/ nationalist activism have long had a strong presence in India, but if the literature on such activism is to be separated from conceptual feminist writing, the latter appears 'sparse', as Maitrayee Chauduri points out (2004: xi). Or, as Meenakshi Thapan argues somewhat defensively: 'Feminist scholarship in India is less concerned with the refinement of

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[9] For a very comprehensive account of the relationship between the ideas of woman and nature in Western thought and culture, see Neuschler (2001).

theoretical nuances and more with the immediacy of women's experience in the everyday and with the urgency of contemporary issues that need to be addressed' (1997: 13). An alternative reading of the literature, however, might suggest rather that it is 'impossible to separate the history of action from the history of ideas' in this context (Chaudhuri: xii, emphasis omitted). Indian feminist writings on issues of the body, often focusing on culturally-specific issues such as sati, dowry, female foeticide and infanticide, and so on, have played key roles in shaping feminist agendas. They may thus contribute to Western theory an avenue of exploration into the body that escapes the dualistic tensions I describe more fully below, and I therefore draw upon some such writings later in this chapter.

To lay out more clearly the dominant aspects of explicit attempts to build a feminist conceptualisation of the body, Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco's (2005) summary of the primary approaches to these questions in recent social theory is helpful. Fraser and Greco suggest that despite the extensive literature that has been produced on the body, there remain a limited number of fundamental approaches that have been adopted to address the questions of what bodies are and how best to conceptualise their relationships with other bodies. They identify three principal perspectives from which the body has been theorised, although it should be noted that these have given rise to numerous and sometimes very subtly distinguished engagements with both materially and discursively produced bodies.

First there is the perspective that apprehends 'the body as something we *are* (the body as subject)'. This viewpoint gives rise to the categorisation – or accusation – of particular feminist discussions of the body as 'essentialist' and also includes what have been termed 'foundationalist' or 'phenomenological' approaches to the body. Second, there is the understanding of 'the body as something we *have* (the body as object)' which could broadly be termed 'constructionist' (Fraser and Greco 2005: 4, authors' emphasis). With reference to the latter but with relevance to both theoretical categories, Alan Radley makes the point that 'it is doubtful whether [the term 'social constructionism'] defines any one theoretical position; instead, it covers a range of theories' (1995: 4). Although it is important thus to recognise the internal differentiation of each stance, Fraser and Greco's descriptions foreground the central commonality in each and highlight their various manifestations as constituting two generally separate trends within social theory which, although in many ways fundamentally opposed, share a reliance upon the Cartesian legacy of dualism, a problem that I address in due course. Leaving aside for the moment the third perspective, I want to examine here the feminist articulations of each of the above two approaches to the body.

Running parallel to the 'body we have/ body we are' visions of corporeality, the ideas of essentialism and social constructionism are expressed most clearly in the debates around the sex/gender distinction in feminist theory. The introduction into social theory of the concept of gender and specifically its constructed nature (and therefore also the possibility of deconstructing and reconstructing it), is exemplified by Simone de Beauvoir's resonant statement that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. De Beauvoir elaborates on this famous point by suggesting that: 'No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature' (1953: 295).

It is in this claim that as Donna Haraway suggests 'all the modern feminist meanings of gender have roots' (1991: 131). This radical suggestion in the 1950s of the constructed nature of manhood and womanhood opened up distinctively new spaces in feminist theory for the understanding of the differences and inequalities between men and women as the consequences of cultural and discursive inscriptions upon their bodies, rather than as the effects of essential biological (genetic) difference. A distinction is thus drawn in social constructionist thinking 'between the material body and its social/ cultural representations' (Brook 1999: 11), or between sex and gender, with the latter taking significant precedence in explaining the social world.

I want to suggest that the constructionist perspective on the body echoes the Cartesian paradigm in its separation of the biologically given from the socially, culturally or intellectually constructed. This is not to deny the importance of recognising the constructed nature of gender identities and other social structures. Rather it is to argue that too heavy or exclusive an emphasis on the constructed nature of the self can perpetuate the privileging of mind over body. Not only has such a paradigm historically been used to exclude women from the realm of knowledge and transcendence, as I have already discussed, but such a reading of the self disallows a space for bodily agency in making social meaning. To put it another way, while the mind is active – constructive and inscriptive – the body is seen as 'a blank page, an unmarked text, a *tabula rasa*' (Grosz 1994: 119), of which almost anything might be made.

In contrast to social constructionist understandings is a feminist essentialism which explicitly operates from the same point as the 'Cartesian', masculinist essentialist thinking that understands women as defined by and through their bodies, but which seeks to reclaim women's bodies from the history of oppression associated with the latter. By way of example, the eco-feminist positions discussed earlier would fall into

this category in their privileging of women as essentially, naturally, biologically equipped for environmental recuperative projects. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson view such an approach as problematic given what they see as its embracing of a model that constitutes the conceptual core of a tradition of women's oppression, as well as what they consider to be the ahistorical and acultural analyses to which it gives rise. For example, they identify Shulamith Firestone's (1970) appeals for the understanding of sexism as underpinned by the biological differences between men and women, as 'essentialist and monocausal' (1990: 28). Fraser and Nicholson criticise Nancy Chodorow's (1978) work on motherhood on the same grounds, arguing that 'the idea of a cross-cultural, deep sense of self, specified differently for women and for men, becomes problematic when given any specific context' (1990: 30).

In the view of critics such as these, the definition of women by means of bodily functions or potentialities such as reproductive abilities is suspect, since it implicitly excludes from the category of 'woman', or at least renders deficient, those unable or unwilling to bear children (Brook 1999: 8). Multiple further exclusions have thus been seen to be perpetrated, particularly in Western discourse, in totalising notions of 'woman' which can erase differences of race, nationality, colonial history, sexual orientation, religion and class through their lack of attention to the multiple realities of diversely situated women. It is important to note however the arguments that these exclusions are not necessarily intrinsic to the foundational principles or ideas of a feminist understanding of bodies as 'something we are', but rather emerge from the ways in which these have been discussed, implemented or (mis)understood. Alison Assiter, for example, through close readings of Firestone's and Chodorow's work (Assiter 1996: 23-29), shows Fraser and Nicholson's claims against their work to be questionable, and demonstrates that while their writings may be problematic in certain areas, the charges against them of essentialism and ahistoricism do not hold.

However, because of these and related dangers perceived to inhere in biologically-based understandings of women, the essentialist corner has become a risky one to hold in contemporary academia. Such risks are highlighted by Elizabeth Wilson's description of Alison Assiter's *Enlightened Women*, an important part of which, as I have just indicated, demands a positive re-evaluation of 'essentialist' theories, as a 'brave' project 'which goes against the grain of current orthodoxies' (Assiter 1996: back cover). Thus it is, as Wilson argues elsewhere, that essentialist stances are often qualified by the adjectives 'tactical' or 'strategic', and that the biological body is touched on 'only lightly, discreetly, hygienically' (cit. in Fraser and Greco 2005: 15). A reluctance on the part of many contemporary feminists to 'compromise' their social

constructionist positions by venturing into the dangerous waters of essentialism thus widens the gulf between the two fields, which in turn further reinforces the mind/ body and sex/ gender dualisms that are in fact implicated in the undermining of the feminist project.

As the descriptions I have given of these two categories may suggest, constructionist and essentialist approaches to the question of the body represent what has been one of the most fundamentally divisive areas in contemporary feminist theory. Social constructionist understandings of the body have dominated this field of enquiry both in India and the West and continue to do so today, while 'essentialist' accounts have been accused of collusion with systems of patriarchal domination. Vicky Kirby makes the important point that the oppositional debates between essentialist and constructionist positions within feminist theory have become 'increasingly sterile' (1991:4), and Robyn Longhurst (1997), like Monica Gatens (1991), argues that 'the distinction between these two approaches to embodiment might not be as straightforward as it is often assumed' (Longhurst 1997: 489).

Furthermore, although they are positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum of (at least Western) feminist thought, social constructionism and feminist essentialism are both problematic in that they are underpinned at some level by a notion of the physical body as 'politically and materially *static*, while political and material *malleability* is reserved for the "cultural" body' (Fraser and Greco 2005: 9). Part of what renders each of these positions deficient, therefore, despite their internal variations, is an implicit value placed either upon the material or upon the social body, and a lack of attention to the dynamism that in fact characterises both the physical and the imagined body. I would therefore argue that the active role of the multi-dimensional body in the processes of making and making sense out of the world, has been inadequately theorised in feminist work. Even where connection and integration between the body and mind are insisted upon, the theorisation of two sets of processes – physical and social/ cultural – as separate and unequal, inevitably creates a two-tier hierarchy. As long as we take a theoretical starting point within this paradigm of division, there can be no real escape from it, but what Anne Witz calls the 'new feminist philosophies of the body' (2000: 1) have identified and begun to disturb this reliance on the mind/ body and sex/ gender oppositions.

The Body as a Becoming

These new feminist theories constitute a significant part of the wider corporeal turn in Western social theory more generally, and they share with the non-feminist analyses in

this field a desire to conceptualise gender and human bodies beyond the constraints of binary thinking. These anti-dualistic trends represent a significant shift in feminist thinking on the meaning and value of women's bodies. Neither denying the differences between men and women nor uncritically celebrating them, certain contemporary feminists propose an integrated understanding of body and mind that conceives of gender in important new ways.

From among these, the work of Elizabeth Grosz has been enormously influential. Drawing on and interrogating the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Foucault, among others, Grosz (1994) elaborates a radical new feminist politics of the body that eludes the traps and circularities of binaries. Judith Butler (1990, 1993), too, has had tremendous impact on recent thinking about the body, and I engage particularly with her theories of the performativity of the gendered body in the following section of this chapter. Writing with (and against) Grosz and Butler, other contemporary feminist theorists seeking to conceptualise the body as primary but also as historical, cultural, and most importantly active, include Vicky Kirby (1997); Gayatri Spivak (1985), notwithstanding her claims (cited earlier) to being unable to approach the body; and Moira Gatens (1996), to name a few.

I have suggested that in dominant Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment scholarship, attempts to theorise the body have been caught in the tension between the mind on the one hand, and the body on the other. An underlying assumption has been that the two are essentially, substantially, different – albeit perhaps somehow fully integrated. These ideas have been at the crux of philosophical attempts to understand our selves and the nature of the relationship between us and that which is not-us, and the prevailing focus of feminist theory in Western scholarship attests, as I have indicated, to the apparently vital importance of this distinction in understanding how women's subjectivities may be produced and valued. For this reason the attempts within recent philosophies and sociologies of the body, specifically gendered or not, to theorise embodiment and corporeality beyond the bounds of the mind/ body dualism, constitute a major shift from dominant assumptions and theories that have become commonsensical.

Those philosophies of the body in the writings of the theorists named above, which take an explicitly feminist perspective, constitute an important strand of the non-dualistic theories of the body that are being developed in contemporary scholarship. They not only resist dualistic paradigms but actively and deliberately operate beyond them. In contrast to the feminist literature that remains embedded in Cartesian

understandings of mind or soul as both separate from the body and superior to it, this alternative model resists the image of the body as passive or inert matter and displaces the long-running debate over the differences and connections between body and mind, soul or Self. It offers a more productive vision of the body in that it allows us to move beyond these dualisms in which theorisations of the body have long been entrenched. In so doing we avoid some of the pitfalls of the broadly termed 'essentialist' and 'constructionist' tendencies within feminist thought, and open up the possibility of a new understanding of the multiple ways in which the body becomes meaningful in everyday life, as itself an agent of such meaning as well as a site of inscription. Understanding the modern body as itself a dynamic becoming thus opens up the ways in which modernity too may be read an active and human-centred process of becoming.

The defining characteristic of the new philosophies of the body may therefore be expressed as a shift from attempts to conceptualise the body either as something we are or something we have, to borrow Fraser and Greco's phrasing once again, to an attempt to articulate the body in terms of how it comes to be. These theorists thus refuse to travel very far down the path of trying to define the body, arguing instead that the question of what the body does and can do is of greater interest than its constitutive substances or parts. The driving question is thus no longer what the body is, but rather what it does. It is not conceived of as substance, but as process. This understanding of the body is central to my project, which seeks to uncover the ways in which modern Indian womanhood becomes meaningful through discursive constructions of the female body. I unpack in this section some of the key elements of a relatively general theory of the body as a becoming, before addressing in the next section the particular issues of understanding discursivity as a major element of this dynamic process.

Although this approach takes the body to be central in an attempt to understand subjectivity, or the place of the self in the world, it rejects the idea that the best way to understand the body is to define its substance, especially in relation to the mind or the soul, and proposes instead a more open-ended conception of the body as multi-dimensional and engaged in an ongoing process of becoming. Drawing elements of contemporary Western theory (which is often embedded as I have explained in the work of seventeenth century philosophers such as Spinoza) together with both classical and contemporary conceptualisations of the body in various schools of Indian scholarship, I discuss in this section the ways in which these ideas are convergent in principle despite being somewhat divergent in terms of cultural origin. I explore how they may be read as mutually beneficial in helping to articulate the body as more than either a passive physical surface or an abstract, and equally passive, site of inscription.

Their starting point being outside of the body/ mind-spirit debate, as I will argue shortly, the new philosophies of the body are representative of the third fundamental perspective on the body as identified by Fraser and Greco, which perceives 'the body as something we *become* (the body as process and performativity)' (2005: 4). In Buddhist philosophies a similar idea is expressed in the notion of the no-Self, which I have already mentioned and which is not the nihilistic perspective it may seem at first glance. The positive view of the no-Self is brought out in the idea of it being 'the middle way that denies both being and non-being in favour of becoming' which 'is seen as a creative process, a continuous arising and perishing, in which everything is related to everything else in mutually dependent ways' (Koller 1993: 55).

The idea of the becoming-body is in many ways a connection between the theories arising from the perspectives on the body as 'something we are' and 'something we have'. It is however a conceptualisation that moves beyond the debates which have circulated around these for so long and which are underpinned by opposing value systems yet by a similar vision, particularly within feminist theory, of the body as static and unchanging. Although this third approach represents a kind of connection, that is not to say it is one that sets out to reconcile the object-body and the subject-body, since crucial to these anti-dualistic theorisations are both an entirely different starting point and different approaches to understanding the body. As is the case in the other two broad approaches, the theories within these attempts to capture the body-becoming or the engaged body do not converge neatly, but they share important commonalities.

Firstly, they have in common a point of departure that is a body necessarily characterised by agency and development, which notion immediately opens up conceptual possibilities for reading the connections between the body and modern subjecthood. This starting point, as I have already outlined, lies outside of the Cartesian body/ mind-spirit debate, suggesting that these divisive and reductive categories have (through their application if not in principle) been 'abstracted out' from the 'unique structure' of what Ichikawa Hiroshi, in the context of Buddhist philosophy, calls the body *as* spirit, which is 'itself fundamental' (cit. in Ozawa-de Silva 2002: 24). Elizabeth Grosz, following Spinoza's argument for a monist understanding of the world, is in agreement :

> whereas Descartes claims two irreducibly different and incompatible substances, for Spinoza these attributes [body and mind] are merely different aspects of one and same substance, inseparable from each other... There is no question of interaction, for they are like two sides of a coin. The dilemma of

> Cartesian dualism – how the will (which is not extended) can move the body (which is extended) and how body informs the will of its needs – is displaced. An act of will and the movements of the body are a single event appearing under different aspects; they are two expressions of one and the same thing. To every mode of extension there exists a mode of thought. Their interrelations or complementarity is based on the common ground of which both are equally dependent aspects (1994: 11).

This alternative point of departure underpins at the most basic level the displacement of a dualistic paradigm. Because the inscribed body and the lived body as theorised within the Cartesian framework are seen as fundamentally incompatible concepts (Grosz 1995: 33), it is impossible to reach a point of connection between the two from within that paradigm. The project of reductionism to which Cartesianism gives rise, is thus in Grosz's view one that is quite simply 'doomed'.

There are resounding echoes here with elements of the Indian philosophical traditions. As we have seen, the unity of the body and mind is generally thought fundamental in Indian philosophies, even in schools of thought as definitively divergent as those falling under the headings of Buddhist and Hindu. John Koller puts it like this: 'Indian philosophers have tended to see the mental and physical as aspects of an integrated process, seeing the body as conscious and consciousness as bodily activity' (1993: 47) and in the context of Asian philosophies more generally, Thomas Kasulis argues that 'in response to Western philosophy's mind-body problem, common sense seems to ask "what problem?"... Because we can distinguish the two, it does not follow that they must exist distinctly' (1993: xv-xvii). Murphy Halliburton, in the context of his research among 'people suffering psychopathology and possession in Kerala, India' (2002:1123), puts forward the idea of a continuum of 'states of being that includes the body, mind, consciousness, and self/ soul'. Experiences and actions are thus associated with states of being on a spectrum from the most tangible or 'gross' elements to the completely intangible atman.

These Indian conceptualisations of the body, while significantly different from a Cartesian model, are not quite the same as Grosz's argument that 'bodies have all the explanatory power of minds' (1994: vii). Rather, they offer an understanding of the body and mind as distinct in terms of many of the practices of everyday life yet united in that they are of the same substance, the realisation of which union is considered, particularly in Buddhist thought, to be both achievable through particular practices and desirable, a point to which I return shortly for further elaboration.

Secondly, as I have already suggested, theorisations of the body as a becoming *approach* the question of the body in a way that differs markedly from the other two, asking primarily not what the body is, but rather what the body does, how it interacts, how it comes to be. This is the key question for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – 'We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do' (1987: 257) – as it is in Buddhist philosophy, in which the self is not something that 'has' a body and a mind, but is understood 'in terms of the processes involved in experience' (Koller 1993: 55). The five interrelated groups of processes that thus constitute the self, as understood in Buddhist thought, are bodily processes, which are physical; and feeling/ sensation, perceptual processes, impulses to action, and the processes of consciousness, which are mental.

The emphasis here is therefore on the processes by which the body is realised, or comes to exist in a meaningful way. The body thus conceived is not the stable material entity, incapable of transformation or agency, that serves as contrast to either the malleable discursively constructed body as a site of inscription, or the active and productive mind, but an affected and affecting body that is dynamically engaged in relationships with elements and processes by which it is transformed, or by which it *becomes*, and which it in turn also transforms. Approaching the questions of how the body becomes modern, then, can also enable a deeper understanding of how modernity itself comes to have meaning. The two sets of questions are intimately related through the dynamism of their articulation in the everyday.

While theories of the body-becoming tend thus to move away from questions of what bodies are towards the more productive questions about how they come to be, theorists working with these ideas in the Western academy have in fact offered numerous analogical suggestions as to what the body may be in order to illuminate and illustrate their theoretical take on this complex concept. All these descriptions have in common a focus on bodies, organic and inorganic, as both themselves complex and multi-faceted as well as being in dynamic relationship with each other. Deleuze, following Nietzsche, argues for example that the question about what a body does needs to be addressed with reference to relationships of forces: 'Every relationship of forces constitutes a body – whether it is chemical, biological, social or political' (1983: 40). According to Koller, the Indian philosophical traditions in general tend towards a similar view: 'the human body is really a body-mind… a field of interacting energies' (1993: 45-46).

Drawing on this idea of forces, Ian Buchanan introduces the term 'assemblage' in order to deal with the difficulty of defining concretely 'the peculiar substance of a body'. He argues:

> Not one thing or another, nor even many things, but the bond between things, the body's substance is in a constant state of flux. However, defining it simply as a flux is to admit defeat. This is why the term "assemblage" is so crucial... Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon.
>
> (1997: 81)

Similar to Buchanan's concept of assemblage is Manuel de Landa's also explicitly Deleuzian notion of 'meshworks'. De Landa understands bodies as the sum of those processes which 'combine heterogeneous elements by using their functional complementarities' (1994: 38). De Landa applies his notion of meshworks to all kinds of bodies, human and non-human, organic and inorganic, in order to describe the relationships of forces that constitute all matter engaged in the process of becoming.

Like the terms suggested above as ways to describe what the becoming-body may be, the additional notions of the body as an 'interface' (Latour 2004: 206), the body as 'event' (Budgeon 2003: 36), as a 'hinge or threshold... between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority' (Grosz 1995: 33), 'a juncture or constellation' of the interactions between energies (Koller 1993: 46), and finally as a process or a becoming, all resist attempts to classify the body as substance and insist instead that attention should be paid to the flows, forces, engagements, and affects by means of which the body is constituted, and by which it can therefore be recognised and more fruitfully described.

Important within these understandings of the body-becoming is the concept of immanence, which is key to both the Indian and Spinozist Western rejections of bodies – or any 'thing' else – as mere static matter. Deriving from the Latin words 'in' and 'manere', meaning to remain within, the idea of immanence is most often employed in theological theory to describe the presence of the divine within all things. Opposed to a notion of transcendence, a theory of immanence proposes no external cause of the body-mind as itself of one substance. A working notion of the immanence of the body-mind, as the potential for realising the coming into being of the self, is therefore the starting point from which to begin to examine how specific bodies come to have meaning. Far from denying the physical specificities of bodies in favour of a generalised, abstract body that does not exist, this perspective values the multiple materialities of the body as that which enables the body to become ever more fully alive and meaningful. The similar heterogeneity of modernity, as discussed in the

previous chapter, suggest these multiple realities of the body to provide a fruitful lens through which to seek out some of modernity's facets.

While Hindu philosophies may appear to be in agreement with Cartesian ideas of the transcendence of the intangible soul, spirit or Self (atman) and the associated denigration of the body, the brahmanical immanence of all matter is a crucial element of Hindu thought and practice. This idea of immanence imbues the body with a sense of agency more usually attributed, at least implicitly, by Western thinkers to the separate substance of the mind, but does not represent merely the attribution of mental qualities to the physical body. Rather, as Alan Radley (1995) shows, recovering the agency of the body in this way allows us to address and begin to understand more fully such potentially transformative processes as play, dance, flirtation and style, which cannot be reduced either to the working of the mind or to the passive, inscribed body that is the object of social constructionism. In this way, the primacy of the immanent body as the foundation of the agential modern subject becomes clearer.

Everyday processes such as those to which Radley draws our attention can be likened to the practices of meditation, yoga, and martial arts in that they demonstrate the one-ness of the body and mind. More importantly, they reveal this unity whose realisation is not necessarily innate but rather to be achieved through physical and mental activity. The Indian philosophies of Buddhism and Hinduism both offer to Western theories of the body this significant insight, that the meaningful becoming of the body, and thus indeed modern subjectivity, is a conscious and creative process of attainment or realisation. Similarly, Chikako Ozawa-de Silva outlines the Japanese scholar Yuasa's understanding of the fluidity of mind and body boundaries, adding that Yuasa's contribution is 'postulating that mind-body unity is not a natural state, but rather something to be achieved... Yuasa seeks to understand how the inseparability of mind and body can be achieved and maintained' (Ozawa-de Silva 2002: 30-31).

It is important to recognise that an understanding of how the body becomes meaningful in the everyday cannot stop at the boundaries of what is tangible. Rather, the tangible serves as the point of departure. Bodies are of course constituted by physical flesh, but are not reducible to the flesh. The multiple realities, potentialities and meanings of the body become known through a focus on the processes in which the body is enmeshed rather than exclusively on its surfaces. Therefore, I turn now to a consideration of the ways in which a focus on the processes of the body may best equip us for a journey into questions about the ways in which contemporary Indian public discourse produces the body of the woman as modern.

The focus on processes rather than on a substance or substances as the constituents of the body can be likened to the behaviour of the photoreceptors (rods and cones) in the human eye. While the rods have greater photosensitivity, they are predominant in our peripheral vision. This means that dimly lit objects are typically more visible from the edges of our field of vision, and disappear or become indistinct when regarded directly. Similarly, when not reductively defined as inert matter, or otherwise directly regarded in order to gain a definitive answer as to what it is, the body paradoxically becomes more visible, more describable. The theorists with whose work I engage in this section have this in common in their approaches: they all insist that the body must be regarded somewhat obliquely if the clarity of its conceptualisation is to be maximised.

Bruno Latour expresses the importance of this oblique viewpoint through his idea that 'to have a body is to learn to be affected'. The body is thus 'an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements' (2004: 205-206, emphasis omitted). Latour uses the example of the training of a 'nose' in the context of the perfume industry to illustrate his idea. As the training progresses, the nose (in both senses of the word – the organ as well as the person who becomes *un nez*) is acquired by means of engagement with the different scents in the 'odour kit'. This example shows the body not as a passive 'be-ing' but rather as a process of becoming. While this example is taken from a specialised context, it does not require a great leap of imagination to see similar examples in the most everyday and mundane contexts. Through the senses the body learns to become affected, not only through the directly tangible – touch, smell, sight, sound, taste – but also the less tangible or intangible – rhythm, emotion, intuition, desire and language – and by these affects it is in a real sense constituted.

This idea is almost identical to that of Deleuze and Guattari, who suggest that a body is 'the capacity to form new relations, and the desire to do so' (Buchanan 1997: 83). Following this notion of Deleuze and Guattari's, Buchanan employs the term 'health' in order to build an understanding of the body as the process of making connections, or forming relations, which in turn allow yet more connections to be made. A healthy body is one that is constantly engaged, through learning to become affected, in the process of forming new relations. It is the body's desire for health that drives it 'to make new connections' (Buchanan 1997: 82), and therefore, health is not defined by a lack on the part of the body but by the agency of the body. Equally, the body's desire for health never disappears, as it would if health were the attainment of an absence, but continues as long as the body lives since 'health is not attainable as an end; it can only

ever be processual' (Buchanan 1997: 83). Thus understood, the body that is not constantly learning to be affected, not constantly being made meaningful, is one that is unhealthy, and ultimately dead. This denies the Cartesian notion that somehow perception would be purer, understanding clearer, and the self more alive, were the body able to be transcended. As Latour puts it: 'the opposite of embodied is dead, not omniscient' (2004: 209).

To these Deleuzian and Latourian ideas of the body becoming affected, the earlier discussed Eastern philosophers' emphasis on the achievement of bodily unity as desirable adds an increased sense of conscious agency. (Significantly however, that consciousness is not attributed to an implicitly disembodied mind.) This emphasis resists the passivity implicitly ascribed to the embodied subject by certain accounts of the body, notably those that see the body as primarily a surface of inscription, and draws attention instead to the specific ways in which that unity can be actively attained and understood.

From a feminist point of view, this focus leads us to ask about the ways in which a specifically female body comes to be meaningful, and the implications of this meaningful body on female subjectivities. It raises questions about how the body becomes an agential subject as well as how corporeal subjecthood may be constrained and refused by various means, both material and symbolic. These questions are closely connected with the central concepts of modernity discussed in the previous chapter – individual autonomy, freedom, and rights. Recognising the importance of the body as processes of becoming leads us to investigate the ways in which these processes may create and exercise certain freedoms for women.

Before continuing with an elaboration of the discursive processes that have a major role to play in the constitution of the body as a becoming, it is important also to acknowledge some of the main critiques that have emerged in the wake of the new philosophies of the body. In contrast to these philosophies' apparently explicit emphasis on corporeality, certain theorists have identified a gap in this recent Western theory that they see as distinctively body-shaped (Nettleton and Watson 1998: 2; Jackson and Scott 2001). Furthermore, the question of whether the literature that represents the theoretical 'recuperation' of the body, acknowledges in any meaningful way its debt to the feminist work described above, is a topic of contemporary debate. The two complaints are not unrelated. The paradoxically disembodied nature of the new corporeal theories has in fact been linked, by certain feminist writers such as

Davis (1997) and Witz (2000), to the domination of this emerging field of inquiry by masculinist patterns of thinking.

What is being remarked upon by these and other social theorists is what they see as the continued absence of theory that is grounded in material, fleshly bodies rather than orbiting abstract, imagined ones. While at first glance the new theories of embodiment seem by definition to be concerned with bodies, many scholars have suggested that 'the more the body is studied and written about the more elusive it becomes' (Williams and Bendelow 1998: 2), that 'the new body theory is just as masculinist and disembodied as it ever was' (Davis 1997: 14), that 'the sociology of the body has, by and large, ignored the voices that emanate from bodies themselves... mainly because this sphere of study tends to suffer from theoreticism' (Nettleton and Watson 1998: 2) and that 'we need to develop a perspective which avoids both theoretical abstraction and abstracted empiricism' (Jackson and Scott 2001: 10).

Part of the problem is thus seen to lie in the distancing discourses used to theorise the defining ideas of the field as much as in the types of bodies, or perhaps the lack thereof, that constitute the focus of these theorisations. Although Fraser and Greco claim that: 'it is commonplace now to not to refer to *the* body but to *bodies* in the plural' (2005: 3), and Longhurst that: 'in most of this [new corporeal] work the authors are quick to point out that there is, of course, no one body – *the* body is a masculinist illusion' (1995: 98), references to 'the body' and apparently detached and disembodied analyses continue to be prevalent in this literature. This continued abstraction of 'the' body can erase the characteristics of specific bodies, such as (at the most fundamental level) species, as well as sex, race, health, and ability.

But too narrow a focus on the specifics of individual bodies for their own sake would also be a mistake. As Thomas Osborne argues: 'we do have good grounds for thinking there is such a thing as the body, so that saying unequivocally that the body does not exist – that there are only bodies in the plural, or organs, or incorporations – is almost if not quite as misguided as saying that the body is everything'. Osborne suggests, in line with the perspective I outlined at the beginning of this section, that the most productive approach is not to seek 'a representation of what the body is (of providing a theory of the body, or of asserting its irreducibility) but [to log] the ways in which the body is a problem; and a problem in the positive sense – not just as an "obstacle", but as a vehicle for thought and action' (1997: 189; 192). I would not therefore discount generalised theorisations of the body, but rather advocate the cultivation of a close relationship between productive conceptualisations of the abstracted body and

analyses of the ways in which specific bodies are actively engaged with affective objects and processes, and indeed are themselves constituted as modern through that very engagement.

Following Osborne, the most fruitful way forward is an approach to the body that recognises the differences between bodies as well as the commonalities that they share, and aims to understand the multiple ways in which bodies continually modify, and are themselves modified by, the innumerable elements with which they interact. The result of such an analytical perspective is neither an abstracted net of theory that allows material bodies to slip through the holes, nor a narrow focus on difference for its own sake that denies the aspects of common identity shared among all, or particular groups of bodies. Rather, such an approach opens up the field for an ever-growing description of the many aspects and processes that contribute to our understanding of what 'the' body may be, and how 'it' becomes modern. Behind such a description is an understanding of the purpose of the theories described above as fulfilled not in and of themselves, but only through dialogue with specific bodies and affects.

An additional critique of this alternative perspective on the body comes specifically from feminist theorists. In their refusal to delineate between body and mind and their emphasis on the primacy of the immanent body in reading women's realities, the new feminist philosophies of the body, in the same way as those theories accused of essentialism, run the risk of offending social constructionists who view the feminist political project as fundamentally dependent on the association between the self and the mind as primary. In contrast however to the accusations of reductionism that may come their way, these theories of the body-becoming represent in fact a resistance to the reduction of the body that they have identified in the constructionist models of the body which dominate feminist social theory. Refusing to label the body as either a site of cultural inscription or a vehicle by means of which the mind is able to act – a categorisation which aims for a quite literal reduction in the number and variety of responses to the questions about what constitutes a body – a view of the body-becoming insists upon trying to understand the proliferations of meanings that make up the corporeal reality of what Bruno Latour (2004) calls the 'multiverse' (as opposed to the 'uni'verse).

As I suggested earlier, certain Indian feminist writings on the body that seek not to define the body but rather to articulate the politics and processes that surround it, can provide useful examples of how these nuanced conceptualisations of becoming might be grounded in the contexts of material life. Such writings demonstrate some ways in

which the body might be discussed such that the traps of both groundless abstraction and simplistic essentialism are avoided. For example, Kalpana Ram's (1998) exploration of the demand for bodily autonomy as central to women's modernities both avoids the reduction of women to their bodies and warns against the dangers of universalisation even on issues that seem universally resonant. Using as a case example the different ways in which debates over amniocentesis have been articulated in urban India and the United States, Ram demonstrates some of the dangers of careless generalisation about the agency of the body, and reinforces the importance of contextualised and grounded theory. She points out that 'The transnationalist resonances of the claims to rights over one's body obscure the fact that this project has also proved to be the site of some of the most powerful controversies that have challenged the internationalist thrust of the women's movement' (ibid: 619). The politics in which 'the' body is embedded, indeed the realities of the body, are thus determined by transformations of both biology and culture, and need to be read through these multiple and dynamic interactions.

Also emphasising the importance of recognising both the general agency and the specificities of the body, Seemanthini Niranjana's (1997) work on embodiment in a South Indian village cluster is useful here. Niranjana argues persuasively for an attentive reading of women's bodies as specifically situated in the dynamic dimension of space. In her theorisation the body is not reduced to a symbol or a site of inscription, but read as a material agent that 'itself condenses our location in a cultural space' (110). To concretise her ideas, Niranjana explores the ways in which women in a particular South Indian community articulate 'matters as diverse as work, quarrels, the family, caste group, "proper" behaviour, women's activities, or interaction within the village' (ibid: 111) through the vocabulary of *olage-horage*, a specific delineation of social-moral-spatial parameters. Through her analysis she demonstrates how 'the manner in which women, women's bodies, inhabit space, becomes the anchor through which the fluidity of realms and identities is negotiated (ibid: 119).

Mary Hancock's (1999) study of Indian womanhood includes a discussion of bodily pollution in South Indian Hindu households that builds on the kinds of analyses and theoretical positions offered by Niranjana and Ram. Her exploration of the permeability of bodily boundaries, both physical and moral, grounds pollution 'in bodily praxis rather than objectified concepts' (ibid: 98). Specific bodily acts of cooking, serving and eating food not only transform the body along lines of cleanliness or pollution, but are also 'the means by which... intimate hierarchies [are] practically constituted – manipulated, reworked, and undermined' (ibid: 100). While intangible, these transformations are

powerfully real and foreground the body as simultaneously subject/ creator, and object/ site, of cultural meaning.

While the theories of becoming described above are clearly manifest in these studies, the bodies they describe are also unarguably real and contextualised. These explicitly situated studies of the body as subject thus demonstrate the possibility of developing a theory of the body that neither robs the body of agency nor dissolves into detached abstraction from the realities of social corporeality. The focus in conceptualising the body as a becoming is thus on its flexibility and transformative potential within the politics of everyday life. These carry particular resonances in the contexts of modernity where the body can be and is affected by increasing numbers of elements, and is therefore able to form innumerable new relations.

The ideas outlined in this section constitute a significantly different understanding, however, from the role accorded the body by theorists of reflexive modernity such as Anthony Giddens (1991). In Giddens' writing the body is seen to be an object of modernity, one which undergoes transformation not through its own engagements with the world but as a site whose physical surface we (implicitly, our minds) are increasingly able to alter and reconstruct at will, through technologies and practices such as cosmetic surgery, diet, fitness regimes, fertility treatments, and so on. The body here is indeed a site of change, but it is change that is effected upon the tangible surfaces of the body by the actions of the mind. Rather than becoming increasingly unified, the mental and physical processes of the body in Giddens' reading of modernity seem to grow ever more distant from and to act in opposition to each other. The privileging of the mind, and the consequent reduction of the body to the status of an object, remain entrenched.

Although thus problematic, this understanding of the body's role is powerful and widespread beyond academic social constructionist thought. It is however one that is at odds with the project of recognising and validating modernities as active ways of being, and is being challenged through writings that demand the retrieval of the body in understanding our selves, our societies, and the ways in which we make ourselves modern. Just as unhealthy or dead bodies are ones that are not constantly gaining meaning, so our conceptualisations of the body, whether academic or popular, which do not value that engagement, impact negatively on the body by limiting its and therefore our own capacities for agency.

From the outline of the becoming-body that I have elaborated here, drawing on both Indian and Western notions of what the body is and does, it is clear that such a perspective is different in important ways from the 'essentialist' understandings of the body of which many feminist writers are so wary, as well as from the social constructionist positions that dominate feminist analyses of the body. Foregrounding the primacy of the body and how it comes to be meaningful does not imply a limitation of the possibilities of subjecthood when that body is defined by its dynamism and its capacity to be continually transformed and to transform. The focus is not on the body as biologically predetermined but rather on the perpetual opening up of possibilities for transformation. While the many specificities of bodies are undeniable and often irreducible, these specificities – sex, skin colour, size, shape, physiognomy – are constantly producing and being produced or imagined by social, political, cultural factors. 'The body is not opposed to culture – a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product' (Grosz 1994: 23, author's emphasis).

Although discourse is, as I will discuss in the next section, one of the most important means by which the body comes to be meaningful, the body is not simply rendered subject to the power of social discourse in the new philosophies of the body. To use Shelley Budgeon's words, it is not 'a natural foundation or passive surface upon which meanings are inscribed by systems of signification' (2003: 36). The body is not written upon by discourse, rather discourse is one constitutive aspect of its becoming. Arthur Frank expresses something of these inextricable connections between discourse, specifically narrative, and corporeality in his response to Alan Radley's (1995; 1997) insistence on the primacy of the body over discourse. Frank argues: 'Which is the foreground: the elusory that cannot be said, or the narrative that is put into words? As the gestalt psychologists would tell us, foregrounds and backgrounds shift. Now we see profiles, a moment later a vase' (1997: 109).

Discourse and the Body

The final question I want to address in this chapter is perhaps its most important in preparing the ground for the analyses that follow in chapters five to seven. This section asks: what is the importance of discourse in an understanding of the body as a process of becoming? Working within both the corporeal turn in social theory, and the narrative turn that I discuss in the following chapter, there are certain apparently fundamental tensions in my approach to understanding modern Indian womanhood in that the relationship between corporeality and narrativity may most easily be read as being one of opposition. Methodologically, these tensions reflect certain disciplinary divisions between the social sciences and the humanities, but it is my contention that each field

stands to benefit from dialogue with the other. Conceptually, the divisions between materiality and representation are clearly evident here, but I would similarly suggest that these need to be problematised and challenged and that the body provides a productive lens through which to undertake such a task. In the light of the theoretical discourses that I have been discussing, I would argue that an understanding of the body as a becoming in fact requires a close attention to discourse and to texts of all kinds. Following Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I suggest that the corporeal turn can offer 'new ways to think about text as a social, corporeal, and material practice' (2005: 448), just as discursive practices can offer new ways to think about the body.

The importance of representation to the processual, dynamic, becoming body is emphasised by Elizabeth Grosz. She openly rejects the notion that 'there is the "real", material body on one hand and its various cultural and historical representations on the other... these representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such' (1994: x). Despite the differences between Grosz's work and her own, Judith Butler argues for a similar understanding of the body, arguing that 'to claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body' (1993: 10). Therefore, the body in Butler's writing is not 'simply linguistic stuff' but nor does it have 'no bearing on language'. The body must be understood in its discursivity, just as language must be understood in its materiality:

> ... there can be no reference to a pure materiality except via materiality. Hence, it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified.
>
> (ibid: 68)

Elements of Butler's work are in fact central to my argument in this section. Her theory of discursive performativity is one that will take us some distance into understanding the role of public discourse in the constitution of embodied modern womanhood. The foundation of this theory is the notion that discourse *does* things. Drawing on linguistic classifications of performative statements or speech acts,[10] common examples of which include 'I pronounce you husband and wife' or 'I resign', Butler conceives of all

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[10] J.L. Austin's (1975) work on linguistic performatives is a key influence on Butler's own theory of performativity.

discourse as in some sense performative, which is to say it enacts (or performs) that which it names. Performativity for Butler, then, is 'a specific modality of power as discourse' (1993: 187). She explains however that this is not to say 'that *any* action is possible on the basis of a discursive effect' (ibid, author's emphasis) since its performative power lies in a Foucauldian conception of discourse, or discursive formations, as 'large groups of statements' that are both culturally and historically specific (Foucault 1969).

Discursive performances of the specifically *Indian* female body as modern draw together the theoretical modalities of power discussed here into a material – geographical, cultural, political – context. To take one of the most powerful examples, embodied Indian womanhood cannot escape the nationalist discourses that in many ways define it. From the enduring image of 'Mother India' to the young women in Jyoti Puri's (1999) study who see their pre-marital chastity as indicative of a distinctively Indian morality of womanhood, the body of the Indian woman is made meaningful to a significant extent through narratives of ideal nationalism. As forthcoming chapters show, such narratives pervade the discursive construction of almost all characteristics of the new Indian woman, including her sexuality, her dress, and her domestic and public roles.

It should be clear that Butler's notion of performativity is not, as some have mis-read it, 'wilful and arbitrary choice' (Butler 1993: 187) on the part of the individual, since the performative power of discourse is constituted not simply in words themselves but in 'the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of norms' (ibid.). The iterations and reiterations articulated within public discourse thus encapsulate this notion of discursive performativity, and although by no means stable, they construct in a very real sense the social identities that constitute the body as meaningful. From this it is clear that questions of power are central to performativity generally, but especially so to the discursive performativity of embodied womanhood. The discourses that construct the female body as modern enact presence, what womanhood is, but also absence and exclusion, what it is not and what it cannot be. As Butler puts it: 'The normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as "being" – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well. And in the case of bodies, those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic' (ibid: 188).

Not all of Butler's readers are convinced by her argument for the political power of discursive performativity, and especially for the potential of discourse effectively to

subvert existing structures of domination. One of Butler's most vocal critics has been Martha Nussbaum, who attacks Butler's writing style as 'ponderous and obscure', her ideas as 'familiar' and 'shopworn', and her politics as 'sadomasochistic', 'hip quietism', and a collaboration 'with evil' (Nussbaum 1999). Nussbaum takes particular issue with Butler's focus on language as political action, arguing that this focus on discourse elides the materialities of inequality, poverty and oppression experienced by 'real women'. She suggests that 'Butler's focus on the symbolic, her proud neglect of the material side of life, becomes a fatal blindness. For women who are hungry, illiterate, disenfranchised, beaten, raped, it is not sexy or liberating to re-enact, however parodically, the conditions of hunger, illiteracy, disenfranchisement, beating and rape. Such women prefer food, schools, votes, and the integrity of their bodies' (ibid.).

In a thoughtful response to Nussbaum's denunciation of Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) remarks upon Nussbaum's complaint that 'feminists like Butler "find comfort in the idea that the subversive use of words is still available to feminist intellectuals"'. Spivak dryly suggests that Nussbaum's 'own essay is a better example of this confidence than anything written by Judith Butler'. Responding to the same essay, Drucilla Cornell and Sara Murphy (1999) reject the dichotomy that Nussbaum draws 'between those feminists who are "materialists" and those of a "new symbolic type" who "believe that the way to do feminist politics is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstraction"', arguing that it is 'not only simplistic but obscures the crucial focus of second-wave feminism on the role of representations in shaping our reality'.

It is because of the very power of discourse to produce the realities of the body that there is a need to articulate and critique the multiple (both physical and represented) ways in which the materialities of women's lives take shape. As Susan Bordo argues, in an era where women are consistently represented as 'hiding in the shadows of men, seeking solace in their arms, willingly contracting the space they occupy... we desperately need an effective political discourse about the female body, a discourse adequate to an analysis of the insidious, and often paradoxical, pathways of modern social control' (1993: 166-167). While Butler may be attacked by critics such as Nussbaum for the political emptiness at the heart of her theoretical work on the body, the spaces opened up in her work for resistance and subversion of dominant discursive formations should not be discounted.

Although there are of course limits to discursive resistance, as indeed there are to any one form of resistance, the potential for positive political transformation through

discursive performativity in Butler's work is a vital part of her philosophy. Butler argues that the constructed and unstable nature of discursively performed identities is exactly what opens up the possibilities for their redefinition and resignification. Political action is thus at the heart of the concept of performativity. As Butler suggests: 'Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure' (1993: 241). As I read in forthcoming chapters some of the ways in which the Indian woman is discursively produced as modern, such resistances are articulated and analysed, and the new woman emerging from such struggles is shown to be a conflicted and contradictory figure. Claiming a space within particular modernities and creating new ones, embodied Indian womanhood remains engaged in the 'difficult labor' to which Butler refers, in which both the modern female body and an embodied feminine modernity are constantly being enacted in a myriad of everyday performances.

Conclusion

The body has recently become a central focus of contemporary social research in a relatively dramatic surge of theoretical interest, which has come to be referred to as a 'corporeal turn' in the social sciences. In the last two or three decades, contemporary analyses of embodiment and corporeality have addressed numerous different aspects of the body. By and large, however, these have implicitly reinforced a dualist understanding of the body that perpetuates its positioning as passive and inferior to the agency of the mind and preclude an understanding of the body as a modern agent in its own right. Such dualism is in large measure the result of the influence of Descartes' work and dominant Enlightenment narratives of the pre-eminence of reason and the transcendent capabilities of the mind. I have argued here that a reliance on Cartesian dualism as a means of understanding the body in modern societies can therefore be problematic, particularly from a feminist perspective as the close associations between womanhood and the body have resulted in the historical marginalisation of women from public discourse. I have therefore sought to develop a conceptualisation of the body in this chapter that displaces the subordination of the body to the mind and indeed the separation of the two altogether. Drawing together ancient Indian philosophies of the self together with more contemporary work on the body, I have described how an understanding of the body as a process or a becoming may offer greater potential for embodied political agency. Theorising the body in this way avoids the traps of essentialism or constructionism that have become problematic and unproductive in

contemporary feminist writing, and opens up the possibilities for grounded, contextualised explorations of the body as, like modernity itself, a dynamic and transformative process.

The crux of my argument here has been that since the body is what Elizabeth Grosz calls '*the* cultural product', a fruitful way into understanding it in its simultaneous materiality and intangibility is through discourse. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of discursive performativity as a key constituent of the meaningful body, I suggest that in order to understand what it means for the Indian female body to be produced as modern, we must interrogate the discursive formations that enact this body. It is necessary to read such discursive productions of the body not just for what they allow, but also for what is positioned outside of the boundaries of the modern female body. As Catherine Burroughs and Jeffrey Ehrenreich argue, 'Reading the social body as a process is similar to reading smiles in that, on the one hand, the encoded messages can be obvious and familiar, yet on the other hand, they may also reveal, through analysis, information and meaning regularly hidden from view' (1993: 3). It is clear then that attention must also be paid in such reading to the potential for discourse to perform the body in ways that differ from dominant narratives – to signify and to enact alternative, perhaps transformative, embodied modernities. In chapters five, six and seven I explore some of the specific ways in which Indian discourses perform the female body as modern, employing in direct analysis the more general conceptual tools and frameworks laid down here and in the previous chapter.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Methodologically as well as conceptually, this thesis troubles some of the boundaries in contemporary social research and seeks to open up more inclusive spaces for interdisciplinary debate than are currently accessible. Working at productive sites of intersection between literary and media criticism, cultural studies and human geography, I demonstrate in this project the complementarity of certain methodologies that are characteristic of each discipline. Although the productive nature of such interdisciplinarity is generally agreed upon by scholars, it is evident that, as Sabina Leonelli suggests, 'the recognition of the importance of interdisciplinarity does not, as yet, correspond to its practical support within social science institutions. The difficulty of engaging in constructive exchanges among disciplines is a widespread academic reality' (2004: i). As I will show, however, there are significant overlaps between the methodologies of social science and those more usually associated with the humanities, and work carried out in those spaces of overlap is able to draw on and benefit from, as well as to contribute to, the richness of both fields.

In previous chapters I foregrounded the importance of discourse in understanding the materialities of modernity and the body. As this emphasis suggests, this thesis takes a hermeneutic approach to the question of how to make sense of modern Indian womanhood. Originating from the Greek god Hermes, whose role was to interpret the messages of the gods, the term hermeneutics refers to 'the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts' (Ricouer 1981: 43). The idea of a text in contemporary hermeneutics is not restricted to written documents but suggests that all social practice may be read and interpreted as text, as conveying and concealing multiple meanings.

Reading the world thus demands close attention not just to what is said or done, but also to the context of that discourse or action, the whole of which constitutes 'the hermeneutic circle'. As Paul Ricouer suggests, this 'entails a sharp opposition to the sort of objectivity and non-implication which is supposed to characterise the scientific

explanation of things' (ibid: 165). Most importantly, therefore, a hermeneutic approach is one that 'puts us on guard against the illusion or pretension of neutrality' (ibid), privileging instead self-reflexivity and sensitivity to the relationship between the researcher and his/ her subject/s. It is thus entirely in tune with a feminist approach that seeks to avoid trying to perform what Donna Haraway calls 'the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (1991: 189).

With these implications of an interpretive approach firmly in mind, this chapter sets out the methods used in this research project and explains the role of each in fulfilling the aims and objectives set out in chapter one. I begin by elaborating on the specifics of my interdisciplinary approach before addressing in detail the process of undertaking the research. Finally, I reflect upon the politics of my own position in relation to biographical, cultural, ethnic and other factors which unavoidably become part of the qualitative research process.

Troubling Methodological Boundaries

As Elspeth Graham argues, 'Methodological choices are, at heart, philosophical choices' (1997: 9). The complementary but cross-disciplinary research methods that I detail in this section both reflect and build upon the epistemological hybridity that is my initial focus here. This thesis demonstrates a strong belief in the importance of understanding public discourse as a central means of expressing and constituting the social imaginary, which Charles Taylor describes as 'that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy' (2002: 106). The materiality of discourse and the reality of the meanings that circulate within, through and around its various forms, demand to be taken seriously by social scientists seeking to understand contemporary culture.

A significant amount of attention has been paid to the 'narrative turn' in social theory, a move towards positioning story-telling at the centre of philosophical and social science disciplines, while at the same time interrogating just what it means to place the label 'narrative' on an oral account, on a life, or on an identity. As Martin Kreiswirth suggests, 'it is quite apparent that in the last three decades thinking about stories has significantly changed' (2000: 295), with an increased focus on theorising 'narrative's ontology, politics, epistemology, ideology, cognitive status, and disciplinarity' (ibid: 296). A number of theorists have recognised and responded to the social resonance of all kinds of narrative, from oral accounts of events to magazines, novels, even songs, and the ways in which they open up space for investigating questions about how the world works.

This narrative turn rests in large part upon the understanding that story-telling of various kinds is fundamental to meaning, to knowledge, and to our own identities; as Hayden White points out, the very words '*narrative, narration, to narrate,* etc. derive... from the Sanskrit root *gnâ'* which means 'know' (1987:215). In addition, as Michael Hanne puts it, 'Storytelling... is always associated with the exercise, in one sense or another, of power, of control' (1994: 8). From the individual internal narratives that we all use to make sense of our everyday activities to the stories that geologists, astronomers and physicists tell about the history of the earth, and all the tales in-between, narrative underpins not only our sense of self but all the relationships that constitute our cultures and societies.

My concern here is of course with the specific forms of public narrative in contemporary India that construct ideas of womanhood as part of the modern social imaginary. A four-month period of fieldwork in India, from February to May 2005, was instrumental in enabling me to fulfil one of the main objectives of my research – identifying the kinds of public discourse that play key roles in producing the new Indian woman. During this period of fieldwork I lived in Bangalore,[11] a rapidly growing city that is often referred to the Silicon Valley of India because of its burgeoning IT industry. The capital of the state of Karnataka in South India, Bangalore is a clean, wealthy city by Indian standards, with high literacy and employment rates, and a vibrant cultural life. English is widely spoken and understood and is in fact the first language for many middle-class Bangaloreans, especially those under the age of about thirty.

Bangalore epitomises Indian modernity in many ways, not least in the visibility of women in public spaces and in positions of status in various organisations and institutions. Women wearing so-called Western clothing are unremarkable in the city, as are women shopping, travelling, or dining alone. Numerous Bangaloreans told me how safe the city was for women, and indeed I had no cause to feel physically threatened during my time there, even when travelling (either on foot or by auto-rickshaw) late at night or in the early hours of the morning. The city is home to a number of feminist organisations, including Vimochana – an activist group that works 'Towards the vision of making violence against women unthinkable and creating a violence free world for all' (Vimochana website[12]) – as well as the feminist bookstore Streelekha and the Asia Women's Human Rights Council. All these factors combined

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[11] The name of the city of Bangalore was officially changed on 1 November 2006 to the Kannada 'Bengaluru'. However, given that at the time of research and writing, the former name was the one used both officially and unofficially in English, I refer to the city as Bangalore throughout this thesis.

[12] The Vimochana website is accessible at http://ciedsindia.org/001_vimochana_vision.htm. Accessed 14/7/2006.

to make Bangalore the ideal location for the initial stages of an investigation into the imagining of modern Indian womanhood.

Two main research methods were used during the fieldwork to identify some of the key discursive sources of these ideas of what it meant to be a modern Indian woman. The first was unstructured, naturalistic observation of ordinary Bangaloreans and the contexts of their everyday public life, with regard to multiple forms of public discourse including plays, films, music, magazines, newspapers, books, billboard advertising, and so on. As Keith Punch suggests, naturalistic observation is characterised by the fact that 'observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behaviour of those whom they are observing' (2005: 179), and indeed my aim here was not to intervene or set up particular situations but to begin to map through observation the networks of representation that made the idea of the modern Indian woman meaningful in Bangalore.

Any suggestion that such observation is somehow a neutral, objective process should be avoided. The theoretical questions around what it means to be a woman, around the implications of living in a 'third-world' country, around the politics of the English language, and around what it means to be Western, Eastern, Southern, or African – all became more, or at least differently, real and personal to me in India than elsewhere. The ways in which I read Bangalorean society were therefore unavoidably influenced by my own background and political outlook, an issue which I address more fully in the next section.

In addition to on-going and actively engaged observation of circulating public discourses in the city, I undertook a series of open-ended interviews with twenty individuals (see appendix 1). Some interviewees were contacted before my departure from the U.K., but the main method used to identify and contact potential interviewees was 'snowballing', or making use of existing contacts to extend my network once I had arrived in India. Many of the individuals I interviewed in Bangalore held prominent positions there as authors, journalists, educators and professionals. Among my interviewees were the celebrated authors Shashi Deshpande and K.R. Usha, with whose work I engage in this thesis. The majority of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed, and most were conducted in the interviewees' homes or in other comfortable places such as coffee shops or restaurants.

At the time of embarking on the fieldwork for this project, my research questions were somewhat different to those that have been set down and explored in this thesis. Both

the individuals I spoke with in these interviews, and the questions I put to them, were chosen in accordance with aims that evolved and changed shape during the course of the fieldwork and continued to do so afterwards, until they became established in the form in which they are articulated here. The interview material does not speak directly to the research questions of this thesis in its final form, therefore, and has not been used as itself a primary source of data for this research. This is however not to say that the material gathered from the interviews became irrelevant as my research questions developed between February and May (and into June, July and August) 2005. Rather, they proved invaluable as an exploratory foray to begin to identify some of the most prominent ideas around modernity and new womanhood in contemporary urban India.

Never intended as a survey of Indian or Bangalorean society, the interviews had the broad outcome of providing insights into what the public perception of the 'new Indian woman' might be and into the idea of Indian modernity itself. They have thus been used to inform and to guide my explorations into the question of the new Indian woman and her production through contemporary discourse. In addition, they helped me to identify some of the key public discourses of modern India, as each conversation addressed the power of different media with regard to constructing images of modern women. The suggestions and musings of individuals accustomed to thinking critically about their society and the representations of modern womanhood that pervade it, helped to consolidate my own understanding of the deep ambiguities and complexities of my research questions and served to underpin and guide the collection of empirical data during my time in Bangalore and after my departure.

The third element of the fieldwork was deciding upon the sources for, and beginning to collect, that data. From among many possibilities that included film, everyday conversation, theatre, and popular music, I identified two bodies of discourse as central to the production of the 'new Indian woman'. These were contemporary written narratives by Indian women,[13] including mainly fictional but also some autobiographical work, and the newsweekly magazines *India Today*, *Outlook*, and *The Week*.

Narratives by Indian women have a far stronger presence now, both in India and globally, than two or three decades ago. The number of Indian women publishing fictional and autobiographical texts is growing rapidly, and in many countries, including India, their books tell a dominant story of modern Indian womanhood. Some, like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, have been made into films, disseminating their stories among

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[13] The novels and semi-autobiographical texts analysed in the thesis are listed for convenience in Appendix 2 and not in the Bibliography.

a yet wider audience. Given their wide reach and their powerful representations of womanhood, these texts are of central importance to an understanding of the discursive imagining of the new Indian woman.

From an extensive body of literature, a group of about a dozen narratives by Indian women was chosen for deep analysis in the thesis. These were selected according to a number of criteria, chief among which was their visibility and availability both in India and the West, which was key to satisfying the requirement that they constitute a genuinely public discourse. To check that the narratives met this criterion, I ensured that they were available in Bangalore's bookshops, both chain and independent stores, as well as via online booksellers such as Amazon, and I searched out their reviews in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet. Only once I was satisfied that a text was readily available and indeed appeared to have a significant presence both in India and globally, at least in the Anglophone world, did I include it in my research as a useful discursive contribution to the public imagining of modern Indian womanhood.

Also important was that the books had been written in the last 20-25 years and were thus representations of womanhood that resonated with the recent changes in the perceived social and familial roles of women in urban India. Most of the narratives analysed in the thesis were in fact published only in the last decade, and their stories thus present insights that are as relevant to the current social realities of India as the issues of *India Today* published between 2000 and 2006. A third major criterion was that the narratives address modern womanhood with a degree of complexity comparable to that described to me by my interviewees and observed by me in my four months living in urban India. I comment more fully on this point later in this chapter, but note here that it is for this reason that so-called chick lit texts, with their relatively one-dimensional representations of modern Indian women, were not included in the selection process.

From among the available newsweekly magazines, the choice was more straightforward. The three published in English are relatively similar in format and often in content, tone, and apparent political agenda. Since there was a clear need to keep the data to a manageable amount to enable close reading and attentive analysis of the material, it was most practical to focus on only one. *India Today* was the newsweekly with the widest distribution of the three, and the magazine constitutes just one (albeit the most visible and well-known) element of an extensive and powerful collection of initiatives falling under the India Today Group. The group is involved in publishing, charity projects, radio, television and music events, to name a selection, giving the

magazine, as its most prominent endeavour, substantial weight among English-speaking Indians. In addition, the magazine has a clear and explicit interest in Indian modernity and modern, liberated womanhood, as well as the practical benefit of an extensive and easily accessible online archive. I therefore chose to focus on this magazine and limited my study to the period 2000-2006, during which a total of around 330 issues were published. Except where stated, my analyses of *India Today* refer to the online edition. Material available on the *India Today* website conforms closely to the Indian print edition of the magazine; while some small discrepancies between the two do occur, they do not alter the focus or tone of either the magazine as a whole or any articles in particular.

These bodies of discourse, women's narratives and *India Today*, represent genres that are clearly divergent in many ways. Drawing these two contrasting textual forms together and addressing both as important sources of public discourse, my analyses in the following three chapters blur the boundaries of genre to some extent, and highlight the ways in which these two bodies of text may both illuminate and complement the other and contribute to various aspects of the imagined modern woman. This is in recognition of the relationships of intertextuality in which all texts are inevitably enmeshed. Although intertextual connections are widely recognised by critics and academics, combining two distinct textual genres in a single study nonetheless constitutes a further troubling of methodological boundaries since the traditional disciplinary divisions of 'literary' and 'mass media' material generally remain clearly drawn in mainstream academic study. This is not however to suggest that I ignore the differences between the two sources; recognising and respecting those differences allows greater insights into the multi-dimensional 'modern woman' that they produce.

For example, the photographs and other images in *India Today*, which have no direct counterpart in fictional or autobiographical narratives but which are an integral part of the magazine's discourse, are valuable texts or textual elements in themselves and the analysis is enriched by studying these with the same hermeneutic eye that examines the written words. Similarly, although I would challenge a simple opposition between 'truth' and 'fiction', it cannot be denied that novels do not describe 'real' events in the same way that newsmagazines would seek to do. Part of the unique value of fiction for social research lies at the centre of this imaginative element, however. The very fact that 'it does not bear the responsibility of "truthful" representation' as Joanne Sharp puts it (2000: 329), may enable in fiction a discursive opening up of possibilities for political transformation. By working through emotion and the 'moral imagination', according to Martha Nussbaum, 'literary forms call forth certain specific sorts of

practical activity in the reader that can be evoked in no other way' (1990: 290).[14] These possibilities, as part of the work of literary fiction in constructing the public imaginary, suggest that novels may usefully inform numerous disciplines across the social sciences.

Where *India Today* bears a heavier burden of 'truth-telling' and political responsibility in its reporting, women's narratives, even those that claim to be partly autobiographical, largely have the freedom to tell any story they choose. The thematic intersections between the two are therefore as significant as their complementary differences in form and structure, as they represent and manifest important social concerns with particular issues. Modern Indian womanhood is a good example, as it is a clear and explicit concern of both of these groups of texts despite their internal differentiations. Moreover, the differing forms in which such themes are expressed in the two genres allows the reader or the social researcher more points of insight into those issues than they might otherwise have, or more angles from which to approach such themes. These and other differences, then, place these two generically distinct bodies of text in a relationship of mutual and multiple complementarity with one another.

The intentions of the authors, whether to report accurately or to wildly imagine, are not of primary concern in this thesis, as I remark shortly. Rather, both of these bodies of text are taken as valid sources of public discourse that are completed or made meaningful through their circulation in society, and that are among those playing the most prominent roles in producing the new Indian woman. While I respect the generic differences and limitations of each in my analyses, *India Today* and narratives by Indian women are read in this thesis as equivalent in terms of their positions as commentators on, and discursive constructions of, contemporary Indian realities, for both an Indian and a global readership. Each chapter therefore reads its governing theme through both bodies of text more or less equally, although certain sub-themes are naturally more evident or more demanding of elaboration in one than the other. As the analyses proceed in forthcoming chapters, the many subtle ways in which each body of text speaks to, illuminates and/ or challenges the other, will be unpacked and examined.

There are some more specific reasons for my decision to focus on these two bodies of text in this project. Most importantly, these two sources offer sustained and deep engagement with the questions of modern womanhood over substantial periods of

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[14] For additional arguments along these lines see John Horton and Andrea Baumeister, eds. (1996).

time. Unlike other commonly referenced sources of public constructions of womanhood (particularly films and television serials, often recommended to me by numerous Indian friends and interviewees as defining the 'new Indian woman') which suggested the new woman to be a superficial, one-dimensional character (Sunder Rajan 1993) these texts constitute complex, contradictory, and intriguing constructions of modern womanhood. They therefore resonate more powerfully with the materialities of womanhood that I saw being lived out by women in Bangalore, as well as with the complexities of 'real' modern Indian womanhood described by my interviewees (notwithstanding their suggestions that I address the superficial representations in soap operas and films).

For example, in discussions of what they understood as the new Indian woman, most of the women I interviewed identified the realities of that newness not primarily as superficialities but as 'liberation, freedom, travel, communication, [being] able to express ideas that were previously taboo or not thinkable' (Shanta Raghavan), and the genuine 'easing of domestic responsibility' (K.R. Usha). The complexities of the new woman were summed up by Mrinalini Sebastian, a fellow at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore, who suggested, 'It's difficult to keep in mind one idea of the new Indian woman'.

In our interview, Shashi Deshpande outlined in detail what she saw as defining the newness of the modern Indian woman. The decrease in the numbers of joint families (husband, wife and children co-habiting with parents and perhaps other family members) and the rise of the nuclear family among the middle classes is seen by Deshpande as resulting in 'much less control over the women'. She suggests that 'even if the mother-in-law and father-in-law come, it's the woman's home. So she's still in control. I think that has made [a] major difference'. Secondly, Deshpande identifies economic independence as a major factor in enabling women to take control of their own lives: 'And of course economic independence which has not come to everyone, but to those for whom it has come...'. And thirdly, she remarks upon the increasing awareness among women:

> There's a huge amount of awareness of women no more to feel that they no longer have to put up or submit, you know. And right from family planning for example, um, where you know you do find that more and more women are able to sort of have a say in [...] families, which is a major step forward, I think. It doesn't take away the fact that there's a whole world still where women have to sort of abort when they have a girl, when they have an infant. That is there but it's not the entire thing.

All of these women make it clear that the new Indian woman is defined by multiple factors and that both urban and rural women are implicated in the many recent changes in Indian societies. In the light of their comments in our interviews I sought to identify those representations of the new Indian woman that addressed these complexities and pluralities rather than those which were little more than reductive stereotypes of modern womanhood.

A second reason for choosing these, as I have already suggested with reference to women's narratives but which holds true for both, is that both of these sources reach a wide audience, both within India and abroad. They therefore constitute far-reaching, prominent and pervasive representations of the Indian nation and Indian women. Both textual forms are widely available and visible as tangible texts on newsstands and in bookshops in India. Elsewhere, many forms of Indian fiction as well as *India Today* enjoy an wide readership through bookshops, subscriptions, and online access or purchases.

Thirdly, both sources are themselves quintessentially modern phenomena. The fact that they are written in English is a central aspect of that modernity, Indian English being inextricably linked with the modernity and the modernisation projects of the colonial relationship. This is not to say that the English language, spoken or written, is essential to being modern. Rather, it is to argue that the specific history of India's modernity is embedded in that of its most dominant colonising nation and culture, which is Britain. This suggestion echoes my argument in chapter two that postcolonial modernities can in a real sense not be thought without simultaneous reference to relationships of coloniality that continue to play a significant role in constituting them.

Although in this sense 'imported', English is today as official an Indian language as Hindi, Bengali, or Kannada. As Robert Baumgardner puts it, 'English serves not only the *inter*national role of medium of communication with the global community of nations but also the *intra*national and *intra*regional roles of "link" language among people of diverse linguistic backgrounds' (1996: 1, author's emphasis). Additionally therefore, the modernity of the English language lies in the ways in which it facilitates the ever-growing communication networks and the increasing mobility of individuals that play a major role in defining what it means to be modern (Appadurai 1996: 3). Relatedly, English in India has made possible, and successful, phenomena such as the IT and call-centre industries which both represent and create the modern Indian nation.

India Today and contemporary narratives by Indian women are modern also in their content, in that their subject matter is modern India and modern Indians. This concern with representing modern India is evident in the newsmagazine's very name, which is often emphasised and played on in the magazine, stressing its focus on contemporary India and on 'India Tomorrow', the nation's ever more modern identity. The title of the India Today Group's most recent conclave is in fact 'India Tomorrow 2006: Bridging the Divide', and the heading for the C.E.O.'s introductory letter reads 'Charting a bold new future for India'.[15] This explicit focus on the modern is sustained throughout *India Today* 2000-2006, in articles on topics as diverse as party politics, rural projects, women's rights, religious festivals, Indian youth, food and fashion. A significant number of narratives by Indian women share this theme, directly addressing questions of what it means to be a woman in contemporary urban India, one who both experiences and produces new ideas of feminine roles in the family and society. The opposition of tradition and modernity is a recurrent motif, although the undermining of that opposition is evident too and no less important.

Finally, both of these sources are modern as tangible, physical entities. The novel (or indeed the fictionalised autobiography) is of course not a new literary form but is nonetheless characteristically modern even in Western Europe, where it emerged as a distinct form around the sixteenth century. The very narrative form of the novel is thus tied in many ways to the Enlightenment ideas that provided the context for its realisation. In India, however, the novel is a much more recent expression of modernity, as the first novels appeared only in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indian *women* writing novel-length narratives in English were few until the 1980s, after the publication of Salman Rushdie's hugely successful *Midnight's Children*. Although it would be difficult to prove a causal relationship, particularly given the ambivalent critical response to her novel in her home country, it is likely that Arundhati Roy's equally successful, Booker-prize winning *God of Small Things*, published in 1997, played a significant role in triggering the rush of Indian women's narratives in English that have been published in the past decade, in both India and the Indian diaspora.

India Today too, like the other newsweeklies mentioned above, is a distinctively modern textual form in India. As Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge have noted, 'In the case of print media, the most notable recent development is the enormous increase in the number of periodical newsmagazines, both in English and in the vernacular languages. This boom creates and feeds an extraordinary hunger for a

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[15] This letter is accessible at http://www.indiatodayconclave.com. Accessed 13/7/2006.

variety of sorts of information, opinion, and news' (1995: 7). They locate the importance of this textual form firmly in the circulation of narratives of modernity: 'it is in and through the pages of these magazines that Indians of a variety of classes and regions are learning where and how they can gain access to knowledge of the emergent lifestyles' (ibid: 8).

There are three critical and inter-related points to be made regarding the use of written texts as empirical data in social research, before I conclude with an outline of the precise method of interpretation used to analyse these texts. The first point is almost taken for granted in contemporary literary theory and related fields, but bears repeating here nonetheless. Following Roland Barthes (1977), Michel Foucault (1970) and others, there is an emphasis in this thesis on the social role of the text, which displaces any notion of the author as the primary producer of its meaning. What intentions and hopes the author may have had in writing are largely irrelevant in a consideration of how the text comes to be meaningful in a social context. The work of the text itself is therefore privileged above that of its author (whose own identity *as* author is of course equally constructed by the social 'work' of the text, its relationship with its reader). As Michael Warner argues, texts, or rather 'the concatenation of texts through time' (2002: 62) produce their readers: 'Publics do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them' (ibid: 54). And as Lindsay Prior succinctly puts it: 'documents are never inert, but enter into projects as independent agents' (2003: 91).

This idea of textual agency is the focus of my second point. As Prior points out, the claim for a text's agency may be a 'most peculiar' one to some (ibid.). However, the reconceptualisations of the idea of actors or 'actants' by theorists of actor network theory (ANT) such as Bruno Latour (1999), enable us to understand texts as social actors in that they 'can restrict and facilitate, serve as allies or foes, become involved in systems of domination and subjection, make and unmake the nature of the material world. In short, documents can have effects and in so far as they have effects then they can be researched as part of a field – as dynamic rather than inert phenomena' (Prior 2003: 92).

Thirdly, this understanding of the text as a social agent and not simply a container of meaning is the key to understanding the driving question of the hermeneutic project, 'what does the text mean?', as being necessarily preceded by the question 'what does the text do?'. Recognising, and expressing through analysis, the links between these questions draws together action and meaning and emphasises the idea that the meanings of the text have not somehow been placed therein by a god-like figure but

rather come to be – are constructed and re-constructed – through the text's social interactions. Abandoning 'meaning' in favour of 'reference', as Prior advocates, misses the point that the two are in fact inseparable in understanding the social role of texts.

Bearing all these points in mind, the women's narratives and the articles in *India Today* were analysed and interpreted according to a system of close reading that privileged the dynamics of the text itself above perceived authorial intent or anticipated themes. This system developed through an initial reading of the material. As I read each text, I kept a record of emerging themes and ideas on index cards. The scope at this stage was broad and no limitations were set on the number or kinds of themes that might be included in the final thesis. Although my reading was unavoidably informed by theoretical academic writing on modernity, womanhood, the body, and so on, I sought to refrain from imposing pre-existing paradigms upon the texts, instead remaining open to the stories that were being told. Once this secondary data, a wide-ranging collection of themes, had been gathered, it was coded according to how sets of ideas related to each other, and from this coding process emerged a narrower set of key ideas that were laid out on a spreadsheet and annotated with the page references of the relevant primary sources. After a final process of coding these themes, I identified three 'umbrella' ideas as useful subject headings for each substantive chapter. Both text and images were included as primary material for this coding process, and consequently the discursive analyses draw upon pictures where relevant rather than confining themselves to written text.

An Ethic of Reading

In addition to helping to determine the selection of empirical data sources, the aims and objectives of this thesis require the designing of particular research strategies in order to be productively addressed. In my readings of the discursive construction of Indian womanhood in *India Today* and women's narratives, I aim to articulate an ethic of reading through the uncovering of the discursive presences and absences that produce the modern, female, Indian body. This hermeneutic process of revealing the hidden or liminal meanings of the text is a necessarily holistic process, as I mentioned before. It is for this reason that my examinations of different elements of the texts, specifically their thematics and their narrative structures, are integrated in the analyses I undertake in forthcoming chapters.

The thematics of a text refers to its subject-matter and the way in which it is presented, incorporating diction, repetition, and all manner of linguistic and stylistic features in the articulation of the text's 'message'. The narrative structure denotes the location of

events within a text, and I would argue that although the structure is distinct from the thematics of a text, the former almost always constitutes a significant contribution to the text's thematic message. Martha Nussbaum expresses this idea thus: 'form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth' (1990: 3).

Since it contains few or more likely no pictures, a novel's narrative structure depends of course almost entirely on the layout of written text – the positioning of chapters, the inclusion of prologues and epilogues, mid-chapter breaks in text, and so on. In writing her novel, for example, Arundhati Roy famously drew upon her training as an architect, seeing the story as an expression of certain 'design motifs' (Jana 1997: 2). The deliberate positioning of certain scenes in perhaps unexpected places radically influences the way in which the book is read and the engagement that is created between reader and text. In the case of media such as *India Today*, the narrative structure of the text includes additional elements. Text boxes, images, and the location of an article in one section of the magazine rather than another (as a cover story rather than a mere 'feature', say), all play a structural role that contributes to the thematic messages that may reinforce or subvert an article's thematics.

The importance of narrative structure to feminist writing and thought has been emphasised by proponents of the idea of *écriture féminine*, among the most famous of whom are Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Impossible to define neatly, *écriture féminine* in the writings of Cixous (1994) carries a strong association with the body and sexuality, and insists upon the recognition of cyclical, non-linear writing as a direct expression, recognition, and validation of feminine bodily rhythms. This is not to say that Cixous advocates an essentialist understanding of women or their writing, as while *écriture féminine* is expressive of and intimately linked to the female body, it is not dependent on the author's sex. Rather, feminine forms of writing can be harnessed by anyone seeking to challenge and break down the boundaries of the patriarchal order that favours linearity and enacts multiple exclusions to maintain its privileges. The theory of *écriture féminine* thus serves as an additional reminder to those seeking sensitively to read narratives of womanhood, that the form of a text is at least as important in writing the body as is its content.

The aim here is not to reveal what a text 'really' says about embodied modern womanhood. Such an approach would undermine an ethics of reading by substituting one 'master plot' for another and thus perpetuating the silencing of certain voices. Rather, the need is for the revelation of what *else* a text might say in addition to the

story that is immediately apparent, and to unpack critically the one narrative that comes to be 'established as the normative one', which is what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests to be the task of the postcolonial historian (1988: 281). Mark Ledbetter expresses this idea thus:

> To 'see again' and 'to esteem and estimate differently' are wonderfully critical tools for discovering victims in a text. But to suggest that what one 'sees' and 'esteems' is correct serves only to re-establish a 'right' reading and to continue a notion that texts have a 'master plot'.
>
> (1996: 3)

The importance of reading ethically in a context as politically loaded as Indian womanhood demands an unpacking not just of the text, but of the reader. Both the hermeneutic approach, as I have already suggested, and the postcolonial feminist framework within which this research is situated, depend upon the self-reflexivity of the researcher and the awareness of the dangers that exist in reading or speaking 'for' others. As the reader and interpreter of discursive constructions of womanhood therefore, a responsibility is placed upon the researcher to address the question of their own position vis-à-vis their research subject/s. Taking this responsibility seriously, I devote the final section of this chapter to self-critically positioning myself, and the knowledge that this thesis produces, within the political context of representing womanhood in postcolonial India.

Situating the Production of Knowledge

The interdisciplinarity of this thesis, both conceptual and methodological, reflects and is undoubtedly tied into the cultural and academic hybridity of my own subject position. As a middle-class female South African national of mixed North Indian and South African descent, conducting feminist research at a prestigious university in the North of England, which involves fieldwork in a wealthy South Indian city, the networks – colonial, cultural, religious, ethnic, gendered – in which I am enmeshed, could be depicted graphically as a scribble of entangled paths looping back and forth over each other. Recognising the situated nature of my research is therefore complicated by the difficulty of defining just where I myself am situated as a researcher. While not unusual, my multiple identities resist attempts to weave them into a coherent narrative that can map neatly to the processes of my research. I try in this section, however, to draw out some the key implications of my own position upon my research, and vice versa.

I have an academic background in literary studies and an abiding belief – grounded in experience and theoretically informed – in the social power of language and text. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the forms of public discourse that I considered among the most significant in India in the context of constructing modern womanhood

were textual, written ones. My training has equipped me to recognise the social value of written texts as well as with the analytic tools needed to embark on the processes of deep reading and interpretation. The interdisciplinarity of my research is thus at least partially the product of my academic as well as my personal background. I should add that my emphasis on the value of the written text as a particularly powerful manifestation of the public imaginary is not to discount the value of other forms of discourse such as those of film, music and so on, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Rather it is to make a considered choice from among these different sources and explore that choice as attentively and thoroughly as possible within the bounds of the thesis. This involves, as will become apparent, the analysis not only of the written word but also of images from the texts in question, placing an explicit value on the visual or pictorial as well as on the written aspects of these texts.

My interest in postcolonial studies as well as my upbringing and education within a postcolonial and apartheid culture have inevitably coloured my worldview. As a member of the first generation of post-apartheid South African youth, my experiences of moving within and between different colour and class communities have instilled in me a lasting interest in questions of marginalisation, ethnicity, power and identity. Similarly, my emphasis on the importance of a feminist perspective is founded in large part on my own past experiences – both as a girl who was taught to 'behave like a lady' and as a woman who learned to question what that meant and why she should – and on the feminine identities that I negotiate on an everyday basis. My choices of research topic, data sources, methods, as well as the process of analysis, are inevitably influenced by my individual experiences as a student, as a mixed-race South African, as a daughter, sister, girlfriend.

As described above, my own position within the context of my research is multi-dimensional, but it does not therefore escape the imperative that questions of power between researcher and researched be considered. Exploring questions of Indian womanhood from a position that is at least partially Western demands that issues of subalternity be taken seriously in that relationship. Representations of modern womanhood imply (though not exclusively) an affluent and relatively powerful femininity to which agency and independence are central, but as feminist scholars have shown, an identity of subalternity in one sphere is not necessarily subsumed by autonomy in another. The visibility and autonomy of 'modern Indian women' with regard to gendered power relations do not deny the imbalances between India and the West. The realities of the 'colonial present' (Gregory 2004) together with those of living in a deeply

patriarchal society, have positioned Indian women as 'doubly in shadow', according to Gayatri Spivak (1988: 288).

As one who simultaneously occupies positions on both sides of the colonial divide simultaneously, an insider/ outsider, I am acutely aware of the 'multiple and contradictory bases of subjectivity' (Mankekar 1999: 35) that are threaded through all public and private narratives of womanhood, and therefore inevitably through my own identities. For me, reading representations of Indian women and the particular 'shadows' they carry and construct, has demanded the re-learning of certain privileges as loss. As Gayatri Spivak, from whose work this idea is drawn, suggests: 'In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* "unlearns" female privilege' (1988: 295). This entails the recognition of the heterogeneity of women and experiences and representations of womanhood, and a genuine, reflexively critical engagement with the text.

Recognising these complexities in both myself and my data, I have endeavoured to carry out my research as far as possible with a consciously critical eye, sensitive to the broader academic debates within which they are located, to the voices of the empirical data sources, as well as to my own negotiated position with regard to all of these. While there can of course be no such thing as the single true reading of the texts in question, or of any social text, it is entirely possible to produce a false reading – most easily through a failure to be attentive to the story the text itself is telling. This is what Mark Ledbetter suggests when he says: 'I think that what we need to be careful of is the almost inherent desire to "tell the story" ourselves, instead of having any story "told" for us' (1996: 3). My aim throughout the following chapters has been to allow the texts in question to narrate their own story of modern Indian womanhood, while recognising that as their interpreter I cannot but select, mediate and in fact create their meaning. There is a constant but productive tension in this thesis, therefore, between the primary text, its context, and its interpreter and interpretation – all which are held in the dynamic whole that is the hermeneutic circle.

Chapter Five

Transgressive Bodies

A quick glance through Indian newspapers and magazines reveals that one of the primary attributes of the new Indian woman is her refusal of 'traditional' norms of femininity and womanhood. The new Indian woman appears to be challenging social expectations of motherhood and wifely duty while taking on new roles in the public sphere. In terms of fashion, ambition, self-confidence, determination, she is radically different from her mother and grandmother who are typically depicted as somewhat bewildered by her independence. While the mother and grandmother embody 'Indian' tradition and values in the way that they dress, their attitudes to marriage and childcare, and their own attentions to their husbands and sons, the new Indian woman is expressly concerned with herself and her own achievements in multiple spheres, both public and private. One of her most distinctive characteristics, therefore, is her rejection, and active transgression, of traditional roles.

This reading of the image of the new Indian woman may be a superficial one, but it is dominant across numerous media and in everyday discourse in urban India where common sense opposes modernity to tradition, particularly in the realm of female experience. In dominant narratives of modernity, tradition is typically associated with the limitations placed upon women and the multiple oppressions experienced by them. These are exemplified in the Sita-Savitri – submissive, sacrificial and uncomplaining – model of femininity which is often invoked as representing the traditional but now outdated ideal to which women should aspire. In contrast, and as I argued in chapter two, women's freedom, their individual autonomy, and their independence from constraining social structures and roles are all strongly associated with being modern. A number of binaries therefore result from the opposition of modernity and tradition and their specific articulations through notions of womanhood. Some of these are outlined in the table below:

Traditional	Modern
East	West(ernised)
Conformist	Transgressive
Constrained	Liberated
Victimised	Empowered
New woman	Bharatiya nari[16]

Table 5.1

Furthermore, these narratives of modernity as being opposed to tradition and liberatory for women, centre upon the body as a key site for the articulation of these categories. They produce female bodies that are marked as either modern and liberated or traditional and oppressed, according to the norms that they transgress or to which they conform. The bodily transgression of women thus becomes central to the production of their own modern subjectivities as well as to the modernity of the Indian nation more generally. The importance of the female body to the discursively constructed relationship between transgression and modernity is evident in all three sections of this chapter, but is particularly notable in narratives of modern female sexuality, which are explored in depth in the final section.

My overarching aim in this chapter is to unravel some of the discourses of bodily transgression in women's narratives and *India Today*, and the ways in which they perform the female body as modern. I argue that the image of the new Indian woman that is produced from these sources is a hybrid and contradictory figure, since their narratives of transgression both implicitly reinscribe women within patriarchal paradigms, and offer a potentially transformative view of Indian womanhood. As is shown through close reading of the texts however, neither of these processes can easily be aligned with the processes of either modernity or tradition. Therefore, the transgressive new woman, and the view of modernity, that emerges from close readings of the narratives of female bodily transgression in these sources, both reinforces and disturbs the dominant binaries outlined above.

This simultaneous reinscription and troubling of norms is in fact part of the basic work of all kinds of social transgression. Acts of transgression always serve to highlight the specific (cultural, religious, social, or political) boundaries that define them as such, and which they also serve to define. As Tim Cresswell puts it, 'The labelling of actions as

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[16] The term 'Bharatiya nari' is prevalent in common parlance and refers to an abstract, 'traditional' ideal of (Hindu) womanhood. The Bharatiya nari embodies the feminine virtues of submissiveness, self-sacrificial love, modesty, gracefulness, gentleness, humility, and so on. Her counterpart is the Bharatiya purusha, the ideal Indian man, but it is telling that this term is almost never heard or read in everyday discourse.

inappropriate in the context of a particular place serves as evidence for the always already existing normative geography (1996: 10). At the same time, and by definition, transgressive acts constitute crossings of these boundaries.

It is therefore important that any discussion of transgression be carefully contextualised in space and time, since behaviour or modes of being that are considered taboo at one point in history or in one cultural and political context may be completely acceptable, even obligatory, in another. Uma Narayan illustrates this beautifully in an anecdote about travelling to visit more 'traditional' family members in South India at the age of twelve.

> My mother made it clear that, marked as I now was by puberty, I could not wear my 'Western' skirts and dresses there, though they had seemed 'Indian' enough to both me and her when I wore them in Bombay. The primary principle that seemed to determine what I could wear when I was South visiting my relatives was that it fully covered my legs. I have since wondered in what sense this 'culture' that was bothered by my spindly twelve-year-old legs was the 'same' culture that produced the polymorphously perverse erotic sculptures on the temples of Khajuraho, festooned with dozens of sexually acrobatic 'divine' bodies, in a variety of positions, some of which are undoubtedly only possible for the gods!
>
> (Narayan 1997:27)

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Fig. 5.1 Khajuraho Sculptures

The pictures reproduced above of the sculptures that Narayan refers to, would likely carry a significant amount of shock-value if they were hung as decorative images on the walls of an orthodox (or indeed a liberal) Hindu household. They are therefore useful examples of Cresswell's and Narayan's arguments – that notions of what constitutes transgression are clearly inseparable from the multiple and sometimes contradictory cultural processes together with which they are enmeshed in webs of mutual construction and definition.

It is therefore worth restating that the discourses I analyse in this chapter are specific to Anglophone India, and therefore also largely confined to an urban, well-educated,

middle-class setting and all the politics that such a relatively elite context implies. Within this context, questions of modernity and the concept's attendant principles of freedom and autonomy are manifested in ways that cannot be read as representative of 'India' more generally. Although thus situated within a relatively small sphere of Indian society, these discourses can open up new ways of understanding the multiple connections between tradition and modernity and the ways in which the female body is produced according to these categories.

From *India Today* and contemporary women's narratives, three types of bodily transgression emerge as particularly significant in the context described above. These are: transgressions of space and place, transgressions of gender, and transgressions of sexuality. Each section of this chapter deals with one of these types of transgression, although all three are of course interlinked and inter-dependent. I begin each section by outlining how the transgression in question defines certain boundaries that are constructed as traditional. I subsequently move to a close reading of specific narratives of this transgression in order to unpack some of the multiple realities of modern Indian womanhood. I interrogate in each case the valorisation of transgression as a path to modern freedom and autonomy, exploring the ideas that underpin this attitude and the implications of it for a feminist politics of material and symbolic emancipation.

Transgressing Spatial Boundaries

Tim Cresswell (1996) emphasises the ways in which transgressions are dependent for their definition and their power upon the spatial context in which they are enacted; a transgressive act is often defined as such by being 'out of place'. Although not all transgressions are definitively or even primarily dependent upon space or place – for example, many feminist transgressions of patriarchal norms are defined not by the physical spaces of enactment but rather by social structures that are often intangible – the transgressions that I examine in this section are certainly spatially implicated in a very fundamental sense. That is to say that the discourses of transgression that I explore here construct the mere presence of a woman in a certain place as itself a transgressive act, and furthermore, that spatial transgression is constructed as indicative of her modernity.

As I discussed in the introduction, and as with all transgressions, the transgressive act illuminates the norm and the boundaries around it, as well as indicating an alternative to that norm. Within the discourses of *India Today* and contemporary women's writing, narratives of transgression valorise women's entrance into certain social spaces from

which they have been excluded. These transgressions illuminate an underlying structure of space that is strongly and unequally gendered, with certain clearly demarcated spaces being marked out as feminine and others (the remainder) as masculine. Those spaces marked out as feminine are typically the 'inner' ones of the home, while masculine spaces encompass both those of home and the 'outer' public spaces of leisure and work.

The transgressions of space in narratives of modernity refer most often to women's crossing from the inner spaces of home into the outer or more public spaces of the workplace. The very bodily presence of women in these masculine spaces is often explicitly constructed in these discourses as an emancipatory transgression of traditional boundaries. These constructions can however be problematic on several levels. Firstly, it is questionable whether these boundaries can be defined as traditional at all. As Partha Chatterjee argues in an influential article (1990), the particular implications of the divisions of space into inner (feminine) and outer (masculine), which are today considered traditionally Indian, are in fact a decidedly modern rather than a traditional phenomenon. While the associations of woman with the domestic and man with the public sphere are not very different 'from the typical conception of gender roles in any "traditional" patriarchy' (ibid: 239), the particular investment of ideas of virtue, purity, and essential Indianness in feminine spaces, and femininity, are an effect of modern nationalist reforms rather than generations-old tradition.

Chatterjee suggests that this ideological weight was added in its contemporary form to gendered spatial divisions by nineteenth century nationalist movements that sought to define an Indian identity against that of the country's colonisers. While the material techniques of Western civilisation were considered necessary for modernisation, spirituality was positioned at the core of that Indian identity. Chatterjee explains that the 'material/ spiritual distinction was condensed into an analogous, but ideologically far more powerful, dichotomy: that between the outer and the inner'. The dominant and enduring thinking of the colonised Indians was that 'the material domain lies outside us... ultimately it is unimportant. It is the spiritual which lies within, which is our true self'. Chatterjee develops his argument thus: 'Now apply the inner/ outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living and you get a separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity' (ibid: 238).

In the world, 'typically the domain of the male', one might therefore engage in material modernisation, but the home, which is represented by and therefore also encompasses the female, must remain pure. Chatterjee points out that:

> If we now find continuities in these social attitudes in the phase of social reforms in the nineteenth century, we are tempted to put this down as 'conservatism', a mere defence of 'traditional' norms. But this would be a mistake. The colonial situation, and the ideological response of nationalism, introduced an entirely new substance to these terms and effected their transformation... The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But it had failed to colonise the inner, essential, identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture.
>
> (ibid: 238-239)

Still following Chatterjee's argument, a more problematic issue arises around the transgressive new Indian woman. This is the question of whether the ideologies that underpin the valorisation of the women's spatial transgression as modern, are in fact substantially different from those that locate femininity in the home and are thought of as definitively traditional. According to Chatterjee, the effect on notions of womanhood of investing the inner spaces of the home with the true identity of the nation, was the production of a 'new woman', the bhadramahila or 'respectable woman', characterised by her 'womanly virtues' such as 'chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labours of love' (ibid: 247).

These attributes contrast markedly with those of the contemporary new woman, but the narratives of transgression that suggest women to be flouting these 'traditionally Indian' rules of femininity by crossing the boundaries of inner space are nonetheless inherently problematic for much the same reasons. As Chatterjee shows, the particular constructs of femininity that are being rejected in these narratives are not those of traditional womanhood but rather those of the nineteenth century 'new woman' that came into being in accordance with a nationalist agenda. The nationalist framework that underpins these ideas of womanhood can now be seen to be echoed in ideas of modern womanhood, since the new Indian woman is by definition being constructed within a nationalist framework. Not only is she less of a break from tradition than she may seem, it is not at all clear that the contemporary new Indian woman represents in fact any productive resistance to ideologies of nationhood that instrumentalise women.

I return to this relationship between woman and nation in the final section of this chapter, and to what are perhaps its most damaging implications in chapter seven, but

a final question remains to be addressed in this section. The most prominent form of spatial transgression in the discourses of women's narratives and *India Today* is the crossing from the inner spaces of home to the outer spaces of the workplace. The independence and personal achievement that this transition from feminine to masculine spaces is thought to mark, is constructed as a major element of new womanhood. An important question is therefore whether the associations of inner spaces with the feminine, and outer spaces with the masculine are genuinely being challenged in these discourses of spatial transgression.

Moreover, in the privileging of the public over the private sphere as a key site of new womanhood, are these discourses in fact furthering the devaluation of the domestic realm as oppressive, in contrast to the liberatory potential of the world outside the home? If the household is imbued with oppressive traditions and limitations for women who seek self-realisation, how are we to think about the subjectivity of women who did not and do not depart in any meaningful sense from the boundaries of feminine spaces? Is it indeed possible for women to find self-fulfilment in the home or among family, or can a sense of self only be achieved through escape via study, employment or migration to Western countries?

It has come to be widely recognised that the household is not a static or one-dimensional arena. Rather it is a site of intense contestation and is central to the production of specifically feminine modernities. As Alison Blunt has shown, both the 'imaginative and material spaces of home' are sites of 'creativity, subjectivity, and resistance' (2005: 3). Rita Felski, too, has argued that 'The so-called private sphere, often portrayed as a domain where natural and timeless emotions hold sway, is shown to be radically implicated in patterns of modernization and processes of social change (1995: 3). This demands that attention be paid not only to the workspaces that are often the central concern in narratives of women's spatialised modernities, but also to the spaces that these narratives might exclude from those modernities.

It should be noted that the liberating spaces of the workplace that lie beyond the home and its domestic activity need not be large physical ones. They may be metaphorical or more defined spaces, such as those of the imagination and the written page, and no less transgressive for their relative intangibility or size. Many have attested to the transgressive nature of the very act of writing for women. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen remarks 'Writing is male territory, has been so right from the beginning. Women are late-comers, and trespassers' (2002: 6). It is the physical space of various workplaces, however, which foreground the mere bodily presence of women as transgressive and

which is most prominent in the discourses of *India Today* as 'outer' spaces which are being 'stormed and conquered' (*India Today* 4/4/2005: 67, print ed.) by women.

The celebratory tone of the discourses surrounding the presence of women in these masculine domains is exemplified and concentrated in a recent issue of *India Today* entitled 'Women's Special Issue: Power Goddess' (ibid.), which focuses explicitly on 'the new Indian woman' (ibid: 1) and 'the modern Indian woman' (ibid: 33) who are 'taking on roles tradition has tried to deny them' (ibid: 34). The issue features profiles of 30 women who 'leap across the gender divide and take charge' (ibid: cover) as well as several articles addressing modern women's roles in the fields of architecture, the arts, the media, politics and personal relationships. The invocation of women's transgression and emancipation as a central aspect of India's modernity is consistent almost throughout this edition of the magazine, and its discursive construction of tradition as oppressive versus modernity as liberating resonates with similar articles and profiles of women in the public sphere that have been published in *India Today* between 2000 and 2006. These articles tend to focus particularly on television and film actresses and the characters they play, as well as images of women produced through advertising media. I return to some of these examples and explore them more deeply in the following section.

K.R. Usha's novel *The Chosen* provides an interesting complement to the 'Power Goddesses' profiled in *India Today*.

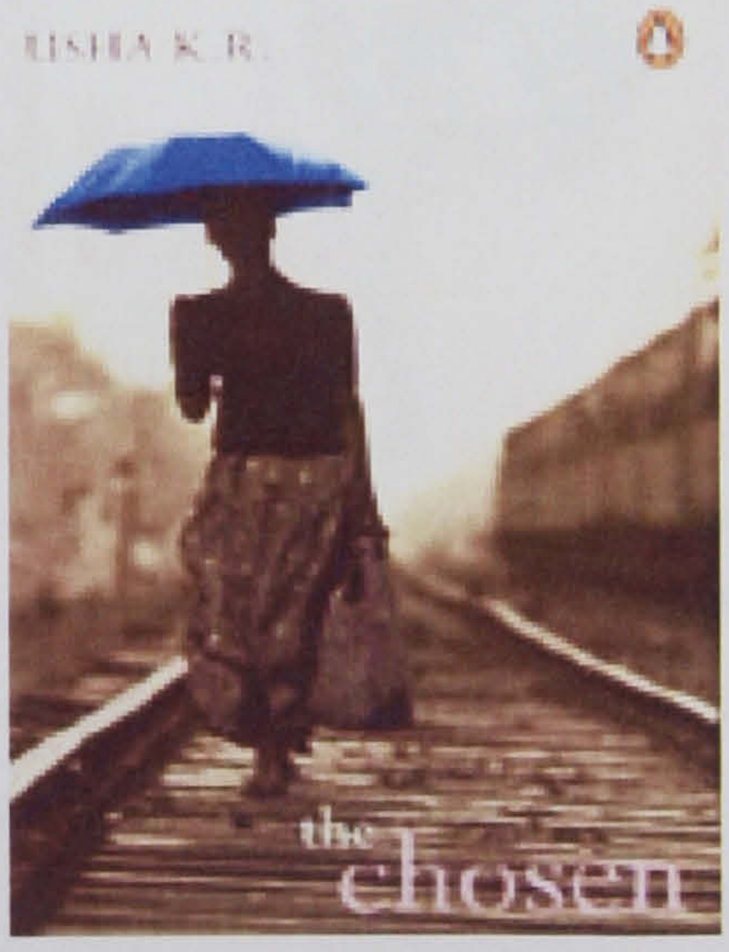

Fig. 5.2 The Chosen

After her father's death when she is just 13, the novel's protagonist, Nagaratna, is forced to move with her family from the idyllic village of Gubbigudu to the 'semi-squalid' Vitthala Colony in Bangalore. The first things we as readers see of Vitthala Colony is its presiding deity, Plague-amma, who 'sweeps the city with an epidemic of chicken-pox or measles' once a year. Other initial images include Vitthala Colony's temple and its

astropalmist. The small town is thus seen to be governed by tradition and as she comes of age in this place, Nagaratna becomes increasingly conscious of what she sees as the lack of sophistication in her surroundings and in her family. She perceives the more 'noble' employment as an office assistant in an ashram school to be her means of escaping from being 'Pinioned for life. With a ball and chain to Sai Krupa. To Vitthala Colony' (Usha 2003: 38).

Contrary to the overt causal connection between women's presence in the workplace and their modernity expressed in 'Power Goddess', an attentive reading of this issue of *India Today* together with *The Chosen*, reveals that elements of tradition and modernity are interwoven in significant, though not always progressive ways in the discursive production of the new Indian woman. My readings of these texts reveal the ways in which they implicitly disrupt the binary opposition of tradition and modernity and their associations with women's repression and oppression on the one hand, and their liberation and empowerment on the other.

In 'Power Goddess', the first challenge to these binaries is located on the magazine's front cover (below).

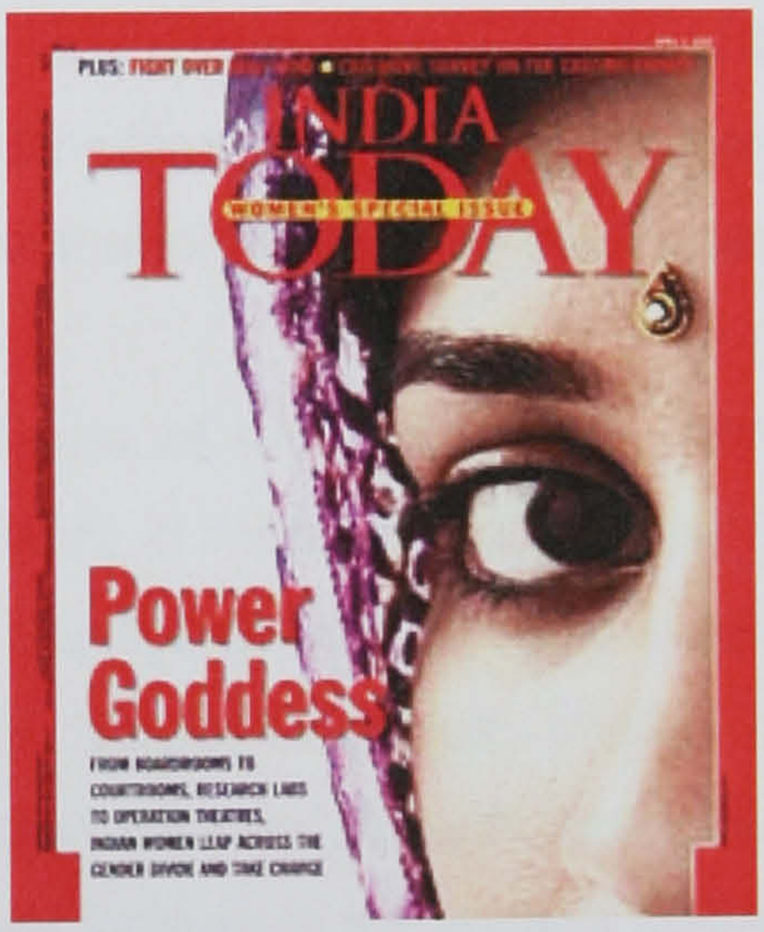

Fig. 5.3 Power Goddess Cover (*India Today* 4/4/2005)

The juxtaposition of the issue's title with a close-up of a woman's face, adorned with a bindi and a sari pallu or dupatta, dramatically illustrates the meshing of what is commonly thought of as traditional – particularly the covering of the head – with the explicitly stated modernity of the women profiled by the magazine. The covering of the head in India, as elsewhere as debates around the hijab in Western countries attest, is often associated with what are thought of as traditional gender hierarchies that are oppressive to women. Rama Mehta highlights contemporary attitudes to this practice in her novel *Inside the Haveli* (1977). The novel tells the story of an educated and outspoken Bombay girl, Geeta, who marries into an old Rajasthani family where the

women keep purdah.[17] One of the most difficult things for Geeta to maintain is the covering of her head with her sari pallu as all the women do not just in front of the men of the house but in front of each other too. When Geeta first arrives the women exclaim 'in horror' at her lack of veiling, asking 'Where do you come from that you show your face to the world?' (ibid: 14). For Geeta, who cannot seem to keep her pallu from slipping off her head, the constant vigilance required to keep her face veiled is a powerful symbolic silencing, and literally rendering invisible, of her as an individual.

The apparent contradiction then, between the traditional appearance of the woman in the above image from *India Today* and her designation as a 'power goddess', throws into question the easy association, expressed elsewhere in the magazine, between the oppression of women and traditional practices. The image therefore reinforces the sense of Tabassum Ruby's finding in a different context (Ruby's study was conducted among Muslim women in Canada) that there can exist 'a gap between dominant understandings of the hijab as a symbol of... women's oppression, and the self-expressed sense of women... that the wearing of the hijab is a positive experience in their lives' (Ruby 2006: 54). The women in Ruby's study list several ways in which they perceive the wearing of the hijab to empower them: 'making their identities distinct; taking control of their bodies; and giving them a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim world' (ibid.). Elsewhere, Ruby offers the additional suggestion that for some women the hijab is 'a sign of liberation that protects them from a sexist society' (2004: 7).

A second image from this issue of the magazine similarly troubles the distinctions between modernity and tradition, in much the same way as does the very title of this issue. Both the title and the illustration (below) for the cover article, which carries the same title as the entire issue: 'Power Goddess', invoke ideas of deity to express the empowerment of modern Indian women through their paid work in the public sphere. The picture, portraying a young woman in the style of a Hindu goddess, uses traditional religious imagery to express the modernity of contemporary women. Similarly, the title 'Power Goddess' links ideas of women's power, in terms of financial success, authority, independence, with the notion of divinity and worship.

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[17] Purdah refers to the practice of secluding women from everyday public observation, and particularly from the gaze of men who are not their husbands, through the covering of the body with clothing and veils but also through the confinement of women to particular rooms of the home.

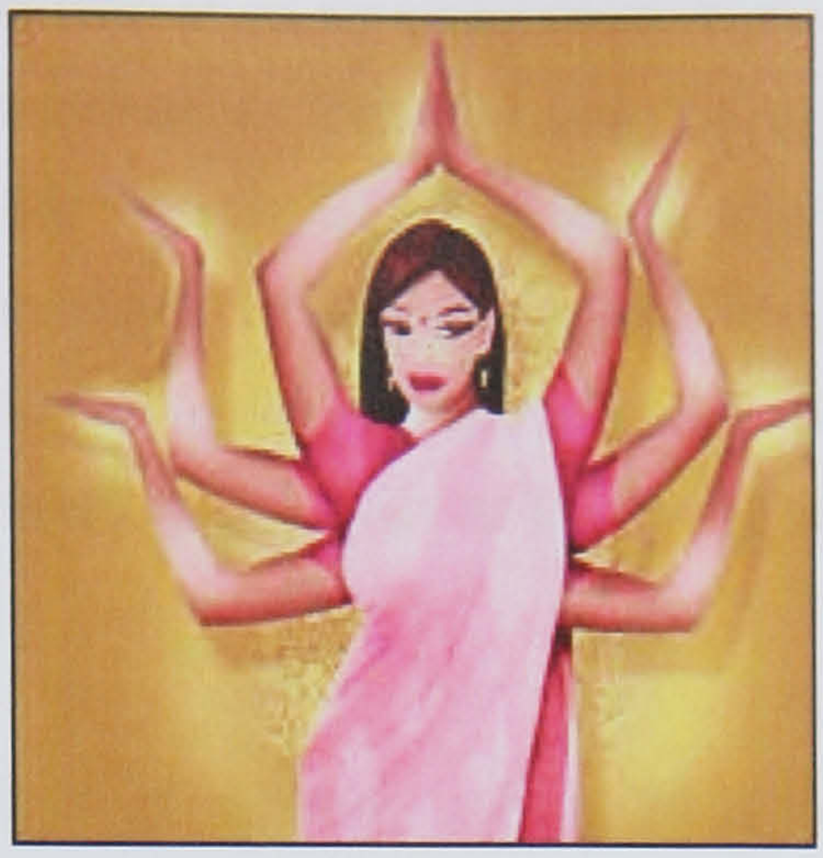

Fig 5.4 Power Goddess illustration (*India Today* 4/4/2005)

A consideration of these two examples leads one to ask whether their construction of the modern woman as deified removes her from the material reality of everyday life and renders her new achievements and power understandable within an existing frame of reference in order to render her also more manageable. Constructing the transgressive woman as something divine, extraordinary, even mystical or unearthly, may in fact work to reinscribe the norm of masculine presence in the spaces she is seen to be appropriating. Such an emphasis on the exception as indeed exceptional can perhaps help to implement the rule, as is also suggested by further discursive constructions of the new woman that I examine in the next section.

The evolution of traditional religious imagery and ideas into representations of the modern woman is one discursive means by which women are 'kept in their place'. These two examples of the implicit circumscription of explicitly modern women are paralleled by several small instances in various issues of *India Today* 2000-2006. Drawing on principles of tradition to illuminate and interpret the modernity of new Indian women, allusions to certain 'cultural' or 'traditional' feminine attributes as praiseworthy are ostensibly celebratory but in fact work to reinscribe the boundaries whose transgression is outwardly lauded.

Examples of such gendered language pervade the magazine and run contrary to the magazine's explicit lionisation of the modern, transgressive Indian woman. For example, in the 'Power Goddess' issue I have been discussing, an article on female police officers praises the ways they are 'spreading their influence with a quiet resolve', a profile of a female film director claims that 'Revathy's biggest strength… is her emotional quotient', and a look at an all-female team of architects concludes with the line, 'As the girls return to their drawing boards, the laughter and chatter begin'.

Elsewhere, a Dalit woman who is so sexually frank that 'even Shobha Dé[18] could pick up tips' is patronisingly described as 'one little woman' (*India Today* 28/8/2000), and in a profile of Leila Seth (author Vikram Seth's mother), she is described as 'independent-minded' but also as 'a throwback to a gentle past' and someone who 'can make sure you tuck into your comfortingly gooey chocolate cake with the same quiet care with which she shuts the drawing room door to keep out the mosquitoes' (*India Today* 8/12/2003).

This repeated reinscription of women within traditionally feminine paradigms is significant in that it reveals a fundamental inconsistency in the discourses of *India Today*. While explicitly emphasising and celebrating the transgressions of women into masculine spaces as powerful indicators of their being modern, these same discourses reinscribe a patriarchal paradigm of womanhood that diminishes their achievements and reinscribes them within established norms of femininity. These instances of patriarchal language usage subvert and undermine the magazine's overtly progressive representation of women, and blur the boundaries between tradition and modernity that are clearly outlined elsewhere in the magazine.

Returning to the specific context of women in the workplace, similar questions of tradition and modernity are raised by K.R. Usha's *The Chosen*. As an employee of Vidyalaya, the ashram school, Nagaratna finds the place magical and her very presence within its walls is incredible to her. She is 'always overcome by a sense of awe, that she should be one of the select few chosen to inhabit this sacred space' (Usha 2003: 49). Although Vidyalaya is not a masculine space, ruled as it is by the female principal, Miss Pandit, Nagaratna's presence there is transgressive in the sense that it represents an implicit rejection of her home and family and an opening into a new, refined and romantic world in which, given her village origins, she does not 'really' belong.

Although Nagaratna yearns for, and indeed achieves, an escape from the confines of Vitthala Colony, the life that she attains through her work at the ashram school and later the ashram itself, is by no means a modern one in the sense of those described in 'Power Goddess'. Nagaratna's liberation from Vitthala Colony leads her not to the definitively modern environment of the city but rather to the far more fundamentally traditional surroundings of Muttu, the ashram, a place which makes her feel 'as if she had come back to her old home in the village' (ibid: 258). Through this narrative Usha

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[18] Shoba De is an Indian author and columnist who is well-known for her sexually frank fiction and journalism.

demonstrates one way in which an escape from the oppressions associated with a traditional way of life in a small town, can represent something very different from the kind of liberatory modernity that is constructed through public media such as *India Today*.

The borders between modernity and tradition are shown by Nagaratna's journeys, both physical and internal, to be porous and flexible. The physical spaces she occupies consistently challenge the opposition of tradition and modernity, and the question of which spaces provide greater freedom and possibilities for autonomy is not an easy one. Vitthala Colony, for example, is traditional or perhaps even backward in many ways, but it is clearly also modern. It is near the bustling and technologically advanced city of Bangalore, women in paid employment are unremarkable, and the latest fashion trends and needs are acknowledged and available. For example, 'Lovely Matching Centre which Nagaratna's family patronizes used to sell only blouse bits and cloth but now, in keeping with the times, it has a separate glitzy section for ready-mades'.

Similarly, the ashram, though traditional in the most fundamental sense of existing to perpetuate and facilitate religious illumination, is distinctively modern:

> ...every window had mosquito wire-netting and every house a shallow water-channel running around it to keep out the scorpions; a broken slab did not have to wait for years to be replaced, and as for the bathrooms and lavatories! The one attached to Suguna's room had a white porcelain beauty, a long stemmed teacup, not a hole in the ground with footrests that squelched as you lowered yourself between them. That was what she liked best here at Muttu – the absence of rags; nothing tacky here, no worn petticoats making their way down the line into swabs and then all-purpose rags. In Muttu, she had rediscovered her home, but without the pinch, the deprivation, the uncertainty.
>
> (ibid: 258)

Questions of women's modernities and their definition through the spaces they occupy are made more complex by the character of Nagaratna's mother, Sarojamma. Upon her return from a two-month stay at the ashram, Nagaratna finds her mother preparing fried snacks to sell through the business run by Indramma, a neighbour whose cottage industry has always been considered deeply shameful by Nagaratna. Sarojamma has been forced, partly by her daughter-in-law's ill health, to find paid work while Nagaratna has been away. Sarojamma is an immensely successful cook, however, and shortly after Nagaratna's return she begins running a 'mess' from the house:

> ...her first customers were the students who rented a room in Nirmala's building, and before the month was out some of the men working in offices in the Colony had become lunchtime regulars. Sarojamma cooked a simple meal

> – rice, rasam, sambar, a curry, pickle and curd. Soon, lunch ran into two batches and she threw in a chutney and a payasa on Fridays and turned on the radio so that her 'boys' could eat to music. She collected charges for the week's lunch in advance and entered the particulars in a yellow register which was tucked behind the God Shelf.
>
> (ibid: 276)

It is therefore Sarojamma, rather than Nagaratna, who becomes the exemplary 'modern woman' through using her skills and canny business sense, while her daughter, working outside the home, has in fact disengaged herself from the world and effectively travelled in a circle to return to her childhood. The paradoxical contrasts between the two women are condensed in a scene near the end of the novel where Nagaratna is reading an article about the winner of the Miss India beauty pageant in a women's magazine.

> I want the best of all worlds, Miss India declares, and I know I can get it. From the magazine poll it emerges that the young Indian woman of today is ambitious and aggressive, yet feminine – demands money, creativity and avenues for self-expression from her job, and is uncompromising in her quest for self-fulfilment. She is no longer shackled like her mother. She is aware of her sexuality and is all set to assert it vigorously. Miss India is twenty-one years old, and Nagaratna realizes with a pang that she too is twenty-one; she is a young Indian woman.
>
> (ibid. 299)

Of course, despite her yearnings for something more than the stifling confines of the sordid Vitthala Colony and her family – 'something uncluttered and noble and fulfilling' (ibid: 38) – Nagaratna could not be further from the popular image of the new Indian woman that her magazine describes. After a suicide attempt and a long recuperative stay in a nursing home, she realises that 'she has no job to return to... and the nursing-home bill has eaten into the rest of the nest-egg her father had left for her wedding' (ibid: 321). She has no money, is unfulfilled, and has little hope for the future.

Her mother, on the other hand, fulfils almost all the criteria of a modern woman, with the likely exception of 'vigorously' asserting her sexuality. She both exemplifies and turns on its head the notion of the modern Indian woman, illustrated by her actions upon Nagaratna's return home from the nursing home. Fully capable and in control, Sarojamma is at the same time resolutely religious. She reopens the mess immediately, aware that money is being lost every day that it is shut, but giving thanks to God for her daughter's health is at least as important as earning: 'Her mother reserves ghee lamps for festivals and special occasions... for ghee after all costs sixty-eight rupees a bottle. But today, Nagaratna knows, though it is neither a festival nor a birthday, today there will be a row of ghee lamps on the God Shelf' (ibid: 321). These

two actions, opening the mess and performing the necessary religious rituals, are not opposed but are both central to Sarojamma's essentially modern and specifically Indian identity.

In summary, both *India Today* and *The Chosen* complicate and indeed in some ways overcome a division between the categories of tradition and modernity, through their explorations of women's presences in the spaces of the home and the workplace. *The Chosen* interrogates the dichotomy of inner and outer spaces and the ways in which it is mapped onto ideas of tradition and modernity, challenging the conventional positioning of women within those categories and revealing some of the connections between them. The novel demonstrates some of the ways in which principles of becoming modern may be enacted in the traditionally feminine spaces of the home, while the outer spaces of paid employment may be as constraining for women as domestic drudgery.

The transgressive presence of women in the workplace is seen within the discourses of *India Today* to be fundamental to women's modernity, but while these transgressions from feminine to masculine spaces are overtly celebrated in these pages, women are often 'kept in their place' by the implicit value conferred on the traditionally feminine attributes of quiet strength and endurance by which women maintain the status quo. Therefore, although their transgressive presence is prized as a marker of a particularly Indian modernity, the degree to which that presence is seen genuinely to transgress social boundaries warrants further interrogation. The next section therefore turns to a more detailed exploration of the particular ways in which such transgression might be enacted. It examines how women's bodily transgressions might be actively performed by narratives of modernity, focusing specifically on the ways in which gender roles may be inverted and flexed, and on some of the implications of these contestations of the norm.

Aggressive Women

Just as these ideological categories of tradition and modernity are mapped onto the female body's occupation of physical spaces, so too are ideas of gender-appropriate behaviour implicated therein. The ideal of femininity often used as shorthand to express the constraining roles traditionally imposed upon Indian women is exemplified in particular Hindu deities. Sita and Savitri, whom I have already mentioned, are perhaps the two most common examples of this ideal, often referred to together as the embodiment of traditional Indian womanhood in the term 'Sati-Savitri', though of course they constitute a specifically Hindu symbol. These two women are characters from the

Mahabharata whose chastity, purity, and sacrificial wifely devotion are often seen in the contemporary discourses analysed here to epitomise the patriarchal oppression that inheres in 'traditional' ideas of womanhood.

From figures such as these comes also the more abstract nationalistic figure of the Bharatiya nari, often decried and derided in contemporary discourses as old-fashioned and stereotypical. This image illustrates the potent connections that are woven between ideas of traditional womanhood on the one hand, and those of nationalistic womanhood on the other. For example, an article on modern women in Mumbai quotes one such young woman as saying 'The social pressure to conform to the traditional, coy "Bharatiya nari' has no role to play here' (*India Today* 14/8/2000). These condemnations of the Bharatiya nari as outmoded and oppressive resonate with critiques of the construction of the woman as a symbol of the Indian nation. However, as I suggested in the previous section, when it is so often replaced, as in this article and almost in the proverbial same breath, by the image of the 'new Indian woman', the Bharatiya nari is not so much discarded as rearticulated in contemporary discourses. An ideal of Indian womanhood thus remains central even in certain discourses of modernity that seem explicitly to reject such a principle, calling into question the idea of modernity being principally characterised by a break with tradition.

The behavioural boundaries that determine appropriate performances of masculinity and femininity typically define the latter according to such attributes as motherliness, submissiveness, dependence on male relatives, and physical weakness. In contrast to these qualities, women are commonly seen in *India Today* to be engaged in a revolution, challenging patriarchal norms and restructuring Indian society through their crossing and redefining of these boundaries. By transgressing the norms of femininity through the adoption of masculine roles characterised by aggression, the pursuit of career-related rewards, or simply through the choice of a 'masculine' career, women are seen to become modern. However, the notions of freedom and empowerment with which such 'gender-bending' is explicitly associated in discourses such as those of the 'Power Goddess' issue of *India Today,* need to be interrogated. While there can be no doubt that patriarchal ideologies are being actively contested in multiple ways in India as elsewhere, I would suggest that the contradictions and nuances of those contestations in both their physical and discursive enactments are sometimes erased in what can be overtly triumphalist narratives of women's modernity.

The attribute that is repeatedly and consistently invoked in *India Today,* in connection with women's modernity and empowerment, is that of aggression. It is interesting to

note that although the patriarchal norms that define and govern feminine behaviour constitute a recurrent theme in contemporary narratives by Indian women, the acts of resistance against these norms take a substantially different form in these discourses. Aggression, and certainly physical aggression, is rarely apparent and certainly not valorised in the same way as in *India Today*. Rather, women's narratives tend to draw attention to the constrains of womanhood that hinder women's individualisation and ambition, leading critics such as Lisa Lau to suggest that the authors of these texts 'consistently posit their protagonists and female characters as victims... primarily and simply because they are women' (2003: 369). This is not to suggest that the texts articulate no resistance to patriarchal norms. Acts of resistance are in evidence but are typically enacted within traditional spaces (a good example of which appears in the following chapter's discussion of Margaret Shanthi, who feeds her vicious husband into passivity) and the texts seldom if ever suggest a reversal or explosion of such boundaries.

Aggression is however so strongly and consistently emphasised in *India Today* (as well as in other sources that include everyday conversation) as central to the new Indian woman, that it merits attention here. In numerous articles published in the magazine over the past 6 years, the new Indian woman has been defined by, and praised for, her appropriation of the 'masculine' attribute of aggression which is seen to be expressed by her assertiveness, her emotional independence, and her anger. It is significant that these laudatory articles focus primarily on images of women produced for television and film, generalised notions of the 'alpha queen' (*India Today* 4/4/2005) the 'uberwoman' or 'Mr. She' (*India Today* 18/2/2002), and public personas such as that created by the 'spunky', 'plucky', 'feisty' teenage tennis star Sania Mirza whose t-shirts, emblazoned with slogans such as 'You can either agree with me or be wrong', are considered representative of her 'strong personality' (*India Today* 19/9/2005).

An article on the actress Raveena Tandon provides a good example: 'Aggression, it appears, is the name of the new game... Tandon emerges as a strong woman...There was something about her indomitable spirit that directors found themselves drawn to... Tandon's vibrant screen presence is complemented by a "blunt, dare-all" attitude' (*India Today* 29/4/2002). Similarly, an article on trends in television advertising points out 'There's a new kind of babe on television and she is all the things mommy said you should never grow up to be. She's selfish, actively aggressive and – the biggest sin in mommy's book – really doesn't know how a lady should behave around men' (*India Today* 25/11/2002).

It is notable, however, that the qualities of aggression, selfishness, and outspokenness that are attributed to these women as signals to their modernity, do not in fact constitute any real challenge to established notions of femininity and masculinity. Although these women behave in ways that challenge expectations, their actions are discursively constructed not as alternative ways of being feminine but as adopted aspects of masculinity. Nor do they challenge the reduction of women to the physical surfaces of the body, which play a major role in these ostensible challenges to traditional gender roles. Women's modern contestations of the norms of feminine 'vulnerability and submissiveness' (*India Today* 18/2/2002) are seen to be played out particularly through their recognition and indulgence of their own bodily desires – for sex, cigarettes, physically liberating clothing, even motherhood – and through specific adornments and modifications of their bodies. Paradoxically then, what might persuasively be read as the increasing feminisation of the female body through the emphasis placed on clothes, makeup and the desire to have children, is instead validated by discourses within *India Today* as a process by which women are in fact transgressing gender norms and thus becoming modern.

An article cited above, on young women in Mumbai, provides a useful example of this discursive parallelisation of increased feminisation or sexualisation of the female body with gender transgression, focusing as it does on the women as 'successful, single, sexy and savvy'. The tone of the article is emphatically triumphant, extolling the power of these women who play 'hard ball', and are 'hardcore professionals, working long hours, matching their male colleagues in strength, street smartness and resolve'. Apart from the fact that the qualities of 'their male colleagues' remain the norm and the apparent aspirational goals for these women, what is central to their successful modern crossover into male echelons is their appearance: 'the dated stereotype of the doggedly dowdy feminist is out. This is a post-feminist generation of women who revel in being female. After all, style is also power'. Heavy emphasis is placed on their clothes – 'the saris give way to mini skirts and lycra... Not for them the clichés of unwaxed feminists in cotton kurtas and kolhapuris' – as well as their handbags and shoes. These women are 'bold, carefree, cool' and as quoted earlier, have no time for the Bharatiya nari, but the point is driven home that their femininity remains firmly intact and is expressed through their physical appearance.

Even as they thus reinscribe women within traditional paradigms of femininity, the value placed by such articles on women's aggression is based upon what is seen to be the active breaking down of traditional gender roles and the appropriation of power by modern women. Aggressive women in 'real' life, however, are of course not confined to

the screen nor manifestations of aggression to self-assertion. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the 'feisty women' (*India Today* 18/9/2000) and the 'Bollywood babes' (*India Today* 23/9/2002) whose aggression is extolled as a marker of their modernity and empowerment – in instances where aggression is manifested in actual physical violence – such 'gender-bending' is treated very differently. Several articles in the last 6 years of *India Today*'s publication have addressed the question of violent acts, including and especially murder, that have been perpetrated by women. The discourses surrounding this perhaps more genuinely transgressive extreme of feminine aggression, further complicate the oppositional relationship between modernity and tradition set up by some of the discourses analysed above. A close reading of the ways in which female murderers are discussed in *India Today* reveals this dichotomy to be far knottier than it may appear elsewhere.

Juxtaposed with the numerous articles in *India Today* that celebrate women's self-assertion and even aggression as a basic element of the individualisation that is key to being modern, the magazine's narratives of violent women prompt some questions that are fundamental to a feminist inquiry into the political potential of women's aggression. Among the most important is whether, without discounting the value of moral judgements against murder and the infliction of physical harm, the discourses surrounding the actions of these women provide any recognition of the idea that such violence could be seen as a feminist strategy, part of the gender transgressions that seem elsewhere to be considered fundamental to women's self-realisation and emancipation from patriarchal rule.

Anita Harris and Diana Baker (1995) raise the question of whether violence is 'a priori masculine' and whether the necessary feminist rejection of the patriarchal order can also allow for the appropriation of aspects of that order in order then to subvert, reject and even explode it. Through the analysis of Helen Zahavi's *Dirty Weekend*, a novel about a female serial killer called Bella, Harris and Baker offer a reading of female violence that sees it as having the potential to be a rewriting of a patriarchal discourse that 'fundamentally alters the politics of that discourse' (Harris and Baker 1995: 598). They argue that contrary to Audre Lorde's argument that 'we cannot use the master's tools to break down his house,... *Dirty Weekend* demonstrates that these tools can be the most effective because they disarm the enemy. The vital point is that they are not used in the same way' (ibid).

Bearing Harris and Baker's argument in mind, *India Today's* article on Phoolan Devi, an enormously famous Indian dacoit, raises interesting questions regarding the

magazine's validation of female aggression elsewhere. Phoolan Devi, who spent years living as an outlaw in the Chambal ravines in Madhya Pradesh, evading the Indian police and gaining the popular moniker of 'Bandit Queen', was killed by gunmen in Delhi almost twenty years after her surrender to police in 1983.[19] The article published in *India Today* shortly after her murder provides a powerful illustration of the ways in which some of the principles of traditional practices, roles and beliefs suffuse notions of women's modernities as they are constructed in the magazine's discourses.

While Phoolan Devi's life is not fiction as is Bella's, the narratives that discursively construct Phoolan's life are significant in much the same way both in the handling of their subject matter as well as through what they choose to include and exclude. It is therefore important to ask whether *India Today* addresses the possibility of a feminist interpretation of Phoolan Devi's story, and indeed there are elements of the *India Today* article that acknowledge Phoolan's power, the significant authority and respect she commanded as a gang leader, and her violent resistances to injustice. She is described as having 'won for herself the right to define her life' (*India Today* 6/8/2001) and quoted post-surrender as saying that what she missed most about life as a dacoit was the 'power and authority' (ibid.) she had enjoyed.

Primarily, however, Phoolan is cast as a figure of 'wretchedness and desperation, trauma and terror, violence and crime'. Her life is seen as having been 'needlessly glamorized' and 'over-romanticised', and rather than a 'dacoit beauty' she is described as 'a drab-looking, highly moody, childishly petulant and disastrously short-tempered girl'. As an extreme example of an independent-minded and aggressive woman, Phoolan Devi attained the status of an icon in her own lifetime, in the contexts of both caste and gender struggles. The discourses of *India Today*, however, repeatedly point to her feet of clay. It is not insignificant that rather than being read as modern, Phoolan Devi's life is seen by *India Today* to have been primarily defined by the principles of tradition, both oppressive and empowering. They serve in these discourses as both the perceived cause and effect of her modern, or at least transgressive, self-definition.

As another representation of the life of Phoolan Devi, Shekhar Kapur's 1994 film *Bandit Queen* is criticised by Arundhati Roy (1994) for its overwhelming emphasis on the multiple rapes endured by Phoolan and its consequent construction of her victimisation by an oppressive patriarchal system as the primary cause of her activism. Roy's remarks are relevant to the discussion here since the discourses of *India Today* adopt

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[19] It should be noted that Phoolan Devi's assassination was due to her political involvements rather than her dacoity of twenty years before.

a similarly deterministic view to those of the film that Roy highlights. *India Today* suggests that Phoolan's life was defined not only by the violence that she inflicted on others but also to a large extent by the violence exacted upon her own body.

Phoolan Devi is not just the victim of traditional structures of oppression; the perceived effects of her transgression invoke the principles of tradition as much as, if not more than, its apparent causes. Her status as a 'folk heroine', a 'fairytale plus crime thriller', a 'caste icon' and a 'legend' (ibid.) empowered her in life, winning her enormous popularity and support for her political career, and maintain her as myth after her death, yet this near-deification of her transgressive life is rooted in ideas of a transcendent or formulaic truth fundamental to traditional beliefs and ways of life. Although *India Today* seeks to dismantle her mythic status of bandit queen, the article's repeated acknowledgements of it reinforce its reality as a meaningful and influential construction. Phoolan is seen to occupy a godlike position in the eyes of many, and her transgression, which in one sense lies at the heart of women's modernities, is also thus the means by which traditional practices are both reinforced and reinscribed. In fact, the 'formulaic truth' (Giddens 1994: 64) that lends authority to Phoolan's legacy is perhaps the crucially modern and feminist principle of the autonomy of the individual and the doctrine of women's emancipation.

The ways in which Phoolan Devi's story is constructed both within *India Today* and through other discourses are profoundly unsettling of dominant frameworks of tradition and modernity. Her modernity is seen in *India Today* to be both her empowerment and her downfall, while tradition is both cause and effect of that modernity, playing a significant role in the construction of the legend of Phoolan Devi as 'Bandit Queen', a legend that empowered Phoolan in both a material and a symbolic sense.

Two further recent stories from *India Today* raise similar questions to those that underpin and pervade the article on Phoolan Devi. The first of these is entitled 'Women Killers' (27/8/2001) and the second, looking at other female dacoits in the Chambal ravines, is entitled 'Lipstick among the Bullets' (3/5/2004). The first article examines the 'domestic strife, love triangles and lure of wealth [which] are leading a growing number of women to homicide in Rajasthan'. The second focuses on one female dacoit who wields significant power within a gang living in the same ravines as did Phoolan Devi during her time as an outlaw. These narratives too prompt a reconsideration of the opposition between tradition and modernity and their respective associations with (particularly women's) oppression and liberation, but circulating within the context of

the discursive production of women's modernities, they differ in significant ways from those arising from the former article.

The transgressive violence of both the 'killer women' and the Chambal outlaws is clearly seen both as a challenge to gender norms and especially to the elements of tradition that inhere therein. The murder of men by women, for example, is attributed to 'a marked departure from traditional thinking', and the female outlaws are referred to as 'gender benders' whose ruthlessness against their victims is seen to clash with the affection they display towards those they love. Their transgressions are however not valorised as are those of the 'power goddesses' discussed earlier, or even those of Phoolan Devi. Rather, they are tamed and any political charge in them effectively defused by the focus and language of the narratives.

The elements of the transgressions that constitute a real threat, whether physical or symbolic, are all but eclipsed by the discursive reinscription of the women into roles of traditional femininity. There is a strong focus in 'Women Killers' on the status of the women as victims – whether of individuals in the form of violent husbands, of rural, traditional social orders, or of state processes and institutions that do not address their needs. Through the emphasis placed on their subordinate positions within a patriarchal social order, rather than on their very evident attempts to resist and explode that system, the women are discursively constructed as objects of the readers' pity.

This reinscription of violent women into roles of traditional femininity and patriarchal structures of power, even through their transgression of those roles, is as the title might suggest, even more explicitly carried out in 'Lipstick among the Bullets'. The article focuses particularly on Neelam, a young woman who is quoted as saying 'I fell in love with him [the 'dreaded' Nirbhaya Gujjar] and deserted my house in Oriyyah in Etawah district to join his gang', and the title refers to its central paragraph:

> For all her salty demeanour, the young woman retains her femininity. Neelam begins her day with a bit of preening before the mirror, applying lipstick and pulling on an assortment of bangles. "I like T-shirts and jeans," she says. Both she and Sarla Devi, her 15-year-old daughter-in-law whom she is training in the ways of the jungle, lug around vanity bags that are filled with branded cosmetics.

The above passage is accompanied by two photographs (below), the first showing Neelam applying vermilion to her hair against a background of tents and rifles, and the second showing her holding a rifle while others look on. The first photograph is doubly significant, showing not just Neelam's 'preening' in front of the mirror but also reemphasising her status as wife (as only married women wear vermilion in their hair)

and thus intensifying the contrast between her two personas. Both images together restate the text's key point – the apparently paradoxical juxtaposition of 'masculine' and 'feminine' – and are representative of the article's several photographs of Neelam that emphasise her appearance as 'slim, agile, beautiful in a homely way'.

Fig. 5.5 'Femme Fatales' [sic] (*India Today* 3/5/2004)

In other ways too, it is stressed that Neelam is at heart a traditional woman, especially in her position as wife. While her lack of compassion or 'maternal instincts', and her skill with a rifle are clearly important to the story, they serve primarily to highlight her youthful, feminine attributes such as the attention she pays to her physical appearance, her affection for her husband, and her enjoyment of an evening dance. The narrative suggests that what is natural to Neelam is the persona of a 'doting village housewife' rather than that of 'the gangleader's moll'; she has to consciously remind herself to perform the role of the latter.

The discourse of both these articles, in different ways, suggest that women's transgression is ultimately only skin-deep, and that their modernity and empowerment, insofar as it is defined by an enactment of gender transgression, are superficial and do not penetrate the 'true' character of the woman. Their inherent femininity – characterised by passivity and subjection in 'Women Killers' and by the care taken with their appearance in 'Lipstick among the Bullets' – thus remains undisturbed by, and tempers the political effects of, their deeply transgressive behaviour. The women in these narratives can be constructed as sympathetic characters because the articles are able to position them within a framework of traditional femininity, whether by constructing them as objects of pity or by inviting the reader to see them as ordinary modern consumers of feminine products such as cosmetics. The articles illustrate Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's distinction between deep tradition and surface modernity, implying that principles of modern femininity, in this case aggression, are undamaging to the characters of the women in question since their modernity remains only 'skin-deep' (Sunder Rajan 1993: 133).

Transgressions on the part of women who engage in aggressive behaviour are, to an extent, implicitly constructed as carnivalesque by the discourses of *India Today*. I refer here particularly to the theories of the carnivalesque developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, whose studies of Renaissance carnival revealed how the inversions of social structure that characterised carnival were in fact carefully controlled and ritualised by those in power. Its transgressions therefore served primarily to reaffirm rather than to destroy dominant ideologies and hierarchies. The mockeries and parodies of authority that carnival permits are enacted within a safe space such that they pose no genuine threat to those in power. They are also short-lived, and the norms are soon reinstated. Carnival is thus the 'temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men ... and of the prohibitions of usual life' (Bakhtin 1984: 15) and like all transgressions, the carnivalesque illuminates the borders of control perhaps even more clearly than the alternative spaces beyond.

Although Bakhtinian carnival is of course a very different affair to an article about life in the Chambal ravines, there are strong parallels between the two. The discourses analysed above construct real female aggression as carnivalesque in that the women are seen to be only superficially transgressive of patriarchal authority. In the case of the women constructed as 'power goddesses', 'bollywood babes' and the like, the symbolic challenges they pose to traditional gender hierarchies are celebrated as empowering and indicative of women's modernity. However, as we have seen, these discourses simultaneously rein in such challenges by inscribing them within paradigms of traditional order. Moreover, actions of violence that genuinely threaten to destabilise such structures are moderated by the reinscription of more conventional gender paradigms and hierarchies.

This tempering of the real effects of transgression notwithstanding, it is perhaps possible that in a context in which the principle of transgression and its production of modernity are thus overtly celebrated, the carnivalesque could serve, as Stallybrass and White suggest, as a catalyst for 'actual and symbolic struggle' (1986: 14). As Bakhtin himself suggests, carnival seeks to 'uncover, undermine - even destroy, the hegemony of any ideology that seeks to have the final word about the world, and also to renew, to shed light upon life, the meanings it harbours, to elucidate potentials; projecting as it does an alternate conceptualisation of reality' (Bakhtin 1984: 252).

Although an analysis of the effects of discursive celebrations of women's transgressions is beyond the scope of this thesis, the material transformations that may arise from these and similar popular discourses would merit deeper exploration.

Contrary to Cresswell's assertion that 'Transgressions do not form their own orders. Borders are critiqued, not replaced' (1996: 166), it is clear that many women's realities are being radically transformed in urban India through their own transgressions and those of the women who have gone before them, perhaps both because of and despite the kinds of public discourses that have been analysed in this section. This is clearly evident in the material on sexual transgressions that I explore in the next section, which reveals both the increased sexual liberation of Indian women and the continued constraints on their bodies and sexualities.

Sexual Transgressions

In the first substantive section of this chapter I discussed the construction of inner and outer spaces according to ideologies of masculine and feminine realms. In this section I want to focus in on the body as the most fundamentally 'inner' space of all. From the discourses of modernity in both women's narratives and *India Today*, it becomes clear that the transgression of the social constraints of the female body is seen to be a fundamental means by which women become modern. Women's bodies are invested with numerous boundaries and limits in the name of tradition, and the emphasis in *India Today* and contemporary women's narratives on bodily transgression through dress and especially sexual(ised) appearance and activity, highlights the boundaries they see to be drawn on and around the female body itself. The traditional woman's body is one that is closed off from the violation of the world, both by her dress and by her actions. She is covered by traditional clothing, hidden from threatening eyes, and refuses contact with other bodies that might sully her purity. Such bodies are particularly male, human bodies but also other 'bodies' or objects such as forbidden foods or items of clothing. Modesty, chastity, restraint and self-denial thus appear as bodily borders that women must transgress in order to be modern.

Nowhere is the bodily transgression of women more closely connected with their modernity and empowerment than in the contemporary discourses surrounding sex and sexuality. Both in *India Today* and in contemporary narratives by Indian women, sexual awareness, sexual openness and sexual activity are seen to play a major role in the processes by which women begin to liberate themselves and become identified as modern. The sexualisation of the female body is thus made central to the processes of modern individualisation, and is seen to be the key to Indian women's taking control of their lives and defining for themselves the body and the self, against the multiple discourses that seek to appropriate their bodies in the interests of other parties, such as the nation as mentioned earlier.

sexual relationship with Velutha, an Untouchable, leads to Velutha's death, Ammu's own humiliation, and the break-up of her family; Virmati in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, whose refusal to enter into an arranged marriage, because of her love affair with a much older professor, causes her family to physically lock her up in a storeroom on the property and marry her sister off to Virmati's fiancé instead; and Janaki in Jaishree Misra's semi-autobiographical *Ancient Promises* who, after an affair with her childhood sweetheart during her loveless marriage to Suresh, a man chosen by her family, suffers the pain of having her young daughter taken and kept from her by Suresh.

Although both these narratives and *India Today* position the transgressive subjects of their discourse within a context of oppression and punishment, it becomes clear from both sources that sexual liberation is seen as central to modernity and should be aspired to. In the narratives described above, the punishment of sexually liberated women is implicitly condemned, carried out as it often is by villains, or loving but misguided authorities (such as parents as in the case of Virmati), against heroines who seek love, happiness and self-fulfilment and with whom the reader's sympathies lie. Similarly, in the discourses of *India Today*, sexual conservatism is consistently expressed in negative terms such as 'prudish', while sexual behaviour that challenges or destroys what are perceived as traditional norms is celebrated. The strongly gendered nature of these denunciations of sexual conservatism and glorifications of transgression has important implications for understanding the links between modernity and women's bodies in contemporary India. In what remains of this chapter I want to address three pivotal effects, which have both material and symbolic implications, of the public valorisation of women's sexual transgression as evidenced by *India Today* and narratives written by Indian women.

Firstly, I suggest that the emphasis placed on women's sexual transgression in these texts foregrounds the agency of the body in the processes of becoming modern, and through the reading of several contemporary novels by Indian women, I examine in detail how this is brought about. Secondly, I argue that through discourses of sexual transgression, certain key principles of modernity are revealed as being continuous with those of tradition, accentuating the processes of transformation and evolution and highlighting the overlaps between the two categories. Following on from this second point, I argue finally that the emphasis on sexual liberation has the effect of constructing a *new* 'new Indian woman', reinscribing the woman as the symbol of the nation even as the discourses involved appear both to break those boundaries of

tradition themselves and to applaud such transgression in other, non-discursive arenas.

The very act of actively recognising the agency of the female body can itself be a transgressive act, as illustrated by some of the letters published in *India Today* criticising their publication of sexually explicit material in the issues described above. Examples include:

> If the Indian woman seems to be caught between propriety and pleasure, your magazine is seized between perversion and pornography. What type of 'right balance and liberation' you intend from such surveys is hard to understand. **Dr R. Vatsyayan, Ludhiana**
>
> Your cover story was disgusting. However, this was not the first time that you indulged in cheap sale gimmicks. As I do not foresee a change in your attitude, I seek to cancel my subscription with immediate effect. I am not keen on a refund on the unexpired portion of the subscription. However, please ensure that you do not send me a copy of your magazine in future. **G. Chandrasekhar, Chennai**
>
> Instead of selling cheap, pornographic contents in the guise of a family magazine, be brave and take a headlong plunge into yellow journalism. That way you can rename the magazine Sex Today and save readers like me from embarrassing situations. **R.S. Joshi, Bharuch**
>
> (*India Today* 29/9/2003)

In discourses of women's sexual transgression, the agency of the body is insisted upon and feted primarily through a focus on the body's desires. Such a focus is significant for its departure from the far more common construction of women as objects of masculine desire and of passive inscription within a patriarchal system, as well as from the implicit erasure of women from conceptualisations of modernity. The appetites and actions of the desiring body are not confined to sexuality, but often fundamentally implicated therein.

Anita Nair's novel, *Ladies Coupé,* illustrates very powerfully some of the ways in which the body's agency is discursively constructed as central to women's modernities in post-independence India. The protagonist in this novel transgresses particular norms of women's sexual desire and behaviour, and the emphasis given to the agency of the body in those transgressions raises important questions regarding what it means to be a modern Indian woman. *Ladies Coupé* comprises a collection of stories gathered

together in the form of a novel. The character whose story binds the others together is Akhila, a forty-five–year old woman whose body is clearly fundamental in her progressive journey towards self-realisation. Akhila's sexual liberation functions both as the culmination of that journey and as the beginning of a new way of being.

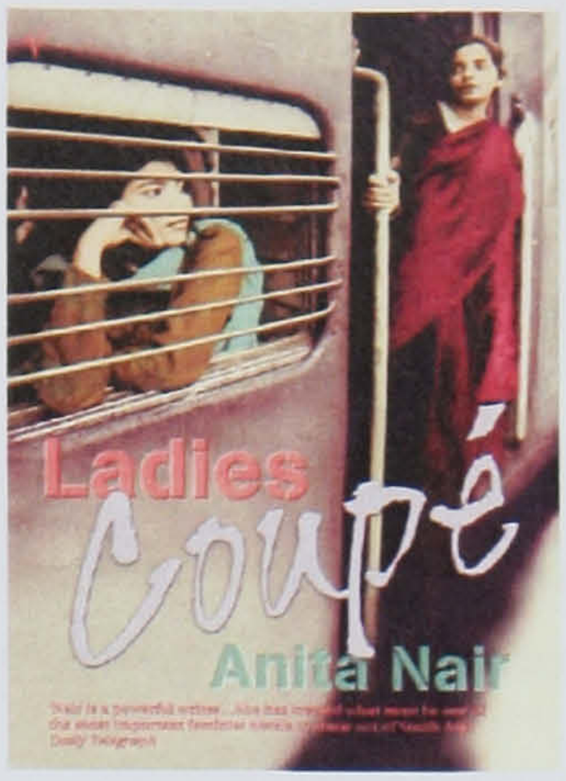

Fig 5.6 Ladies Coupé

Akhila's story is marked from beginning to end with an emphasis on the importance of recognising the body's own agency, desires, and appetites, and with the direct correlation between that recognition and self-realisation and liberation. When the reader first meets Akhila, her emotional state is described in corporeal terms: 'So this then is Akhila… Dreaming of escape and space. *Hungry* for life and experience. *Aching* to connect' (Nair 2002: 2, my italics). Hunger is in fact a recurrent theme in Akhila's life. Some of her most powerful childhood memories recall the feeling: 'Akhila and the other children knew that they had to wait for their mid-morning meal till Amma had finished attending to their father. If their stomachs rumbled, they were expected to stay out of hearing distance so that he didn't hurry through his meal' (ibid: 47).

A climactic episode near the middle of Akhila's story reveals the merging and overlapping of the different kinds of appetite that characterise her life – for food, for romance, and for both physical and emotional/ psychological escape from her oppressive existence at home. An Anglo-Indian colleague, Katherine Webber, had previously commented on the Brahmin customs that allowed Akhila's mother to marry a man who was in fact her uncle but forbade the eating of certain foods: 'I can't understand what your religion is all about… You consider eating an egg a sin. But it is perfectly acceptable to marry your uncle!' (ibid: 16). On this occasion Katherine brings an egg to work as part of her lunch, an incident which immediately brings to mind the earlier exchange that combined food, religion, sin, and marriage.

> Akhila had never seen an egg so close before. She watched Katherine tap it on the table and saw a crack run down the shell in zigzag lines. She watched as Katherine removed the fragments of the shell and it seemed to Akhila that it must be the most pleasurable thing anyone could do. Then, like a Russian doll,

> the shell gave way to yet another layer of white. What lay inside that? What did the inside smell of? What did it feel like to touch?
> Akhila felt a great urge to know and before she could help it, she blurted out, 'Can I have a bite?'
>
> (ibid: 94)

Katherine gives Akhila the egg and their verbal exchange as she does so focuses the reader's attention on the egg not just as representative of the many restraints around Akhila's behaviour but as a symbol specifically of the lack of romance and sexual love in her life.

> 'Eat it with this,' Katherine said, thrusting a screw of paper with salt in it towards Akhila. Then she giggled. 'My mother always says that eating an egg without salt is like kissing a man without a moustache.'
> 'Really?'
> Katherine giggled some more. 'Oh, I forgot. You have never been kissed.'
>
> (ibid.)

The egg's symbolism is reinforced by Akhila's response to the taste, which is described in intensely sensual language: 'The yolk crumbled in her mouth, coating her tongue, clinging to her palate even as it slid down her throat spreading a pure sensation of delight in its wake'.

Akhila's consumption of the egg is an immense transgression but when, after a confrontation with her mother, she is able to cook and eat eggs in her own home, it is clear that Akhila has taken small but significant steps towards selfhood: 'All of Akhila's wondrous explorations and magical discoveries were locked within the fragile shell of an egg' (ibid: 96). This three-way link between food, sex, and self-realisation is expressed again and again. When her dominating younger sister Padma discovers Akhila's transgressive egg-eating, she is horrified, but Akhila snaps, 'This is my house and if I wish to eat eggs here or prance around naked, I will do so. If someone doesn't care for it, they are free to leave' (ibid: 172). It is not coincidental that the egg-eating is brought together with the bodily liberation of 'prancing around naked', or that it is done so in an incident in which Akhila finally asserts herself before Padma and refuses to continue to make sacrifices to please her.

A packet of cashew nuts represents a similar realisation of self:

> Akhila opened the packet of cashew nuts she had bought at Kottayam station. She felt their sweetish meatiness flood her mouth. I am not the Akhila who boarded this train last night, she thought. The other Akhila would have settled for peanuts. Cashew nuts suggested an excess, a grander scheme of things which she wouldn't dare tempt herself with. But this Akhila would. She could feel a slow loosening within; a certain feeling that she was right; a heady

> anticipation...if Prabha Devi could triumph over her innate timidity and rise above traditions to float, she could do the same, Akhila thought.
>
> (ibid: 220)

Akhila's numerous denials of her bodily desires, both with regard to food and to romantic and sexual experiences, signify her stagnation within the bonds of tradition that compelled her to sacrifice her own dreams in order to provide for her family after her father's death. When she recognises and fulfils those desires, however, she is seen to be on a progressive journey to modernity and liberation. The culmination of that journey occurs at the end of the novel, where Akhila is staying at a hotel at the beach resort in Kanyakumari and where, 'each day, she tries a new dish. She has already sampled everything there is on the menu' (ibid: 284).

In Kanyakumari, Akhila invites a stranger, significantly younger than herself, to her hotel room and seduces him. She is entirely in control of the encounter, insisting that he use a condom and that the lights be left on. It is clear that this episode marks the fulfilment of Akhila's self-realisation: 'This is who Akhila is... Akhila knows this as her body moves through a catacomb of sensations...Akhila has no more fears. Why then should she walk with a downcast head? She throws back her head and voices her triumph' (ibid: 289).

The very end of the novel sees Akhila making contact with a man, Hari, again younger than herself, with whom she had fallen in love much earlier. Hari had wanted to marry her but Akhila had broken off the affair out of fear of what people would think and say about their age difference. The novel ends with the implication that they will resume their relationship, and therefore with the suggestion that Akhila has not only found herself, but that her most important desires have also been realised.

Like Akhila, Janaki in *Ancient Promises* finds liberation – in her case from the confines of her arranged marriage and very traditional in-laws – and modernity through the validation of her bodily, and especially sexual, desires. Although her transgressions are punished by Suresh and his family, it is clear that her extra-marital affair with her childhood sweetheart, Arjun, marks a moment of liberation and self-realisation.

> A gentle breeze stirred inside me, blowing away millions of cobwebs... those fine cobwebbed chains that had grown over unwanted dreamed-up desires, shackling them, I'd thought, for ever. I could feel that Goddess's breath blow gently down again, lifting me into her golden air, so full of promise.
>
> (Misra 2000: 190)

This sexual transgression is the first step on a path that, within a short time, leads Janaki to abandon her life in Kerala and travel to England, where Arjun has already

been living for many years. After several months she is also reunited with her daughter and embarks on 'the next chapter' of her life, living in Milton Keynes as a family with Arjun and her daughter Riya.

Similarly, for Astha in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*, a lesbian relationship is an escape from her demanding in-laws, husband and children, and a key part of the blossoming new world in which she discovers politics, art, and her own talents, skills and strength. While sex with her husband is referred to as 'the marital function' (Kapur 2003: 224), with Pipee it is 'an intimacy that was complete and absolute, expressed through minds as much as bodies' (ibid: 231). The coming together of mind and body through their lovemaking is expressive of Astha's newfound wholeness and representative of her breaking from the traditions and oppressions of the joint-family structure.

While tradition and modernity are overtly constructed as oppositional in *A Married Woman* as elsewhere, by positioning the body-as-subject at the centre of modernity as these narratives do, the dynamic negotiation of tradition and modernity is simultaneously highlighted. The notion of modernity as a break from tradition is implicitly challenged, and a close reading of some of these texts reveals instead that the discursive production of women's modernities involves an ongoing engagement with the values and principles of tradition in making sense of the new. The agency of women's bodies as it is foregrounded in these texts is seen to be not an end in itself, but rather to lead to a kind of enlightenment, a vision which reinscribes certain fundamentally traditional tenets.

As a body of public discourse, the texts of *India Today* 2000-2006 and contemporary narratives by Indian women can be read as constructing sex as, in effect, a type of religion for women in that it is through their sexuality that they are seen to be redeemed from the bonds of tradition. This discursive production of sex as redemptive is similar to the ways in which modernist writers such as D.H. Lawrence may be read as making 'a new religion of sex or art or politics' (Wexler 2004: 166). In much the same way as Lawrence's work, these narratives can be read as constructing sex as religious ritual enacted for the purpose of attaining self-realisation. Traditional principles of the sacred, of rebirth, redemption, release and renewal are thus discursively reinscribed through the bodily processes by which women are seen to become modern. The body is both the instrument for the attainment, and the end product, of that redemption or enlightenment.

These ideas are powerfully illustrated by one of the novels already discussed – Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, where Akhila's self-realisation through sexual transgression is constructed through the expression of Akhila herself as a collective of the Mahavidyas, ten goddesses associated with tantra and by definition with great knowledge (maha = great; vidya = knowledge):

> Kali. Ready to destroy all that comes between her and the flow of time.
>
> Tara. With the golden embryo from which a new universe will evolve. She will be her own void and infinity.
>
> Sodasi. Fullness at sixteen. Nurturing dreams and hopes. Even now, at forty-five.
>
> Bhuvaneshawari. The forces of the material world surge through her.
>
> Bhairavi. Seeking to find ways and means to fulfil her desires before all is null and void.
>
> Chinnamasta. The naked one continuing the state of self-sustenance in the created world; making possible destruction and renewal in a cyclic order.
>
> Dhumathi. Misfortune personified. An old hag riding an ass with a broom in one hand and a crow on her banner.
>
> Bagala. The crane-headed one, the ugly side of all living creatures. Jealousy, hatred, cruelty, she is all this and more.
>
> Matangi. Seeking to dominate.
>
> And then there is Kamala. Pure consciousness of the self, bestowing boons and allaying fears… The Akhila her family knew.
>
> (Nair 2002: 288-289)

In this passage, the borders between religious and sexual ecstasy are blurred, and those defining traditional norms of femininity against modern behaviour are therefore rendered similarly indistinct.

Like Akhila, Janaki and Astha too are saved in some sense from tradition and find renewal through their sexual transgressions. The discourses of *India Today*, while perhaps less poetic than the description above of Akhila's self-discovery, are thematically convergent with the novels. 'Sexual liberation,' it is suggested, 'is the first step towards selfhood' (*India Today* 26/9/2005). The 'Alpha Female' is 'free from the burden of her barren sexual history [and] looking fearlessly into a future teeming with sensual possibilities' (*India Today*26/9/2005). Transgressive sex is invested with tremendous power in these discourses, both symbolic and material, the latter because such transgression, it is anticipated, will lead to ever greater and more complete liberation.

The gendering of this new religion is significant; although the changes in men's sexualities too are remarked upon, the discourses of liberation do not apply in the

same way as they do to women's. The Indian woman thus becomes the definitive image of sexual transgression and liberation, and also of India's modernity. Therefore, the final important effect of the contemporary emphasis on women's sexual transgression that I want to examine here is the production of the sexually liberated woman as a defining symbol of modern India. The covers of the *India Today* issues that focus on women's sexuality illustrate the symbolic power of the body of the 'modern' woman. Although each issue addresses at some point the general, continued conservatism of sexual attitudes in India as evidenced by the nationwide surveys they analyse, the cover images (below) clearly suggest the nation's representative to be a young, attractive, sexually liberated woman.

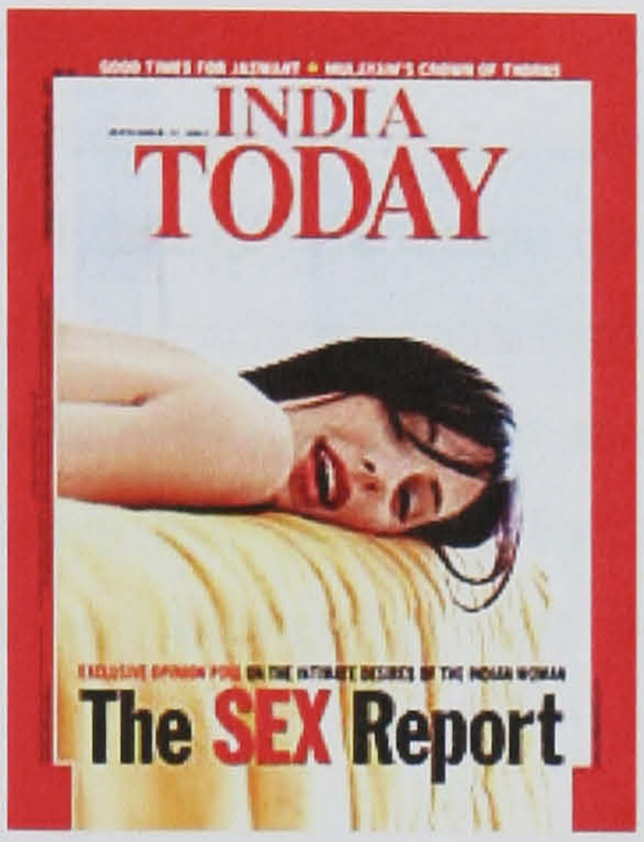

Fig 5.7 The Sex Report (*15/9/2003*)

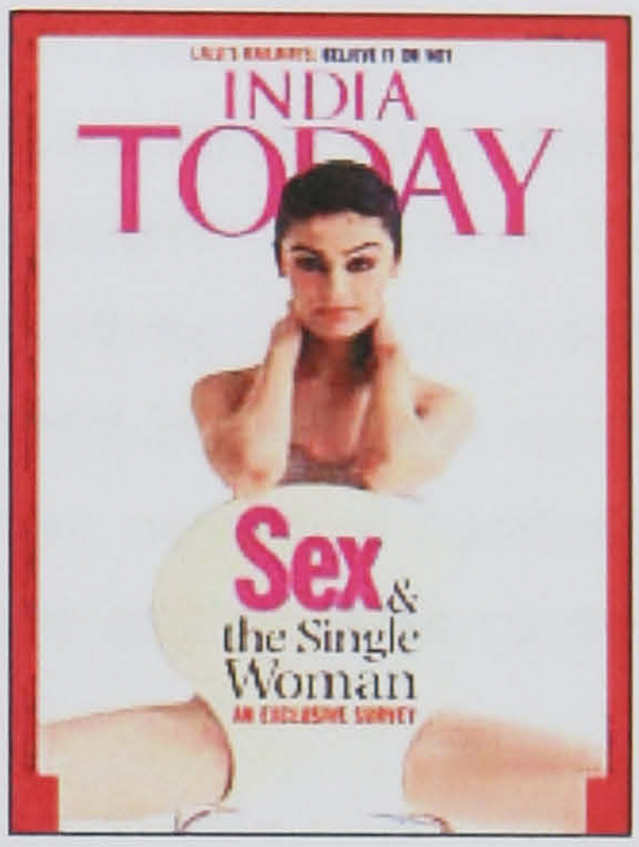

Fig. 5.8 Sex and the Single Woman (*India Today 26/9/2005*)

The female body is thus invested with powerful symbolic resonance, as women's sexual transgression is made to represent the modernity of the Indian nation. Through its production as a symbol of modernity, the female body is remade as a new Indian icon, or an icon of new India, but remains the repository of the nation's cultural identity in the way that so many critics have commented upon (examples include Puri 1999; Thapan 1997; Silva 2004). This symbol, expressed in the discourses within the magazine and those of contemporary novels, is however qualitatively different from the new Indian woman who has been seen to have replaced the bharatiya nari as the feminine stereotype of choice in the media. This stereotype is seen by critics such as Shoma Munshi and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan to be 'practised in the ways of the West, and at the same time [to] retain their Indian values' (Munshi 2001: 90), 'successfully achieving the balance between (deep) tradition and (surface) modernity' (Rajan 1993: 133).

With the sexually liberated woman as their definitive symbol of modernity, *India Today* and contemporary novels are challenging the notion of the 'new' woman as one who is modern merely on the surfaces of the body and suggesting instead that her very

(Indian) values, principles and sense of self are changing. While critics such as Munshi and Sunder Rajan point to the 'new Indian woman' as one who incorporates traditional values into a modern appearance, the symbol of womanhood produced by the textual sources analysed here is very different.

Rather than being externally modern but internally traditional, the discourses of sexual transgression in *India Today* and contemporary novels paint a portrait of the modern woman as characterised by internal conflict. She is torn between her inherited cultural and religious values and the processes of modernity that are seen to characterise almost all aspects of contemporary urban India. Neither her modernity nor her Indianness are in question, however, as neither is constructed as static. The new woman produced by these discourses represents a specifically Indian modernity that is expressed through her active questioning and reformulation of tradition. The principles and ideals of modernity and tradition are thus shown to be unavoidably enmeshed, yet not superficially in ways such as those that Munshi and Sunder Rajan rightfully criticise, but in ways that open up for questioning the very notions of tradition, modernity, freedom and repression, and the social structures and practices constructed upon them.

While the Indian woman is thus reinscribed as a symbol of the modern nation, it is important to recognise the progressive aspects of that symbolism as well as the problems inherent in its existence. The discourses analysed here reflect, constitute, and produce real transformations in the societies in which they circulate, and their prompting of further contemplation, questioning and action should not be dismissed.

Conclusion

I have sought in this chapter to explore the emphasis placed by particular prominent examples of Indian public discourse, on women's bodily transgression as central to their becoming and being modern. The three primary types of transgression that emerge from these discourses – spatial transgressions, gender transgressions, and sexual transgressions – are underpinned by principles of both tradition and modernity, and the discursive expressions of these transgressions in *India Today* and contemporary Indian women's novels therefore render problematic both the dominant construction of these two categories as oppositional and their associations with women's oppression and liberation, respectively.

While transgressions of place, often identified as women's presence in masculine environments such as the workplace, are outwardly celebrated as modern in *India*

Today, it is significant that this celebratory tone is simultaneously undermined by the use of language and images that reinscribe women into gender structures the magazine itself identifies and condemns as traditional and limiting. Reading the more complex presentation of working women to be found in the novel *The Chosen*, these categories and conceptual relationships are further disturbed and women's empowerment is shown to refuse default association with supposedly definitive aspects of women's modernity, such as their working outside of the home.

Transgressions of what are seen to be traditional gender roles are overtly lauded in *India Today* as are those of space and place. It is primarily the attribute of aggression that is seen as key to these transgressions, but a deeper exploration of the discursive construction of women's aggression in *India Today* reveals the inconsistencies in that position. Again, the power that is overtly invested in women's transgressions is implicitly defused through particular discursive and visual constructions of those transgressions. In both *India Today* and contemporary novels by Indian women, sexual transgression is seen as being fundamental to women's modernity. The effects of such valorisation are significant and show key principles of tradition being reinscribed in the reformulation of woman as the definitive symbol of the modern Indian nation. While the impulse to automatically denounce such symbolism should be resisted, the problems therein need to be recognised and further explored.

The exploration of how embodied womanhood is discursively produced as modern and agential, and of some of the power relationships that determine that production, continues in the following chapter. Like bodily transgressions of space, the practices of consumption in which the body is implicated in contemporary urban India is constructed in multiple discourses as a central aspect of becoming and being modern. This is particularly true for women, who are often constructed in the realm of consumption as the quintessentially modern subject. In the following chapter I examine some of the politics woven through narratives of women's consumption and the particular notions of new Indian womanhood they produce. These narratives emphasise again the complexities and contradictions of modern womanhood, which is characterised by aspirations to and realisations of individual autonomy as well as, and often simultaneously, by strict limitations of the female subject.

Chapter Six

Consuming Bodies

Recent decades have seen a steep rise in India's economic growth, and the consequent sudden emergence of a new consumer culture in the country's urban centres that is striking in its breadth and intensity. Numerous public discourses of Indian modernity take these levels of consumerism to be central to the nation's new identity, focusing on the availability of Western products in the Indian market, the newly affluent middle classes, and the increasing importance of various technologies to everyday life. The stereotype of the traditionally thrifty Indian has to a large extent become obsolete, giving way to new images of 'young spendaholics' (*India Today* 9/8/2004), 'mall rats' (7/11/2005, international print ed.), and 'Luckies' – 'Labelled, Urban, Chilled, Kicked-with-life Indians' (ibid. 2/7/2001). The multiple links between consumption and modern identities are therefore clearly culturally and historically determined, despite being shaped, in India as in Asia more generally[20] 'by many of the same influences that defined the West's consumer patterns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (Finkelstein 2000: 225).

In the work of a number of prominent theorists of modernity, consumption is explicitly positioned at the heart not just of large-scale modern processes such as the growth of national economies or the development of new technologies, but also at the heart of being modern on the scale of the individual. As Maila Stivens suggests, 'consumption is central to the constant search for and the construction of the "new", including new identities, that is the hallmark of modernity and postmodernity' (1998: 5). Don Slater takes this idea further, declaring that 'the eminently modern notion of the social subject as a self-creating, self-defining individual is bound up with self-creation through consumption… This renders consumption as the privileged site of autonomy, meaning, subjectivity, privacy and freedom' (1997: 31). Similarly, Pasi Falk takes as his starting point 'modern consumption… as the primary realm of self-construction, offering

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[20] For analyses of consumption in the contexts of certain specific Asian countries see Rappa (2002) on Singapore and Malaysia, and Beng-Huat, ed. (2000) for papers on East and Southeast Asia more broadly.

material for both its social and personal dimensions, and for both sides of individuation – as separation and as self-completion' (1994: 10).

As with the concept of modernity more generally, the ways in which consumption is gendered is often ignored or occluded by mainstream theorists. Feminist theorists, however, have been attentive to the particular ways in which women are implicated in modern consumption, and consumption implicated in notions of modern womanhood. For example, Maggie Andrews and Mary Talbot describe consumption thus: 'it is a sphere where femininity is performed, where versions of femininity are legitimated and negotiated, or contested and rejected', adding that 'The significant part that consumption plays in so many women's lives justifies its study by feminists' (2000: 1). Similarly, Christine Delhaye argues that 'The cultural construction of women as consumers has been an essential aspect of the emerging definition of modern femininity' (2006: 95). Rita Felski would agree, naming gender as 'one of the most significant' cultural and ideological factors that shape consumer demand (1995:61).

Within the context of newly 'affluent Asia', Maila Stivens remarks that 'the development of elaborate new femininities based on the consumer/ wife/ mother and the consumer/ beautiful young woman in the region can be seen as central to the very development of these burgeoning economies' (1998: 5). As this quotation would suggest, the new Indian woman, together with her counterparts in other Asian nations, is constituted in large measure through discourses of consumption and nationhood. Such discourses are enacted particularly on and through the female body, which comes to be meaningful as modern through the articulation and contestation of ideas about who the modern consuming subject is, how much that subject consumes, the effects of such consumption, and the implications of consumption for the identity of the nation.

Consumption here is used in a broad sense, and not restricted to the purchase and use of commercial goods. Rather, it indicates also 'bringing meaning to items, appropriating them, making them, indeed taking them, as one's own' (Andrews and Talbot 2000: 2). Even the idea of 'items' is loosely defined, since people, ideas, narratives, styles and other tangible and intangible 'things' may all be consumed in the sense outlined above. An important implication of such an understanding of consumption is that it is not automatically read as a passive activity but as a sphere of social life that brims with dynamism and creativity, and plays a role in the bringing about of meaning and modernity that is more usually associated with 'production'.

Underneath the processes of consumption, even in an understanding of the term that is thus inclusive, lie desires that are often covert or implicit. Like consumption, desire should not be read as passive but also as deeply embroiled in and constitutive of processes of production (Mackendrick 2004: 12). Wanting drives the processes of modern consumption, and an attempt to understand those processes demands also an attempt to unravel the desires at their root, by asking who it is that desires. This question becomes particularly pertinent towards the end of this chapter, where I begin to explore texts whose perspectives slide between the desiring subject and the desired object, such that it becomes unclear which is which. The woman as consumer is not a fixed subject-position but one that shifts through subtle narrative positionings.

The discursive production of women's bodies through discourses of consumption therefore highlights the elisions and contradictions in those discourses. Women emerge from the texts of *India Today* and contemporary narratives by Indian women as both consuming and consumed, subject and object, desiring and desired – which is not to say that these categories are easily made distinct from each other. In this chapter, however, I focus for the most part on the construction of the embodied female subject as consumer, addressing the other end of the spectrum – the commodification and consumption of women – in the next chapter.

While ideas of what constitutes modernity are predominantly though often implicitly gendered masculine in most social contexts, particularly those thought of as spheres of production, consumption as an activity is a sphere of modernity that is clearly gendered feminine. Advertisements in various media, the layouts of department stores and shopping malls, as well as everyday discourse, all identify woman as the primary consumer of material goods. In this chapter I focus on two major discursive expressions of this relationship, Indian food and Indian fashion, seeking to untangle the ways in which the female consuming body of both these commodities is discursively produced as modern. This chapter may therefore be read as comprising two parts, each exploring the consumption of one of these commodities. The first four sections seek to unravel some of the connections between the consumption of food and modern Indian, especially feminine identities. The following two sections examine the ways in which new Indian womanhood is constructed through discourses of fashion and clothes shopping.

These two commodities, food and fashion, are inextricably linked in the context of late modernity; the consumption of both (or often in the case of food, the lack of consumption) is deeply implicated in the production of bodies, particularly female

bodies, as sexy, saleable, and generally worthy of public attention. As Scott McCracken remarks, 'food is as central to social organisation as sexuality; and indeed food and sex are rarely unrelated' (2000:60). Therefore although I separate them here into two categories, eating and dressing should be understood along a continuum, as should the embodied woman be understood as simultaneously a consuming subject and consumed object.

Eating India

Indian food has meaning for billions of people, including not only those living in India but those in diasporic Indian communities all over the world, as well as others, such as many British nationals who have no explicit connection with India but for whom foods such as chicken tikka masala, chapattis and raita have become as everyday as pie and chips. Indian food is therefore resonant on every social scale from the individual to the global, and its importance for the sustenance of the material body is not easily separated from the symbolic weight it carries. As McCracken points out, 'The moment of eating is one of both material and symbolic embodiment' (2000: 60), and it is a truism that in many modern cultural contexts the politics of eating and not eating are also profoundly gendered. In this section I seek to unravel some of the entanglements between food and femininity, the Indian nation, and modernity.

Within the geographical context of India, as well as in the extended context of the Indian diaspora, food plays an important role in everyday domestic life, organised and impromptu social gatherings, religious rituals, birth, marriage and death preparations and ceremonies, and in helping maintain a sense of continuity of cultural identity as 'home' becomes an increasingly fluid concept for many people. Women play some of the most active roles in these processes as they do in domestic practices more generally. Food is associated with femininity in many different, evolutionary ways during the average Indian woman's life. While many social structures may be changing in India, daughters are still generally expected to learn to cook, and wives and mothers to prepare food for their families, for festivals, and in Hindu families at least, for everyday pujas.

The strong association between Indian food and Indian identity indicates also a strong link between food and tradition, whereby food serves as a link with the past, with a remembered and/ or imagined heritage. Food may therefore be read as serving as a safe space, grounding experience in the familiar to enable engagement with the new, as I discussed in chapter two. This is clearly evident in contemporary Indian fiction, and particularly writing by diasporic women, wherein food is a strongly recurrent theme.

Anis Shivani writes scathingly of Indian-English writers who 'deal obsessively with exotic, spicy food, as if Indians spent the greater part of their lives pondering the taste and timing of their food intake', arguing that 'it would seem from reading these books that Indians have nothing better to do than eat hot food...' (2006: 2). He continues, 'To read these novels, one wouldn't get an inkling that India is a nation of 1 billion people struggling with essential issues of identity and progress' (ibid: 3).

While I would not claim that such texts are always successful in an aesthetic literary sense, damning them as mere exoticism for a Western audience denies the many possible interpretations of food narratives in contemporary public discourse. Shivani's reductionist critique misses the point that food can be precisely a means of articulating and symbolising those struggles with identity and progress. This is especially true for women, for whom the domestic has historically served as the primary site within which such struggles may be enacted. As a space of safety and familiarity in the context of the new, practices of cooking, serving, and eating and their representations through discourse become means of negotiating not just identities of traditional Indianness, but those of modernity too, as I show in this chapter. Such negotiations are performed by many narratives in ways that need not be read as pandering to Western readers, but more productively as emphasising the dynamism of food consumption and its symbolism, and indeed its continued relevance for both making sense of and producing modernity in its many forms.

A contemporary focus in many sources of public discourse on 'fusion foods' illustrates the role of food as a means by which tradition becomes transformed to constitute what is thought of as modern. For example, an article entitled 'World on a Platter' in *India Today* (29/10/2001) suggests that the increased mobility and adventurousness of Indians, other Asians, and Westerners, has resulted in India's 'love affair with different, exciting cuisines'. It describes how 'fusion foods are in. The traditional South Indian idli has, for instance, incorporated cottage cheese and been rechristened paneer idli. Pizzas and paranthas mate, producing a tasty hybrid'. Similarly, in India as elsewhere, Chinese foods are a hugely successful import. Again as elsewhere, however, they have taken on a distinctively new character, in this case Indian, with more chilli and spices being added to suit Indian palates.

Extending and deepening this theme, Amulya Malladi's novel *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2004) highlights the role fusion food may play in the formulation of hybrid identities, blending the materialities of meal-planning, cooking, eating and feeding others with the symbolism of particular ingredients and dishes. The novel's protagonist, Devi, is forced

to move into her parents' house after a suicide attempt, the reasons for which remain unknown to her family and the reader until much later. From a young age, Devi's struggle to fit into either the Indian world of her parents or the American one of her own birth, education, friendships, and later also her affairs and career, are symbolised by her attitude to cooking:

> Why can't we add parsley in the *dal*? Devi would ask. Because Indians don't use parsley, only coriander, Saroj [her mother] would say.
>
> Why can't we make a duck curry or rabbit curry instead of a chicken curry? Do we always have to have the same kind of chicken curry? Devi would want to know. Because Indians don't eat duck or rabbit or deer or any of those other repulsive meats, Saroj would respond.
>
> It was a constant battle whenever Devi would sit at the counter in the kitchen to watch Saroj cook… Devi would tell her about all the restaurants she went to and how the food there was so much *better* than Saroj's. And the food was better because it was a mixture of cuisines. Plain Indian food was apparently boring.
>
> (ibid: 19-20)

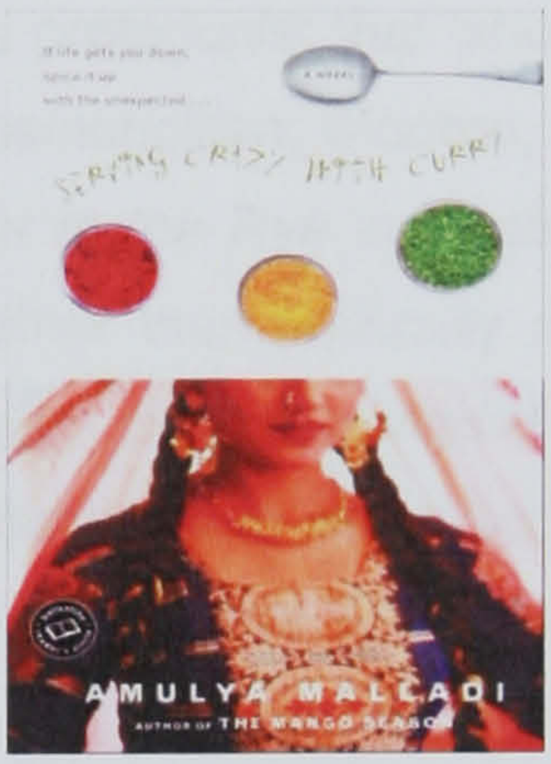

Fig. 6.1 Serving Crazy with Curry

After her suicide attempt, Devi stops speaking and begins instead to cook meals that articulate her desire to make sense of her life. Not just a fusion of American and Indian dishes, Devi's cooking serves also as a vehicle for her emotions. For example, when she is angry with her grandmother, Devi cooks a blueberry chicken curry which, 'served with fragrant cardamom rice, [peeled] off the first layer of everyone's stomach lining' (ibid: 119). In another instance, bringing together her own sexuality and the revelation of her secret pregnancy with the conservative Indianness of her parents and her upbringing, she prepares a dish of curried lamb with pomegranate seeds, the latter added because 'the pomegranate seed is sometimes compared to the clitoris for being pink, succulent, and an aphrodisiac' (ibid: 163).

In both *India Today* and *Serving Crazy with Curry*, food serves as a powerful means of making sense of modernity – on the scale of the global and the national in 'World on a Platter' and of the global and the individual in Malladi's novel. Both narratives weave together processes of identity-formation with those of food consumption, and reveal modernity to be an evolutionary process that is based on and grows out of tradition.

Fatness and Femininity

As I have already suggested in the previous section, one of the most significant points at which meanings of food diverge is gender, and in this section I aim to unpack some of the main ways in which notions of femininity are performed through narratives of food consumption and consequent body size. To this end I explore here a selection of recent articles from *India Today* together with a semi-autobiographical narrative[21] by an Indian cartoonist and illustrator, Manjula Padmanabhan. Padmanabhan's text, *Getting There* (2000), is strikingly different to most other contemporary narratives by Indian women, and was much acclaimed by reviewers for its honesty and its resonance with the experiences of modern Indian women. For example, Anuradha Roy, reviewing the book in *India Today*, says of the protagonist that 'she could have been me, or any of my friends; she's the young, cosmopolitan, modern, urban, Everywoman... If young men in India found their *Catcher in the Rye* in *English, August*, here it is for Indian women: honestly self-centred rather than politically correct, and much cleverer than *Bridget Jones*' (25/9/2000). Through close readings of *Getting There* and other texts, I explore in this section some of the ways in which body size – fatness and thinness – are mapped onto understandings of what it means for women to be modern in contemporary India.

Issues of body size have been considered important to feminist politics for a substantial length of time. As David Bell and Gill Valentine point out 'The idea that power relations are articulated through the body and that it could therefore be a site of opposition and resistance was... an important aspect of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s' (1997: 38). Susie Orbach's famous work *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1988) remains one of the most important feminist texts addressing the social pressures placed on women's bodies to be ever thinner and more disciplined. The issues addressed in these decades have become more pertinent in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, and although America remains the centre for anti-fat discrimination feminist activism, the pressures on women to be thin are similar in Britain, across Europe, and in many Asian countries including India. Narratives that

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[21] *Getting There* is described on the flyleaf as 'based loosely on events in the author's life between 1977 and 1978. Almost none of it is entirely factual but as a whole it is more true than false'.

intertwine food, body size, sexuality and femininity are therefore central to understanding some of the ways in which notions of modern womanhood are produced through discourses of consumption.

Manjula Padmanabhan's memoir-cum-novel *Getting There* is described on the front cover as 'A sparklingly funny search for love, weight loss and spiritual contentment' and is narrated in the first person. The protagonist, Manjula, is defined largely in terms of her desire to lose weight and 'find herself'. This urge drives her to a diet clinic in Bombay where, under the direction of Dr. Shiva Prasad, she succeeds in losing five kilograms. During her diet, two Dutch visitors arrive in Bombay on a 'spiritual quest' and spend several months in the same lodgings where Manjula resides as a paying guest. Manjula falls in love with one of the visitors, Piet, and shortly after they leave India, she embarks with her long-time boyfriend, Prashant (whom she emphatically does not intend to marry), on a trip to America to see her sister, after which Prashant returns home. Manjula, however, travels on to Germany to spend a short time with an old school-friend who has just had a baby, and then to Holland for a longer period with Piet. Throughout the narrative, food plays a vital role in the way Manjula feels about herself and the direction she feels her life is taking.

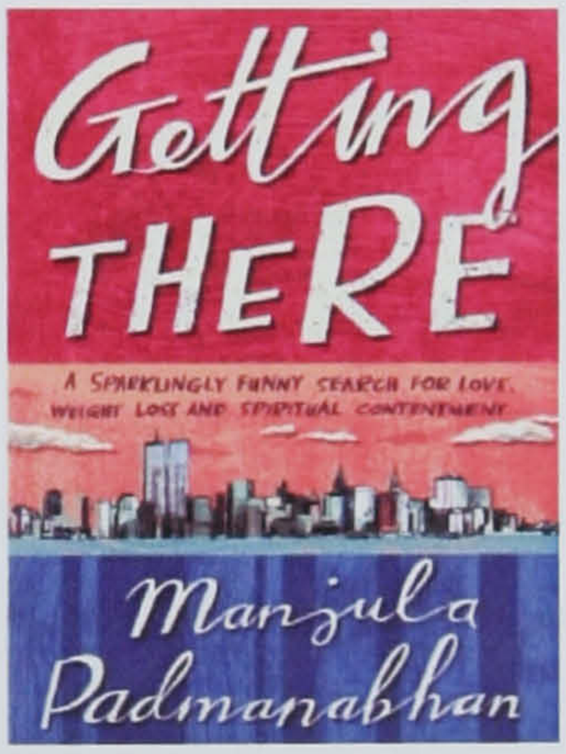

Fig. 6.2 Getting There

In both *Getting There* and *India Today*, food, fatness, femininity, Indian womanhood, and questions of modernity are all inextricably tied up with one another. A recent article from the newsmagazine, entitled 'Girth of a Nation' (10/4/2006) warns that 'If urban India is getting richer, it is getting fatter, too' and that 'India may be facing a fat tsunami'. While the article addresses the health problems faced by both men and women, fat is nonetheless implicitly constructed as a greater and more complex problem for women than for men. From the start, the article positions issues of body size as a distinctly feminine concern: 'Medical researchers are acknowledging the complex physiology behind a simple truth women have held for centuries: the smaller the waist, the better (and healthier) the life'. Women are thus marked out as having almost inherent knowledge of the ideal body shape, but later in the article are implicitly

denounced for neglecting their duty – they appear to be both responsible for the national decline in healthy eating habits, and victimised by their own bodies through their hormonal and reproductive processes. Two examples taken from the article illustrate these points.

One of the phenomena marked out as a central cause of the approaching obesity 'tsunami' is the introduction into the kitchen of the microwave oven, which 'has seen sales of unhealthy frozen convenience foods skyrocket and encouraged elaborate snacking'. Another is 'the increasing number of two-income households, where one parent no longer remains home to look after the house'. Both these complaints are clearly characterised by a nostalgic, though covert, longing for a past where a wife and mother spent her days in the kitchen preparing meals from scratch for the family, contributing to a firmly structured domestic order and healthier individuals. Although both the trends mentioned here – the microwave oven and two-income households – are ostensibly gender-neutral or gender-balanced, the party implicitly at fault is the 'new woman' who depends on pre-packaged foods that can be quickly and easily warmed in the microwave rather than preparing the 'home-cooked food' that has 'always been an integral part of the Indian society', and goes out to work rather than staying home to ensure that nutritious, balanced meals are prepared for her husband and children. Women, this article seems to suggest, are responsible not only for their own obesity but for that of others as well. In fact, they are to blame for the ill-health and disaster threatening all middle-class Indian society.

Secondly, women are constructed in these narratives as victims of their own bodies. These texts are reminiscent of Susan Bordo's description of the way certain discourses construct the body 'as an alien attacker, threatening to erupt in unsightly displays of bulging flesh' (1993: 190). This has become, Bordo argues, 'a ubiquitous cultural image' (ibid.). Illustrating these observations, 'Girth of a Nation' expends two sentences on the problem of 'apple-shaped obesity' to which Indian men are prone. Almost two full paragraphs, however, are given over to identifying the numerous ways in which Indian women are threatened by weight gain. Significant emphasis is placed on hormonal and reproductive processes: 'After the 40s, female hormones start withdrawing and the body tends to put on weight... Women also go through three physiological transitions – menarche (the first menstrual period), pregnancy-lactation and menopause – and, at each of these thresholds, they tend to put on weight'.

The inclusion in the article of an extensive quotation from Dr. Veena Aggarwal, a senior practitioner at a national chain of weight-loss and beauty institutes, illustrates the mixed

discourses of victimisation and irresponsibility that construct modern Indian women with regard to body weight: 'more women are stepping out into the public sphere and they do not wish to get married early. And it's pretty common these days to come across women entering their first pregnancy when they are 30-plus'. The article elaborates: 'Contraceptive pills, full of steroids and water-retentive hormones, [Dr Aggarwal] believes, also tend to make women fat. At the same time, there's the additional strain of balancing work and home, with traditional support systems falling apart. "With so many pulls and pressures on them, I am not surprised that the 35-plus brigade is becoming easy victims," she adds'.

Similar themes run through a key scene in *Getting There*, where Manjula arrives for an appointment at the weight-loss clinic to find another patient already seated in the waiting room. Manjula, who considers herself a strong feminist, despises this woman for her weakness in allowing herself to be (as Manjula sees it) governed by her husband, by wealth and by food. 'Her powdered cheeks bulged and her plump white hands terminated in sharp red nails. Diamonds sparkled from every joint of her fingers. Her air of being a human Pomeranian attached to her Lord Husband by a leash of gold chains was sustained by the obvious symbols of marriage she wore, the heavy jewellery, the red *tikka* on her forehead, the bangles on both wrists, the toe-rings. Every detail of her appearance bespoke wealth of the recently acquired kind, as if she had been gorging on deep-fried currency notes' (Padmanabhan 2000: 23). The picture that the narrator draws here is of a woman both vulnerable and self-indulgent. Like the women described by the article discussed above, she is both the victim and the perpetrator of – or at least a colluder in – her own obesity (and relatedly, of a patriarchal system of power).

A sense of morality and judgement is thus entwined with women's obesity in both of these texts. For women, the moral judgement upon fatness is expressed through shame, a feeling rarely attributed to men in similar contexts. Dr Veena Aggarwal cites in 'Girth of a Nation' the instance of a woman who 'ballooned to a point that her 10-year-old son begged her not to come to his school for PTA meetings' and refers to her as 'an object of shame for [her] child'. This moral load placed upon women's obesity is exemplified in *Getting There* where the rich patient, whose weight is found to have increased since her previous examination, is subjected by the doctor to a thorough interrogation, or as the narrator herself refers to it, 'a confession' of what she has recently eaten. Eventually she must admit to having eaten a Chinese restaurant meal: 'So it came out, morsel by villainous morsel' (26).

The patient, as sinner, is increasingly feminised, and infantilised, through this encounter wherein the doctor admonishes her repeatedly for not being determined enough to stick to her diet. 'When [the doctor] pulled in the corners of his lips, deep clefts appeared on either side of his mouth. He looked both severe and boyishly handsome. The girl was looking up at him, her slick, red-painted mouth hanging slightly ajar and her eyes wide, as if expecting any moment to be spanked. He paused a long moment. Then he looked at her... "So? What shall we do with you, my dear? She burst into tears'. The doctor tells her 'You can do it... You just haven't made up your mind properly yet – just you wait till I speak to your husband' (ibid.). The woman, seen as unable to control her own body, is rendered dependent on male protectors, a fate that Manjula would rather 'eat grilled air and broiled water for a year' than share. Regarding 'that pathetic plumpness' in the doctor's examination room with her, Manjula resolves to avoid at all costs 'that shaming experience'.

The shame experienced by and placed upon the women in *India Today* and *Getting There* is not neatly fixed to one attribute but slides between their obesity, their subjection to male authority-figures, and their failings in their duty as mothers. If they are not in control of their weight, it is implied, how can they be in control as effective mothers or successful women in their own right? As Bell and Valentine argue, food is seen as a tool of control to be used to mould the body to certain norms, and the evidence of such Foucauldian self-surveillance – thinness – reflects a degree of power and competence that marks the slim individual out as being of greater merit than the fat person. Equations between body size and feminine identities are constantly being reinscribed in public discourse. Body size in both *India Today* and *Getting There* is clearly seen to impact on valuations of women's worth in numerous areas of social life, and in fact on their intrinsic worth as human beings, as further examples from these texts show.

The narratives of both these texts suggest that being fat is detrimental to character as well as to physical health. Being thin, in contrast, is equated with being a better, stronger, more capable person. A weight-loss specialist quoted in the magazine declares 'Obesity is simply bad news – for both body and mind', while the empowering aspect of weight-loss is emphasised by an interviewee, Nila Bagchi, who claims 'there's nothing really that I can't do' (10/4/2006). These connections emerge powerfully from a scene in *Getting There* that nicely parallels the one describing Akhila's first taste of an egg in *Ladies Coupé*, discussed in the previous chapter. After asking the cook to provide her with a boiled egg for breakfast in accordance with her diet programme, Manjula is horrified to be presented with one that is soft-boiled.

Having learnt as a child that 'if a boiled egg was placed in front of me and if it proved to be soft, then the only way to avoid eating it was to throw up at once,' Manjula is momentarily at a loss as to what to do: 'I had only a few seconds in which to make a powerful decision'.

The egg becomes a test of her resolve to persevere with her diet and become the person she wants to be:

> The desire to lose weight, I now saw, with my teaspoon poised above the plain white dome of the egg, was really about becoming someone else. Someone efficient and industrious who could fight minotaurs before breakfast, someone who would succeed in her quest to be financially independent and ideologically pure, someone whose illustrations would soon be the talk of the town, be sought after and valued. Someone of consequence, taste and wit. All this was available for the price of... one soft-boiled egg.
>
> (Padmanabhan 2000: 31)

Although the tone of the passage (and indeed much of the book) is tongue-in-cheek, the symbolic power of the egg and of Manjula's diet is restated when much later, Manjula is drawn into an 'exchange of energy' with Piet, involving the two of them with hands stretched out towards each other but not touching.

> I could feel the pull, not merely of Sujaya, Prashant and Govinda [who were in the room] but of my brother, my sister, my parents, my cousins, the whole constellation of aunts, uncles, and assorted relatives, exerting their influence upon the palm of my hand, insisting that I should snatch it away, that it was not characteristic of me, of the person they thought I was, to be sitting in this way, in this room, with this foreigner, doing this thing. There was nothing forbidden or distasteful in the thing itself, except that it was unfamiliar. It belonged to a society different to the one to which I belonged. Yet there I was, doing it. Did that make me a stranger to all those who knew me? Or did it make the person I was at that moment, an impostor, masquerading in my skin? Was I someone who ate soft-boiled eggs? Or not?
>
> (ibid: 77)

Manjula's decision to continue the exchange of energy with Piet gives rise to a decision to take charge of her life, 'to step outside the skin of known associations that the people I knew had of me and to walk around a bit like that, skinless, waiting to see who I became and what would happen when there were no constraints upon me' (ibid: 79). The story of Manjula's journey to America and then to Europe, unfolds from this moment. Her very sense of an autonomous self takes shape in effect through the determination and sense of adventure that is encapsulated in her soft-boiled egg, as much through the process of her weight-loss.

Self-discipline in one's eating habits is thus central to the notion of modern Indian womanhood produced by these dominant narratives. However, these narratives do not only construct food as a means of self-control for women but also as a means by which they may escape or overthrow the control of others over them, and indeed exercise control against those who oppress or confine them, as I discuss in the next section. There are certain problems in these narratives of resistance, however, intensifying the paradox of the modern woman as one who is free to form her own identity yet remains tightly circumscribed by particular social demands. The new Indian woman thus becomes increasingly contradictory the deeper one delves into the specific means of her production.

Feeding Others

Although exceptional in many ways, Manjula is by no means the only character in contemporary Indian women's writing for whom the material and symbolic power of food constitutes a significant means of achieving the identity of a new Indian woman. In terms of both their own self-realisation and their resistance against the constraints placed upon them by others, Shobha in *Monsoon Diary*[22] (2003) and Margaret in *Ladies' Coupé* are excellent examples of women for whom food plays a leading role in struggles for the right to exercise their independence from family members who seek to define their identities. This section explores these two narratives and suggests some of their implications for a feminist reading of the discursive links between food and modern womanhood.

In *Monsoon Diary*, Shoba narrates the story of her life, from birth to the beginning of married life, through recipes, remembered meals, descriptions of festivals, and momentous personal events that are defined as such by the meals that produce them.

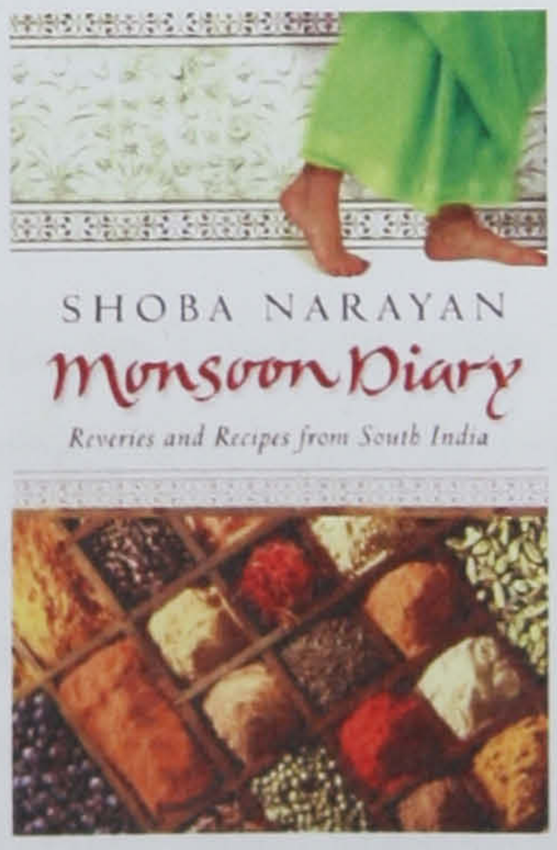

Fig. 6.3 Monsoon Diary

[22] Like *Getting There*, Narayan's text is a memoir rather than a novel.

One such event is described in chapter nine: 'A Feast to Decide a Future'. Shoba is seventeen and wants to travel to America to study psychology. Her father insists that she study in India, while her mother is primarily interested in her marriage. 'Oh, you think you are such a hotshot that you need to go abroad to study... Get married and go to Timbuktu if you want' (Narayan 2003: 100), her mother pronounces.

After gaining a bachelor's degree from the Women's Christian College in Madras, Shoba is offered a scholarship to a women's college, Mount Holyoke in the US, but her parents' response remains the same.

> 'Of course, I am proud of you for getting the fellowship,' my father said. 'But can you promise that you'll come back just the way you left us?'
> 'Dad, what do you mean?' I replied. 'I'm not going to dye my hair orange or change my name or something.'
> 'It's not that,' my mother said impatiently. 'Get married and then go to Timbuktu if you want,' she repeated for the hundredth time.
>
> (ibid: 105)

At a family meal, an uncle comes up with an idea, 'an idea so far-fetched that both parties instantly agreed' (ibid.). '"I tell you what," my uncle said. "Cook us a vegetarian feast like this one. If we like it, you can go to America. If we don't, you stay here." Everyone looked up and chewed thoughtfully' (ibid: 106). Although she has never cooked a full meal for her very demanding 'foodie' family before, Shoba sees this as her only chance to win her independence and accepts the challenge. 'I had to cook, for in it lay my destiny' (ibid.). The preparation of the feast is described in sensuous terms that both echo and anticipate Shoba's own growth from childhood to maturity: 'I teased some spinach... until it blossomed... I hovered over the virgin basmati rice... As sweet butter turned into golden ghee, the litany I learned at my mother's knee echoed in my head. Ghee for growth, ginger to soothe, garlic to rejuvenate, asafoetida to suppress, coriander to cool, cumin to warm, and cardamom to arouse' (ibid: 107).

Through her cooking, Shoba achieves a certain power over her family, challenging and temporarily reversing the hierarchies that have hitherto been performed. Whereas, as we see in the forthcoming discussion of narratives of fashion and shopping, discourses of consumption often cast women in the role of the seduced, unable to resist the urge to consume, here it is Shoba's family members who give in to temptation: 'They picked and sampled, judiciously at first. They didn't want to eat but couldn't stop themselves. They fought over the last piece of okra, taste overtaking caution'. In the end, Nalla-pa leaned back and belched unapologetically. I was going to America' (ibid.).

Food, and specifically Indian food, wins Shoba more time at Mount Holyoke when she decides at the end of her first year of study that she would like to stay on for a second. Needing $1000 to make up the cost of her living expenses, a friend suggests that she organise a benefit dinner. Shoba spends a long time deciding what to cook: 'Indian food... was out, even though I knew how to cook it well... My menu had to reflect America' (ibid: 142). Eventually she decides on 'world cuisine', choosing 'one dish from each continent, except Antarctica, which didn't seem to have anything vegetarian' (ibid.). The meal is a disaster when one person will not eat mangoes or cabbage, another refuses cilantro, another pine nuts, yet another, avocado, and everyone pronounces her attempt at a Japanese-influenced fusion dish 'inedible'. 'Niloufer, the daughter of a Turkish diplomat, took one look at my dolma and said, "That doesn't look like the ones my grandmother made." Reza, the Iranian consultant, announced that he wouldn't eat Turkish food, since his ancestors were murdered by Turks' (ibid: 144).

Worried that everyone would 'demand their money back', Shoba needs a last dish that will 'surprise and delight my guests into prayerful silence, make them forget the whole sorry meal and end the evening with panache and pizzazz' (ibid: 145). She makes upma, a spicy Indian semolina dish, which has the same bewitching effect on her guests as her family feast had done a year earlier. 'By the time I finished roasting the cream of wheat, everyone crowded into the kitchen, attracted by the scent of ghee that I was cooking on the side... By the time the cream of wheat softened, people were licking their lips'. The effect of the upma is somewhat magical, and the meal ends idyllically with general satiation and harmony, ensuring the continuation of Shoba's studies in America.

An even more striking example of food being used by a woman as a means of gaining freedom is found in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*. One of the narratives in this novel belongs to Margaret Shanthi, who controls her hated husband, Ebenezer, through food. As much a 'bully and a tyrant' (Nair 2002: 137) of a husband as a school headmaster, Ebenezer has systematically gnawed away at Margaret's sense of self throughout their marriage, putting an end to her education, encouraging her to cut off her hair, decreasing their church attendance, and pushing her to abort their first child. More disturbingly, he reveals certain sexual perversions that include a preference for the smooth body of a girl rather than the mature one of a woman. In response to this discovery as well as in a search for solace for her general unhappiness, Margaret turns to food. 'It showed on me: in the double chin, in the rolls of fat around my waist; in the

thickness of my calves and the puffiness of my wrists. I hated to look at myself in the mirror. But at least I was no longer daddy's little girl'.[23]

Sex and food are combined in this narrative as both Margaret's oppression and as her weapon. Although he too has a weakness for food, Ebenezer displays sustained self-discipline: 'He never took a second helping, fasted for a whole day once a week and had forbidden me to cook anything that would test his will and make him succumb'. Margaret hatches a plan to disempower her husband, one which begins with sexual 'stealth and cunning'. She seduces him one night 'with a child-like naïveté that made an "O" of my lips and shaven skin. With steely resolve and parted legs' (ibid: 141). The next morning she begins to feed him with food and flattery, encouraging him to eat far more than he needs: 'You have the build to carry extra weight. When a man puts on weight and he is as tall and broad as you are, it gives him an air of authority. A presence' (ibid: 142). As Ebenezer becomes 'a fat man. A quiet man. An easy man... A man whose fondness for eating blunted his razor edge', so Margaret loses weight and finds herself again, self-sufficient and in control of her own life.

In both of these texts, food is constructed as a means by which women may enact resistance and achieve autonomy. It is significant, however, that the food in question is consumed not by the women themselves but by others, and that it is therefore through the act of feeding that Shobha and Margaret are able to define themselves and take charge of their futures. Although I have suggested that the actions of both these women disrupt dominant power relationships within their families, at least temporarily, it is not clear that their actions constitute any significant challenge to the underlying structures of dominance. While they are able to exercise a certain measure of power, they can do so only, it seems, within the already circumscribed boundaries of appropriate, domestic, feminine activity and articulation. The new Indian woman constructed by these texts is perhaps best understood as one who employs effectively what James C. Scott has famously called the 'weapons of the weak' (1985), rather than one who turns existing structures of gender power on their head.

Fasting, Feasting

A contrast to these examples is Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, in which food, either its preparation or its consumption, is not as neatly linked to the production of a 'modern' or liberated woman as it appears in the narratives just discussed. Rather, food in this novel plays a far more complex role in the freedom and constraints experienced by the two protagonists, and their aspirations and articulations of selfhood. The novel's very

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[23] It is clear from the text that this is a reference to Margaret's husband, and not to her father.

title indicates the importance of food therein – its consumption and rejection provide a vital backdrop to understanding the experiences of the two protagonists, sister and brother Uma and Arun.

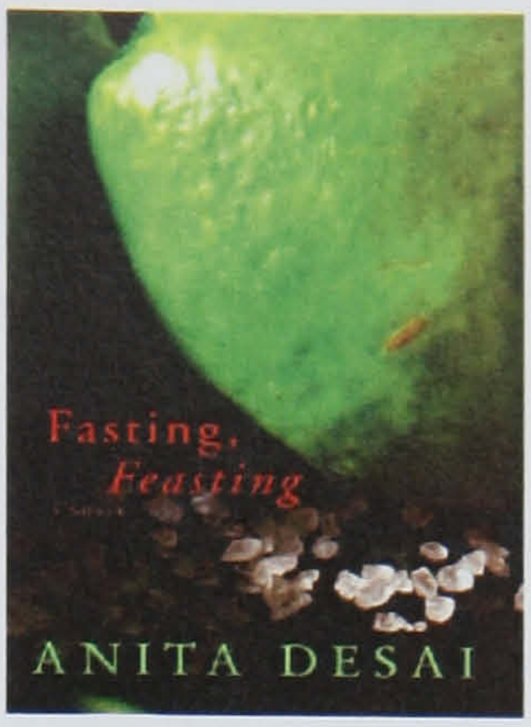

Fig. 6.4 Fasting, Feasting

The novel is divided into two parts, the first telling Uma's story of a stifling life at home with her parents, and the second relating Arun's experiences of studying in America and spending a summer with a dysfunctional American family. As with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (in which Mark Darcy is often said to exemplify 'pride' and Elizabeth Bennett 'prejudice'), the title of the novel invites the reader to identify each protagonist with one of the qualities it names. But again like Austen's novel, *Fasting, Feasting* does not allow such straightforward interpretations.

A close reading of the novel shows that Uma is in many ways 'fasting', though not necessarily by choice, in that she has little opportunity to experience the world outside her home. Her primary form of entertainment and solace takes the shape of a 'shoebox full of old Christmas cards' which she stores 'like treasure'. 'She runs her finger along the gilt crosses and embossed poinsettias, she plays with fragments of ribbon and lace, and reads through the merry little jingles that make her smile: they are so loving and bright with goodwill and friendship' (Desai 1999: 98-99). The pathos of Uma's narrow life is powerfully illustrated in this scene.

While much 'feasting' does indeed take place in the novel, Uma is generally excluded from it in one way or another. Food consumption in Uma's 'dreary outer world' (ibid: 40) is both physically abundant and symbolically resonant, but for Uma it represents primarily the constraints on her life and the disgrace she brings to her family by being clumsy, inept, and unmarried. It is telling that Uma's aunt Mira is one of the only people with whom she has a positive relationship, since Mira-masi, who 'ever since her widowhood… had taken up religion as her vocation' (ibid: 39) is characterised above all by her extremely restrictive diet.

We seldom see Uma eating, but often serving others. Unlike Shobha and Margaret in the previous section, Uma does not serve willingly and in an expression of individual agency or resistance, but begrudgingly and in accordance with expectations of her, as in a revealing encounter at the table.

> 'Uma, pass your father the fruit.'
>
> Uma picks up the fruit bowl with both hands and puts it down with a thump before her father. Bananas, oranges, apples – there they are, for him.
>
> Blinking, he ignores them. Folding his hands on the table, he gazes over them with the sphinx-like expression of the blind.
>
> Mama knows what is wrong. She taps Uma on the elbow. 'Orange,' she instructs her. Uma can no longer pretend to be ignorant of Papa's needs, Papa's ways. After all, she has been serving them for some twenty years. She picks out the largest orange in the bowl and hands it to Mama who peels it in strips, then divides it into separate segments. Each segment is then peeled and freed of pips and threads till only the perfect globules of juice are left, and then passed, one by one, to the edge of Papa's plate.
>
> (ibid: 23)

Uma's role as servant to the needs of her father, her brother, even her younger sister, is dramatically different to that of Arun, an unexpected boy-baby who has been simultaneously cosseted and pushed to achieve academically all his life. Important to Arun's character is his apparently innate vegetarianism; despite his father's scorn for non-meat eaters, Arun has from babyhood rejected meat in favour of vegetarian fare. While he has the freedom to leave home and study in America, Arun experiences much the same paradox of feasting and fasting as Uma when he spends a summer lodging with the Pattons, a white American family. Arun's vegetarianism is not understood or respected by Mr Patton: 'Just can't see how anyone would refuse a good piece of meat, that's all... A cow is a cow, and good red meat as far as I'm concerned' (ibid: 166), although Mrs Patton embraces the notion wholeheartedly: '"It'll be my vegetarian summer," she [said] with a delighted laugh' (ibid: 181).

The abundant quantities of food that Mrs Patton purchases contrast starkly with Arun's experience of actually eating the raw salads and breakfast cereal that constitute his American diet: 'How was he to tell Mrs Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment?' (ibid: 185). As with the Patton's bulimic daughter Melanie, food for Arun represents a constant difficulty. In the Foodmart, while Mrs Patton seems to have 'come home', Arun is tense, 'finds his throat muscles contracting, tight with anxiety over spending so much, having so much. Wondering if this is how Melanie feels and if it is what makes her sick' (ibid 208).

The seeming paradox of abundant food symbolising, especially for women, not joy and freedom, but pain, loss, constraint and desperation, is brought out with great clarity in an episode towards the end of the book, where Melanie is 'attacking' a tub of ice-cream with 'ferocity' after an outburst to Arun and he sees Uma in her.

> Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both licence and plenty. But what is plenty? What is not? Can one tell the difference?
>
> (ibid: 214)

Although Arun experiences the 'fasting, feasting' paradox firsthand, it is significant that his freedom as a privileged male enables him to walk away from the situation at the end of the summer holiday and return to the college dorm where he is independent. Indeed, even in his own experience of the abundance that makes him so anxious in the Foodmart, the food and the problems it symbolises remain at one remove from his own body – he neither consumes much nor seems to feel any real emotion or pain on his own behalf. Unlike Uma and Melanie, therefore, he is able to maintain a certain distance between his consuming body and his sense of self. For the two women, that gap appears much smaller, and their individual autonomy continues to be bound up in their symbolic and material relationships with food.

Fasting, Feasting paints what is perhaps a more nuanced picture of the complex relationships between food and modern womanhood than the other texts analysed in this section. Taken together however, all the texts discussed in this first part of this chapter foreground some of the ways in which food is discursively produced as being a key element of the identities of modern womanhood in contemporary India. Food is both a source of shame and condemnation and a potentially powerful means by which greater individual autonomy may be achieved. Discourses of food should therefore not be too quickly dismissed but rather valued for the ways in which they make meaningful the formulation of modern, mobile, gendered identities.

Fashion and Feminine Individualisation

The construction of woman as the archetypal consumer, and therefore also of consumption practices as feminine, is evident in many discourses of shopping, both historical and contemporary, and both Western and Indian. As Rita Felski has

remarked with reference to nineteenth-century Europe, 'the category of consumption situated femininity at the heart of the modern in a way that the discourses of production and rationalization... did not' (1995: 61). This is a positioning that remains evident today, in advertisements for diverse ranges of products. It is however nowhere more visible than in fashion discourses, wherein the woman is obviously constructed as the primary consumer.

In *India Today* 2000-2006, numerous articles, images, and short pieces on fashion have been published. The focus of these tend to be strongly on *Indian* fashion as a distinct category, with emphasis placed on traditional regional designs, textiles, and accessories and on particularly modern interpretations of garments such as the sari, the lengha, and the salwar kameez. The modern woman's purchase and wearing of such items of clothing is also important in a significant number of these articles, in which women's consumption is constructed according to certain significant patterns which I seek to unpack in this second part of the chapter. The theme of fashion consumption is not markedly evident in contemporary narratives by Indian women. Although clothing is often incidentally mentioned, it does not constitute a major focus of narrative attention. For this reason this and the next section focus primarily on the narratives of fashion consumption in *India Today*.

Christine Delhaye argues that 'while women have been banned from "masculine" processes of individualization, they have at the same time been involved in many "other" – often trivialized – developments of individualization' (2006: 87). Like other feminist theorists such as Joanne Entwistle (2000) and Kathy Peiss (1996), Delhaye considers fashion to be a potentially rich site of self-realisation for women, arguing that fashion discourses such as those of women's magazines contribute to processes whereby women come to 'conceive of themselves as "modern" individuals free to choose and be aware of themselves as unique and self-determining persons' (2006: 87).

As a magazine which overtly displays a sustained interest in fashion as well as in women's self-realisation and achievement, *India Today* has the potential to serve as a powerful discourse of empowerment for women engaged in making themselves modern. Through an analysis of the fashion discourses of *India Today*, including book reviews, profiles and feature articles taken from recent issues of the magazine, I argue that its fashion and shopping narratives do not in fact fulfil that potential. Rather, I suggest that they can be significantly problematic within a feminist framing of the discursive construction of the relationship between women and consumption in the

specific context of contemporary India. I argue that the newsmagazine's construction of shopping women differs markedly from its depiction of shopping men, and that its fashion discourses perpetuate and reinforce the idea of the woman as the repository of national and cultural identity, albeit in a distinctly modern form.

Although a wealth of articles from *India Today* deal with the subject of fashion, relatively few do so from the point of view of the consumer, and fewer still recognise the creative potential of an individual's fashion consumption. Overwhelmingly, the focus of the magazine's fashion discourses is on those they see as the producers of fashion – the designers, most of whom are male – which provides an impression of the active and creative side of fashion as a largely masculine enterprise. Only a small number of articles address the (female) consumer as an active participant in the process of dressing the body. One example of these is an article entitled 'The New Age Sari' (25/2/2002), which explores contemporary sari designs and drapings. The focus in this article is not only on the different ways in which the sari has been worn in the past, but specifically on the potential allowed by the garment for individual expression, as it enables its wearer to 'make a strong personal statement'. It is remarked later in the article that 'the sari today becomes long or short, wide or narrow according to who wears it and how it is worn. There is, in fact, no single type of modern sari'.

It is however noteworthy that at the same time as it insists upon women being free to choose their self-expression through their sari, the article inscribes norms of more traditional femininity upon that same garment: 'It is a heady mix of elegance, sex appeal, feminine mystery, individuality and adaptability. Like tradition, the sari has kept its acceptability and appeal intact through the ages'. The freedom of women to choose thus remains tightly inscribed within already defined parameters of what is acceptable and ideal femininity – namely, as the article states, elegance, sex appeal, and 'feminine' mystery. The image of the modern sari-wearer who is free to choose her own style clearly excludes those women who do not wear their sari in such a way as to show off a graceful body. As I suggested in the introduction to chapter two, it is unlikely that a rural woman who wears a sari tucked between her legs and/ or without a blouse to cover her breasts, would be included in this narrative.

This 'always already' defined framework within which women's self-expression may be manifested, also appears elsewhere in the magazine. In a cover story entitled 'What's Hot... What's Not' (21/7/2003), references are made to 'India's devotion to fashion's fickle goddess' (a term which not only implies that consumers are slavish and unthinking in their following of fashion but also reinforces the already taken-for-granted

feminisation of fashion) and to the ubiquity of certain trends: 'So what if everybody ends up looking like everyone else'. Later, the 'democracy' of fashion is emphasised: 'fashion is about choice'. The choice referred to however, appears not to extend beyond a simple opting-out of current trends: 'if Rohit Bal's slim linen/ khadi/ voile pants are too slim for the average Indian man, he will not buy them. Or if the asymmetrical skirt... looks odd on the average big-hipped Indian woman, out it will also go'. Little attention is paid in these discourses to the way in which individual consumers themselves interpret and translate existing fashions, or to the items that are chosen instead of the rejected trends. The consumer accepts or rejects in an attitude of relative passivity, but does not herself engage with items of clothing in practices of alteration, inventing alternative styles of wearing a given garment, or indeed constructing new items herself, whether from scratch or through modification.

Ultimately therefore, in this article as before, the framework of acceptability within which an individual may choose what she (or he) would like to wear is already clearly defined. As is common in articles on fashion, the magazine neatly tabulates 'what's hot' and 'what's not' in order that readers may be equipped to follow the latest rules. Unsurprisingly, the picture that heads every column of what, or what not, to wear, is of a female model sporting the relevant garment. Details of what 'should be aired,' what is 'now regulation wear,' and what 'not even your shoe should be seen with' (which in 2003, incidentally, was animal prints) make it clear that freedom of choice in fashion is strictly circumscribed by a certain elite. From the pages of *India Today*, that elite group emerges as significantly masculine, defining the bodily spaces within which femininity may properly be expressed.

The differential treatment meted out by *India Today* to men and women through discourses of consumption is noticeable in the setting up not only of production as masculine and consumption as feminine, but also of masculine consumption as active, rational and successful, and feminine consumption as impulsive, emotional, and characterised by failure. Numerous examples from the magazine can help to illustrate this construction, but the juxtaposition of two cover stories will be particularly useful here.

The first article, in an issue called 'Young Shopaholics' (9/8/2004) is entitled 'The I & Me Consumer'. The first article identifies, by age, four categories of Indian consumers: 'technology babies' (born between 1985 and 1996), 'impatient aspirers' (born between 1980 and 1984), 'balance seekers' (born between 1954 and 1983) and 'arrived veterans' (born between 1943 and 1953), describing each in detail and in most cases

profiling one or two individuals who represent the group. The second issue and article are both entitled 'Mall Mania' (7/11/2005, international print ed.). The cover story looks at the shopping malls that 'are mushrooming across the country at an unbelievable rate'; it offers glimpses of several malls in different cities, profiles retailers, and follows a group of shoppers as they spend a day in a mall in Gurgaon. Although the subject matter of the two articles is similar, the way in which the consumers are presented is dramatically different and, I argue, significantly divided at the point of gender.

The consumer in 'The I & Me Consumer' is explicitly male – among the eight individual consumers profiled or quoted in the article, not a single woman appears. It does not seem coincidental that the tone of the article is a positive one, the consumers it describes 'dream big,' are 'visible and active' and have great influence, even though they may be as young as ten years old. The 'technology babies' are described as powerful consumers: 'the influence of the youngest segment of all Indian consumers is way beyond their direct purchasing power', while 'impatient aspirers' are 'an independent breed'. The 'aspirer' profiled in the article is Anshul Pathak, whose unpromising career-beginning in a call-centre 'is turning into a fast-track road to success, wealth and new-found freedom to spend'. Even the 'balance seekers,' while finding 'the multiplicity of product options in the market terribly confusing,' are 'slowly trying to make sense' of it all. The consumers here are all clearly actively engaged in the processes of consumption, creating meaning out of the new by using products to benefit their careers and their families or to bring about the lifestyles they desire. The discursive construction of their habits, aims, and knowledge mark them out as being in control of their consumerism and in fact playing a key role in influencing processes of production and marketing.

The consumer is constructed very differently in 'Mall Mania'. The role of active player in the consumption game is taken over by the character of the shopping mall itself, while the consumer is described in terms that suggest passivity and lazy acquiescence. Such an image is indicated from the very beginning with the suggestion that 'the Great Indian Middle Class… are discovering the lives of mall rats'. In contrast to the image that this cliché provides of the consumer as a defenceless (and usually considered despicable) creature, shopping malls are described as powerful: 'the shopping mall is changing landscapes and lifestyles… the malls promise to forever change the way India goes shopping'. There are numerous references to 'the strategy of the malls' and their control over shoppers, exemplified by their guiding of customers through the space in such a way that the latter will spend as much money as possible, and providing a comfortable environment so that shoppers will linger.

The emphasis on these tactics all serve to inscribe the shopper as an oblivious pawn in the malls' moneymaking game. Even when aware of their strategies, the consumer is portrayed as compliant – one customer described as a 'mall veteran' is quoted as asking 'So what if malls are making me spend more than I would normally?'. Comfort and convenience are foregrounded, and customers are described as 'flocking' – again implying mindlessness – to nearby shopping malls in Gujarat, where a retailer explains that 'The Gujarati customer is learning to spend and we are keen on showing him[24] how to spend'. Throughout the article, the consumer is constructed as weak and passive, a colluding victim of a manipulative power. Since these are attributes far more commonly associated with the feminine than the masculine in the public imagination, the 'typical' shopper is also thereby feminised. This is illustrated not only by the article's focus on women's clothing and jewellery as some of the products most important to a shopping mall, but also by the language used to describe male and female shoppers, exemplified in an short, self-contained narrative within the article. This short passage follows a group of three friends, two women (Kripa and Pia) and a man (Manish) who are all in their early twenties, through a few hours in a Gurgaon mall.

While 'shopping is clearly not the prime objective,' sidelined in favour of 'window-shopping and good old gossip sessions,' the article states that 'some deals are simply irresistible'. The suggestion of overwhelming temptation once again renders the consumer helpless before the power of the product, but significantly, only the women 'indulge'. Even though she gets 'only Rs 2000 pocket money,' Pia 'cannot resist' purchasing a sweater that costs Rs 1300. Kripa 'drools over' a pair of 'champagne pink Gucci sunglasses' which cost Rs 12 550, but she 'cannot summon up the courage to shell out' the money, planning instead 'to return next week with her father who dotes on her'. Not only is Kripa cast as a weak consumer who is easily seduced by a pair of designer sunglasses, but she is also the stereotypically manipulative rich and spoilt daughter, 'daddy's girl', who can extract anything she wants from her adoring father. In contrast to his friends, Manish, a 'sports fiend' whose usual purchases – 'squash gear and shoes' – are significantly less frivolous and more practical than the 'champagne pink sunglasses' or the 'red Benetton V-neck sweater', manages to resist 'the urge to splurge'. Even when he does go shopping, Manish's purchases are not described in terms of lust or temptation – he 'acquires' rather than 'drools over' them, suggesting both a sensible and pragmatic attitude and a certain amount of self-reliance and self-possession.

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[24] In *India Today* as in most Indian public discourse, the male pronoun is typically used unproblematically as generic. Its usage here does not therefore negate the argument that the consumer is implicitly but consistently constructed as female in these discourses.

This example of female consumers being constructed as mindless or as enthralled by merchandise is not an isolated one; a survey of the fashion discourses elsewhere in *India Today* 2000-2006 reveals it to be part of a pattern. A book review of *The Sari* (27/10/2003) focuses on 'the power of the sari on the psyche of the Indian woman' and on the sari as 'a living entity that defines the periphery of lives and dreams'. The agent in this piece is the garment, to which the woman is subjected. Even the book itself weaves a kind of magic over the reviewer, who experiences a 'rush of desire' as she gazes at the photographs and goes to her wardrobe to 'caress the silks and cottons' of her own saris, vowing to 'never again neglect them so'. The sensual language of the review illustrates what Rita Felski calls 'the erotically driven nature of female consumption' (1995:69), a trope that has already been seen in 'Mall Mania' and is recurrent in the pages of *India Today*.

In an article entitled 'Sab Chalta Hai' or 'Anything Goes' (31/1/2000), it is suggested not only that women are slaves to modern fashion, but also that they are ultimately failing to attain the modernity to which they aspire through their clothes. The author of the article is at a party where 'Mrs Newly-Arrived from Chandigarh, resplendent in a shiny deep turquoise and parrot green polyester salwar "suit" and a De Beers solitaire, looked at my brown and beige handloom saree picked up at a Vishwakarma sale with a puzzled expression. "That's nice. Cotton? I don't know anybody who wears cotton"'. The author is irritated by the woman's disparaging remark and uses her as an example of what she sees as middle-class India's 'quest for "modernity"'. Women are clearly failing in this quest: 'Women still can't talk the talk or walk the walk: most of them... still look awkward in skirts, jeans and tights: the attitude wasn't imported along with the clothes'.

A similar sentiment is expressed by an article entitled 'Exposing Desire', which describes how the new Indian woman 'is redefining sexiness through her clothes, even as she fights her genetically dictated figure'. The article's central point is that Western clothing sizes are not appropriate for Indian women as they typically have body shapes that do not match those of Western women, but the language used to convey this message constructs Indian women as striving (and failing) to achieve a Western ideal, as well as being engaged in battle against their own bodies. A designer is quoted as saying: 'the Indian woman's body is a war zone, with the bust and the hips constantly rebelling against the rest of the body'. 'The Indian woman' is described as 'a fashion victim,' and someone who the magazine refers to as a 'diet diva' (itself a trivialising term) explains both the deficiency in the Indian woman's perceptions and the solution

to the problem: 'Until she gives up the idea of becoming the perfect woman as prescribed by Western standards, she can never be comfortable with herself'.

The paternalistic tones of these kinds of articles are further illustrated by yet another, where it is remarked by a designer that 'the Indian woman has matured more internally than externally. While she is ready to project a modern image, she is not ready to wear western clothes to project this image' (27/9/2004). More problematically, certain articles extend the denunciation of fashioned women, not just diminishing them but demonising them (Felski 1995: 62). An article lamenting the 'political and moral quandary' that characterises the inequalities of modern India, marks out as blameworthy 'the excesses of the new rich'. It is clear from the article that these excesses are a particularly feminine fault. 'Kitty parties have given way to hen nights where male strippers are paid to display themselves. Designer clothes, dripping jewellery and foreign holidays have become objects of desire, fuelled by the explosion of TV channels and a prevailing obsession with glamour, catwalks and conspicuous wealth'. While it could be argued that several of these 'objects of desire' are gender-neutral, the focus is on women from the beginning, and is sustained by references to fashion, jewellery, and glamour, which are all strongly coded as feminine. Although the article goes on to say that 'The ostentation of the rich is not the problem,' it is clear that the feminised *nouveau riche* are considered the visible representation of that problem.

Female consumers of fashion in the discourses of *India Today* are clearly not the individualised and self-determining subjects of Christine Delhaye's (2006) analysis. Although it is hinted in *India Today* that fashion may be a means by which individual consumers construct their own identities, the parameters within which such creativity may appropriately be expressed are clearly defined and strictly limited. Within those parameters, while men tend to be presented as rational and practical in their consumption, women are portrayed as slavish, unthinking followers of the new and are simultaneously failures in the context of modernity since their consumption is misguided or excessive. It should be noted that it is of course not only at the point of gender, but also at those of class and age, that these narratives are determined. Credit for active, engaged consumerism is not simply given to any masculine subject but specifically and most emphatically to a young, middle-class masculine subject.

Multiple layers of identity are thus mapped by these discourses onto consuming subjects, of which gender is just one, albeit one of the most significant. In my gendered reading of the narratives, therefore, it becomes clear that concerns about the rapidity of changes in urban Indian society and the blind following of Western trends are often

expressed through the feminisation of consumption, while the positive aspects of those changes – technological awareness, individual achievement, an adventurous spirit, and informed choice – are masculinised. Generally then, instead of forging a modern identity through shopping and dressing, the embodied new Indian woman is tightly circumscribed within patriarchal definitions of femininity and fashion. The active consumption practices engaged in by women are largely erased in these narratives, perpetuating the trivialising of such practices and their rejection as a valid means by which meaningful identities may be performed. As I discuss in the next section however, the Indian woman as consumer of fashion rather than food is given higher, although not necessarily more active status in certain discourses. Positioned to symbolise the new India, the adornment of the female body is legitimised in the interests of a nationalist agenda.

India in Fashion

As described in the previous chapter, the sexually transgressive modern Indian woman has become, at least for *India Today*, a powerful symbol of the new Indian nation. A similar trend can be seen in the magazine's fashion discourses, where the female consumer of fashion is constructed not only as an individual shopper but also as the symbol of the modern nation. The passivity of the feminised consumer, outlined above, is perpetuated by the positioning of the fashioned female body in the role of representing India both to itself and within a global context. Several articles in the magazine address the representation of India to the world through its fashion, a process which both feminises the nation and reinscribes woman as the repository of national identity and culture.

The cover story of an issue entitled 'India in Fashion' (9/5/2005) provides a helpful example. While the article addresses the 'Indian fashion industry's forays into world fashion', the India that is represented is clearly an overtly feminine one. From the cover image (below), which shows a woman in a bright and flamboyant outfit, to a list of the types of items that mark the Indian influence on the Western fashion scene – 'petticoats, wooden bangles and vintage jewellery' – it is clear that Indian women are 'in fashion' rather than Indian men. The article explicitly highlights femininity as the focus of the nation's self-representation through fashion: 'In the new fashion era of sophisticated superfemininity… a refined India is presenting itself to the world'

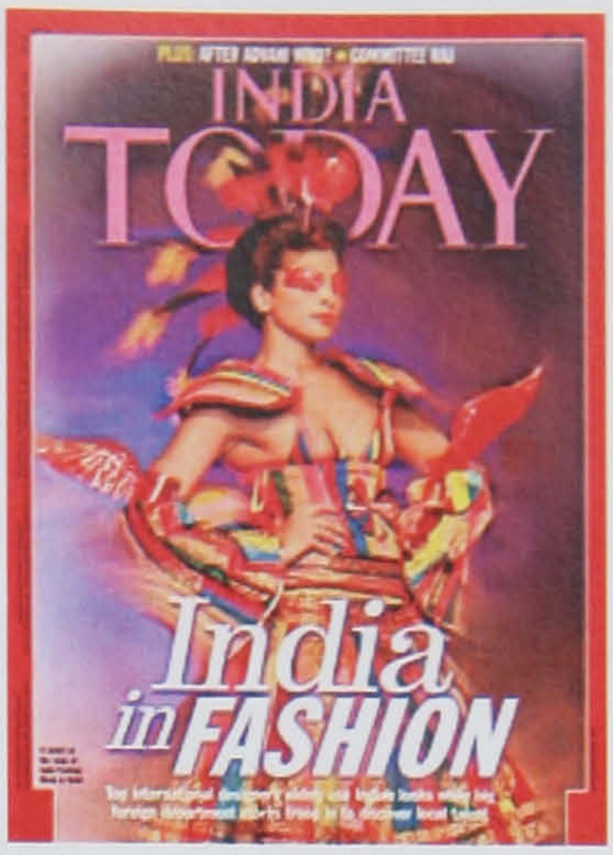

Fig. 6.5 India in Fashion cover (9/5/2006)

In this way, modern national identity is effectively inscribed on the body of the woman. Fashion discourse thus continues the inscription of the woman as representative of India's modernity, particularly through an emphasis on 'fusion' fashion, where women's clothing serves as an illustration of India's ability to combine an Indian cultural heritage and sometimes, implicitly, 'Indian' values, with Western practicality, progress, and freedom (*India Today* 24/3/2003; 4/2/2002). Because the body that shops for and wears these clothes is also a site upon which the nation's modernity is founded and displayed to the world, the textual construction of the fashioned female body as contemporary national symbol illustrates one of the many intersections between the consuming and the consumed body.

Another such intersection is illustrated by two images from a recent issue of *India Today*. The issue, entitled 'What's Hot and Cool', surveys the 'must-have products' that are newly available as part of India's 'consumer revolution'. Both on the cover and within the magazine, consumable modernity is feminised by the use of images of young women (below) to represent 'this age of runaway consumerism, easy EMIs, hyperbranding and the Indian markets flooded with the latest products from all over the world' (1/5/2006).

Fig. 6.6 What's Hot and Cool cover (ibid.)

Fig. 6.7 Consumer/ Consumed (ibid.)

In these images, particularly the second with its sensual lighting and emphasis on the sculptural qualities of the woman's body, there appears to be a slippage between the idea of the woman as the consumer of the product in question, and the woman as herself a modern product, available as the target and promised fulfilment of desire. Although the consuming female body is constructed as problematic in multiple ways as the previous section showed, it is also appropriated by fashion and other consumption discourses that reinscribe the woman as the symbol of the modern Indian nation, commodifying the troublesome consumer. The female body as commodity, then, may be read as the flip side of women's imbrication in the modern processes and discourses of consumption. Such discourses have far darker implications than they may suggest at first glance, and I give the following chapter over to an exploration of the meanings that circulate around and may proceed from the commodification of the female body.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that an explicit focus on the ways in which patterns of consumption are gendered through public discourse is central to an understanding of how modernity more broadly is gendered, and constructed through and upon the human body. Through two commodities – food and fashion – I have explored some of the key ways in which certain public discourses construct aspects of their consumption as constitutive of new Indian womanhood. Both food and fashion carry complex and contested meanings for women, and the specific gendered narratives that circulate around each commodity have important implications for a feminist awareness of the ways in which modern identities are produced. It is clear from the narratives of eating and shopping that I have analysed here, that the relationships between modernity, consumption, femininity, and nationhood are tightly intertwined and deeply political.

Women are positioned in multiple public discourses, including especially those of *India Today* that I have discussed in this chapter, as the archetypal consumer of both food and fashion. Consumption thus becomes a feminised practice, and reading discourses of consumption offers insights into the public imagining of femininity and women's agency. Some of the narratives analysed in this chapter highlight the creative and liberatory potential of consumption practices, in contrast to their more common trivialisation. It is hinted in such narratives that consumption need not be regarded superficially as a passive process, nor should the forms of agency that it may express and generate be erased as trivial or frivolous. Such erasure of the agency manifested in consumption, rather than its validation as a means of becoming modern, is however

dominant in these discourses, which often also reinscribe boundaries around women's bodies that accord with patriarchal forms of control and definition.

Although they are the quintessential consumer, women are often also placed in the position of commodity. Made to represent the nation, the fashioned female body appears regularly in *India Today* as a symbol of the new India and its saleability in a global market. The perpetuation of women's bodies as commodities in discourses that explicitly purport to reject such constructions, such as those of *India Today*, contributes to the wider problem of the objectification of women not just in the visual and textual media but in countless other aspects of everyday life. As I discuss in the next chapter, such objectification has profoundly damaging implications in that it contributes to the construction of modernities that are founded upon the violation of female bodies and yet exclude those bodies from dominant definitions of modernity.

Chapter Seven

Violated Bodies

The image of Indian women as the victims of patriarchal ideologies and practices is a common one in both Indian and Western media and academic discourses, where their experiences, circumstances, and prospects are regularly described in terms of oppression and struggle. Some of the issues most often raised in discussions of Indian women's issues and rights include female foeticide and infanticide, forced marriage, 'eve-teasing' or sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, dowry and dowry deaths or bride-burnings, sati, and the restrictions of widowhood. The violated female body is thus a recurrent motif in the discursive construction of India in the contexts of both the local (or national) and the global.

While it could be argued that the consistent reiteration of these themes contribute to the public imagining of the Indian woman as representative of the '"Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject' (Mohanty 1995), their relevance to ongoing social practices are central to the formulation of an Indian feminist politics. The maintenance and development of debates around the vulnerability and violation of women's bodies in the exercise of patriarchal control therefore remains an imperative in contemporary feminist discourse. Such discourse needs to address not only the 'social facts' of violation but also the rhetoric of violation (Sielke 2002: 1). This distinction is important in ensuring that the horror of physical violation is not diminished by analytic discourse, but it needs careful exploration in order to emphasise the fuzziness of each category's borders, a point upon which I elaborate in the first substantive section of this chapter.

In my empirical sources, Indian women's narratives in English and the newsweekly magazine *India Today*, acts of *sexual* violence and violation are privileged over others in terms of the textual space given over to their articulation and analysis. This is not an entirely surprising emphasis, given the sexualisation of woman that has been remarked upon in previous chapters. Because of this focus in the data, this chapter focuses primarily on narratives of rape and sexual harassment, and on the questions these

representations raise about Indian women and modernity. While feminists such as Kalpana Kannabiran use the term rape to include 'every act of sexual aggression on women' (1996: 41), I hesitate to extend its definition this far. I do not have the space here to enter into the extensive (feminist and non-feminist) debates around the term or its legal definitions. For my purposes in this chapter it will be sufficient to note that I discuss 'violations' of the female body as encompassing rape, legally defined, as well as sexual assault and harassment. It is important however to note the difference between 'violence' and 'violation'. As Laura Tanner points out, 'Although it is the materiality of the body that defines its susceptibility to violence, it is the vulnerability of the subject accessible through that body that renders the victim susceptible to violation' (1994: 3).

The violated female body seems to stand at odds with that of the 'new Indian woman' who is popularly characterised by her sexiness, her independence, and her bodily autonomy, as has been seen. My aim in this chapter is to address the relationship between textual representations of violated female bodies and the discursive construction of Indian modernity in those same texts. To this end I explore narratives of violation in contemporary women's narratives and *India Today*, asking what discursive spaces are opened up in these sources for the violated body also to be modern.

The analyses in this chapter resonate particularly powerfully with the idea of an ethic of reading put forward in chapter four. In an essay on the feminist politics of rape narrative, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, following Tessa de Lauretis, alerts us to the fact that 'A feminist "thematics of liberation"... is insufficient to counter the force of masculine desire that invests all narrative'. She argues that 'this is why feminist texts of rape must also engage in textual strategies to counter narrative determinism' (1993: 73). Taking seriously the possibility of constructing violated female bodies as retaining and expressing agency as modern bodies therefore requires that all narratives of violation are evaluated in terms of both their thematics and the additional textual strategies that contribute to their meaning.

It is crucial also to note again, especially in the context of narratives as ideologically charged as those of female violation, that what is omitted is often at least as important as what is said. Reading narratives of violation demand, far more so than readings of transgression or consumption, that careful attention should be paid not just to the presences enacted by the text but also to the discursive absences that produce the violated, Indian, female body. As Sabine Sielke puts it: 'Since texts mean just as much by what they leave unsaid as by what they say, by what is absent as by what is

present, those texts that explicitly employ rape in turn raise questions about their silences, their absent centers, about what they choose to obscure' (2002: 3). Ledbetter agrees, arguing that reading against the 'master plot', reading the victim's story in narratives of violation, is often a case of 'presenting absence'. He suggests that 'To think that absence is without substance is a rather primitive idea, much like numerical systems without zero... Presenting absence is critical for doing narrative ethics' (1996: 6).

Keeping these remarks in mind throughout, I begin this chapter by discussing the importance of addressing the overlaps between the physical materiality of violation and the discursive materiality of its representation, aiming to avoid either undermining the former or overstating the impact and implications of the latter. In the second section, I contextualise the representation of violation within the broader cultural processes which it both informs and reflects, and open up the discussion of what discursive space may exist in my empirical sources for the violated woman to be modern. The third section examines a selection of texts, identifies certain patterns in their articulation of rapists or harassers and their victims, and interrogates the implications of those constructions. Fourthly and finally, I identify two texts which represent a counter-discourse to those analysed in section three, and suggest that the former offer the potential for an alternative reading of female violation, one which is more sympathetic to a feminist politics of agency and thus contributes more helpfully to an understanding of the ways in which the violated woman may also be an active modern subject.

Violation and Representation

In her book *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film*, Tanya Horeck outlines an incident in 1993 in which the literary critic Carlin Romano imagined, in great detail, the rape of the feminist lawyer and activist Catharine MacKinnon in a review of her book *Only Words*, published in the American newsweekly *The Nation*. As Horeck explains 'One of the common critiques of MacKinnon's work is that she blurs the line between real and represented rape' (2003:1). Romano's piece thus constituted an attempt to demonstrate that physical rape differs substantially from represented rape. What resulted was a public outcry and the accusation of Romano having raped MacKinnon in as material a way as if he had committed the physical act. Such denunciation of Romano was criticised by *The Nation* for, as Horeck puts it, 'ignoring an important distinction between fantasy and reality' (Horeck 2003: 3).[25]

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[25] *The Nation* adds that 'fantasy' is not really the correct term to describe the article, preferring to call it a 'thought experiment' (Horeck 2003: 3).

The tensions between physical bodily violation and its representations are crystallised in this incident, which demonstrate that while the two are not identical, neither are they entirely discrete. More useful perhaps than a conception of two distinct categories, is the idea of a common foundation and multiple overlaps between the two, or of a continuum of domination along which each point refers to and is made meaningful by all the others. It becomes clear in certain situations, exemplified by the one described above, that violative discourses are as entangled in the exercise of sexual power as bodily acts. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan neatly puts it, 'Texts lie not outside the circuit of sexual politics but implicated in them' (1993:64).

Another powerful demonstration of this deep implication of texts within the social politics of sex took place shortly after the publication of Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997. In June of that year a Keralan lawyer, Sabu Thomas, brought charges against Roy on the grounds that her description of a sexual encounter between an Untouchable and a Syrian Christian woman was obscene. Although the case was laid by an individual, as a criminal case the official complainant became the Indian state (Jana 1997: 2), lending greater symbolic weight to the idea that Roy was guilty of offending traditional *Indian* values and morals. The fictional representation of violation – a violation of caste boundaries, the self-inflicted 'violation' of an upper-caste[26] woman's purity – thus itself became constructed as the violation of the nation.

For the reasons such entanglements between text and social politics suggest, narratives of bodily violation demand attentive reading in order to build an understanding of the work that they do within and to relationships of power. More specifically, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, they compel an ethic of reading that acknowledges the relationships of power and identification in which writer, textual subject, and reader are all implicated. As Ledbetter suggests, 'an ethic of reading is to hear those voices' which are usually silenced (1996:1). This requires both identifying and reading beyond the 'master narrative' – in such a way as to reveal the silences, the absences, and the fractures within the text that may allow alternative perspectives on the violation that is articulated therein.

The ethical questions that surround narratives of female bodily violation in contemporary India are better illuminated when situated within the context of broader cultural processes. This context is constituted by innumerable facets including multiple public media but also everyday conversational discourse, political rhetoric, popular

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[26] Although all Indian Christians are officially casteless, Syrian Christians claim to be descended from the Brahmins who were among the first converts of St. Thomas in the first century A.D.

music, and so on. While I cannot of course address all of these, I do explore in the following section some of the principles that link the discursive objectification and instrumentalisation of Indian women with physical acts of violence against women's bodies and the discourses that render meaningful both those acts and the people implicated in them.

Violation and Modernity

The metonymic relationship between the woman and the Indian nation has already been discussed, but I return to the theme here in order to explore some of its implications in greater depth. Through discourse and image both *India Today* and contemporary narratives by Indian women, together with myriad other tangible and intangible manifestations of the public imaginary, construct the Indian woman as the repository of national and cultural identity, both modern and traditional. Martha Nussbaum, in an insightful article published in the *Boston Review* (2004), argues persuasively for an understanding of this relationship as the conceptual foundation for the violence visited upon women during the riots in Gujarat in 2002.[27]

In order to build an understanding of this violence, which was qualitatively different in extent and degree from that exacted upon women in other instances of communal violence in India, Nussbaum begins with the identification of the Indian woman with the Indian nation that took particular shape during, and as a result of, India's period of colonisation by the British. In a narrative that echoes Partha Chatterjee's (1990) analysis of the conflation between woman and nation, Nussbaum explains that Indian men's protection of women and the associated spaces of the home afforded them a sense of control over what was 'essentially' Indian, at a time when any effective national control had in fact been usurped by their colonisers. Because the woman thus represents a group's (in this case, the nation's) identity, the act of raping the women of an opposing group thus becomes 'a potent weapon in consolidating power... an act symbolising the power of one group to damage the domain of rule of the other group, dishonouring the group in the process' (Nussbaum 2004). In the Gujarat riots, Nussbaum argues, the mutilation and murder of Muslim women expressed the Hindu rejection of Muslims as constitutive of a valid group within the context of the Indian nation.

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[27] These riots were characterised by the extreme sexual violence and bodily mutilation enacted by Hindu men upon Muslim women. Nussbaum quotes from the affidavit submitted by the feminist lawyer and activist Flavia Agnes to the Commission of Enquiry in 2002: the 'scale and extent of atrocities perpetrated upon innocent Muslim women during the recent violence, far exceeds any reported sexual crime during any previous riots in the country in the post-independence period' (Agnes cit. in Nussbaum 2004).

At the heart of the construction of the woman's body as national symbol is the pervasive objectification of that body, 'treating as a mere thing what is really not a thing' (ibid). Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a discussion of the collective violence of Partition, refers to this as the trope of 'thingification', of which commodification is a special instance (2002:142). As Nussbaum explains, objectification 'has multiple aspects, including the denial of autonomy and subjectivity and the ideas of ownership, fungibility (one is just like the others), and violability (it's all right to break the thing up or abuse it)' (ibid). Central to the notion of the objectification of women is that of instrumentality, the idea that a woman is not an end in herself but a means to an end. Whether imagined as the symbol of the nation or represented in a pornographic image, women's bodies are consistently objectified and instrumentalised in myriad cultural media and everyday discourses. The relevance of these processes to the violation of women's bodies is clearly expressed by Nussbaum:

> ... the particular way in which kingly rule over women made them into a symbol of nationhood involved instrumentalisation. So the woman was reduced from a person to a mere symbol, and that symbol, however apparently honorific, was a mere tool of male ends. The road from that point to violation is short and relatively direct.
>
> (ibid.)

The previous chapter explored representations of women's bodies in relation to the construction of women as consuming subjects in modern India. This distinctively modern objectification of women gives rise here to a discussion that constitutes what might be considered the darker side of that one, since it becomes apparent that not only is woman the quintessential consumer and her body the primary element – cause and effect – in that consumption, but she is also made to play the role of commodity in numerous and varied ways. As Mary Ann Doane explains, 'woman's objectification, her susceptibility to processes of fetishization, display, profit and loss, the production of surplus value, all situate her in a relation of resemblance to the commodity form' (1987: 22). Similarly, Susie Orbach argues that female bodies are 'presented as the ultimate commodity' (1993: 17). As Martha Nussbaum's work implies, an understanding of this discursive commodification of women's bodies is crucial to an understanding of the narratives of their physical violation. As a fundamental marker of modernity, such commodification and consumption, and therefore also the violation of the female body, come to lie at the heart of what it means to be modern.

Media such as *India Today* play a significant contributory role in creating a culture in which the objectification of women's bodies is considered acceptable and appropriate, even ideal or honorific. The newsmagazine employs the female body in many guises to

symbolise the Indian nation. Depending on the context in which the symbol is expressed, or the aspect of India that is being emphasised, that body may be modern or traditional – it may be a sexually transgressive body, a fashioned body (or often both of these), or a body clad in traditional dress, jewellery and other adornments. Overwhelmingly, however, it is in all these categories a young, attractive, feminine, female body. One example of this is the cover of an issue of *India Today* entitled 'Patriotism Rules' (11/10/2004). This issue of the magazine describes a trend towards 'patriotic' films in the Hindi film industry, and the cover image (below) is of Preity Zinta as the character Zaara in the movie 'Veer-Zaara', released in 2004.

Fig. 7.1 Patriotism Rules cover (11/10/2004)

Although Zinta plays a Pakistani character in the film, she is used here as the face of Indian patriotism in an image that powerfully links the ideas of an adorned feminine body with that of loyalty to the nation.

Another, very high-profile example of such symbolism is the large group of young Indian women who have won beauty contests such as the 'Miss World', 'Miss Universe' and 'Miss Asia-Pacific' pageants in the last 10-15 years, and thus become in many ways India's modern 'face' in international media and popular consciousness. Although the newsmagazine *India Today* is disparaging of the tendency to glorify beauty queens for 'aiming no higher than flouncing around in a mirrorwork ghagra choli and vying with Miss Botswana's plumed headgear,' it does suggest that 'there is something irresistible about a dark princess promising succour to India's teeming millions', and perpetuates the elevation of these women by explicitly marking their awards as decisive moments in the unfolding of the 1990s (3/1/2000). Similarly, Aishwarya Rai and Sushmita Sen figure alongside such personages as Mother Teresa, Indira Gandhi, and Salman Rushdie, in an issue marking twenty-five years of *India Today*'s publication, as two 'newsmakers' – 'people who in these incredible years have shaped our lives, touched our hearts and contributed in great measure to our future' (25/12/2000). The article explains their importance:

> Because who cares what an 18-year-old with legs to the moon says when asked by an ageing society vulture, 'Honey, what would you do if you were prime minister?' so long as she can wing it to win. Because it felt great to have two gorgeous ladies stand in front of a billion people, keep their nerve, smile, and say the right thing at the right time. Because Indian womanhood is not about looking like the Goodyear blimp wrapped in six yards of fabric. Because in a country where women's souls are shackled, teens beaten up for wearing blue jeans and baby girls killed for being baby girls, Sushmita's Miss Universe and Aishwarya's Miss World titles in 1994 was a coming out parade of in-your-face confidence of such magnitude that men and women's libbers are still in denial. Because nobody cares whether 'Ash' or 'Sush' are fighting or fading – they made it, period. Because India now owns the beauty business, and it's a refreshing change from being the beast.

The beauty queens, in *India Today*, represent both a modern, liberated Indian womanhood (which is 'gorgeous' in an evening gown rather than 'blimp'-like in a sari) and India itself, redeeming the nation from a position as the villain in terms of women's rights. They represent the freedom of women that finally mark India – not the individual women themselves, but the nation – out as modern and powerful. This extract from the newsmagazine foregrounds Indian modern identities as distinct from Western imaginings of India and Indianness. Constructed for so long as 'the beast' in the context of global modernity and its freedoms, India has finally managed to define its own modern freedoms, this piece suggests. The postcolonial relationship is thus rendered clearly visible in this narrative, as one that continues into the present as India comes to define itself as modern both with and against Western paradigms.

A stark contrast to the exaltation of the India represented by Rai and Sen is the textual picture drawn of weightlifting champion Karnam Malleshwari, profiled in 2000 shortly before the Sydney Olympics in October. The article is critical of both Malleshwari and the other two female weightlifters it profiles. Its tone is one of despair, remarking near the beginning that 'Barring an act of providence, a gold medal in women's weightlifting, once a cinch, now appears as elusive as the notes of a half-remembered song'. One of the reasons given for this is that Malleshwari, already a world champion when this profile was published in September (4/9/2000), 'has switched categories as she has grown too heavy for the 63 kg class'. The article explains that 'Malleshwari, a once-statuesque lifter, now resembles a contented Hyderabad housewife. In five years she has moved up from 54 kg to 69 kg, victim, it is whispered, of a love of beer and fried food'.

Along with the questioning of her physical strength, Malleshwari is clearly constructed here as unfeminine in an arena, of which *India Today* is a part, where the standards are set by Bollywood stars and beauty queens; the magazine declares that 'There's a bit of John Wayne in her walk' and a later article (2/10/2000) comments that she 'has locked up her lipstick' and that 'when a woman 5 ft 3 in tall lifts up the front of your car so that you can change the tyre, men take a step backwards'. This second article, published after Malleshwari did in fact become the first Indian woman ever to win an Olympic medal, is essentially no more complimentary than the first had been. After quoting her as saying at a press conference: '*India Today* wrote that I like beer and fried food. It caused a problem in my family... It was very irritating', the article entreats its readers to celebrate Malleshwari's victory, but its conclusion mockingly cautions us to 'just remember not to toast her with beer'.

Malleshwari's is a body which is genuinely transgressive of accepted paradigms of femininity, her 'muscles challenge deeply held cultural assumptions and beg the questions "What is a woman's body? Is there a point at which a woman's body becomes something else? What is the relationship between a certain type of body and 'femininity'?"' (Entwistle 2000: 8). Although both Malleshwari and the two beauty queens represent the Indian nation in their respective fields of display, the differences in the construction of each in *India Today* are striking. Malleshwari's body is outside of the norm and 'hard to identify with' (2/10/2000), and her achievements are not elided with those of the nation in the way of Rai's and Sen's. While their bodies exemplify 'Indian womanhood,' Malleshwari is constructed alternately as a figure of fun and one of pity, but consistently as an Other to both established femininity and masculinity. She is thus not permitted to represent modern India as the ideally feminine beauty queens are conscripted to do.

As illustrated by the example of Aishwarya Rai and Sushmita Sen, beautiful Indian women who fit accepted norms of femininity are made to stand for something other than themselves, made simultaneously into something more than, and less than, the individual human beings that they are. The bodies of such women, constructed as emblematic of ideal womanhood, are used to represent not merely India but specifically the nation's modernity. India Today's first issue of 2003 includes an article whose header reads 'Raunchiness was the defining movement and the bold new woman its epicentre', and comments that 'If there were one defining image of 2002, it would have to be Ishaa Koppikar's amazingly mobile belly button...The mutinous navel... was also our ubiquitous and most unabashed cultural ambassador' (6/1/2003). Although these lines are light-hearted, it is clear that in the realm of Indian culture, women's bodies are

seen by *India Today* to mark the modernity of the nation, despite the magazine's implicit moral and aesthetic judgements against the 'new depths' reached by the film and music industries.

In addition (and often parallel) to their instrumentalisation as symbols of the Indian nation, women are commodified through their construction as the objects of an implicitly masculine and sexually desiring gaze. Images of women in sexually provocative clothing and poses are abundant in *India Today* – a magazine which is, overtly at least, intensely critical of the constraints upon and objectifications of women in India. The magazine's perpetuation of women's bodies as sexualised commodities is therefore surprising even in the light of its equation between those bodies and the country's modernity as discussed above and in previous chapters.

Together with the numerous images of semi-naked women that illustrate various articles and advertisements published in the magazine between 2000 and 2006, a weekly column entitled 'Eyecatchers' is consistently illustrated with images of women in suggestive poses. These images portray women as passive objects who are perpetually sexually available, and thereby, I would argue, also implicitly construct the primary reader of *India Today* as masculine and heterosexual. This reading of 'Eyecatchers' and similar texts draws on Laura Mulvey's seminal article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975), in which she argues that certain mainstream forms of cultural representation (specifically Hollywood films) enact a desiring male gaze that reproduces the 'dominant patriarchal order (ibid: 160). Such discourses thus construct the male as the active 'looker' and the female as the passive 'looked at'. Although Mulvey's work is by no means without its critics (for example, Brooks 1997), her elaboration of the 'male gaze' and the need to recognise and destabilise it is key to understanding how women may be multiply violated by visual and discursive practices through the reduction of their bodies to a sexualised image that is designed primarily for the pleasure of an implicitly male viewer.

It is important to recognise that contemporary narratives of physical violation speak from within this context of discursive objectification and violation that sometimes, as is clear in the case of *India Today*, their sources may themselves perpetuate. It is partly because of this discursive context within which they are unavoidably situated, that narratives of female bodily violation become important to an understanding of the more general public imagining of women's bodies. The analyses above, aided by the insights provided by Nussbaum's dissection of some of the ideological underpinnings of the Gujarat riots, expose the continuum between the objectification of women and their

physical violation. More specifically, they enable the illumination of links between the 'new Indian woman' and the violated woman that are commonly elided in public discourse, through the polarisation of these figures in accordance with constructed oppositions between modernity and tradition (a pervasive binary that has been dealt with in depth in chapter five).

As we have seen, despite the 'neo-objectification' of the new Indian woman (or the discursive construction of the *new* new woman), a significant amount of space is opened up in discourses of modernity, in both *India Today* and women's narratives, for female agency – particularly through their focus on bodily desires and practices. I am interested to inquire in this chapter as to whether similar spaces are produced by the discourses of violation articulated within the same sources. As much a part of modern India as women's increased liberation and empowerment, the issues surrounding physical violence against women constitute a strong theme in both women's narratives and *India Today*. The question that must be asked of these narratives of violation is whether they can and do recover in any effective sense the woman-as-modern-subject that is distorted and erased by discourses, such as those analysed above, that objectify and instrumentalise women. My analyses of these discourses in this chapter investigates the possibilities of connecting the issues they raise with the idea of a liberatory modernity for women.

Monstrous Men, Normal Urges

Bearing in mind the above discussions, I turn now to an analysis of my empirical material. To quote Ledbetter once more, this constitutes 'the most important part of this work' since 'the metaphor of the body violated denies abstraction' (1996: 19). From *India Today* 2000-2006, two issues (9/9/2002 and 30/5/2005) have carried cover stories addressing the problems of rape in India. I focus my discussion of the newsmagazine's rape discourses on these two issues, including also a number of more minor yet still substantial stories that have been published in the last five to six years.

Both issues carry on their front covers a picture of a woman and a faceless, threatening man. The first issue makes much of a statistic from the World Health Organisation suggesting that 'there is a rape every 54 minutes in India' (9/9/2002). This sentence recurs in exactly these words no less than four times in the issue (including once on the cover) and once as 'every 54 minutes a woman is raped in India'. Another statistic is cited too, claiming that '42 women are raped every day in India, one every 35 minutes!' (ibid.). The second issue analyses the responses of men and women to an opinion poll conducted in eight Indian cities on the issue of women's safety. In addition to text-

boxes detailing the responses of male and female respondents to specific questions and a highlighted box listing 'the do's and don'ts' necessary for 'attacking rape' (30/5/2005), the article offers numerous explanations as to the causes of the national problem of rape in India's cities.

I argue that these issues of *India Today* utilise a number of textual strategies that serve to re-inscribe the violated woman as a victim and ignore or erase any agency that she may have in the moment of bodily violation. First, however, it is vital that in order to understand the discursive construction of the violated woman, we also examine the figure of the perpetrator, since each plays a role, often through a relationship of opposition, in the production of the other. The narratives of rape in *India Today* display at least three tendencies in their construction of the perpetrators of rape, each of which has important implications for their contribution to public discourse surrounding the violence done to the woman's body, and is therefore worthy of exploration. Although there are clear tensions and contradictions between these narrative trends, they are often carried out simultaneously and, more importantly, share certain problematic features when read from a feminist point of view or, more generally, simply read with an attempt to 'do narrative ethics', as Ledbetter would advocate.

Firstly, and perhaps most surprisingly, the perpetrators of rape can effectively be erased from the narrative. This is particularly notable in certain articles from *India Today*, and is enacted in a number of ways. As I have pointed out, the images used to illustrate the magazine's cover articles on rape in 2002 and 2005 are strikingly similar in many respects, and these similarities are particularly important when considered in conjunction with the articles' printed text. In addition to the cover images of two issues of the magazine, I include in my discussion here two illustrations that accompany narratives of rape in *India Today*, one from the second cover story: 'The Rape Nightmare' (30/5/2005) and the other from an article on gender crimes 'in universities across the country' (10/2/2003).

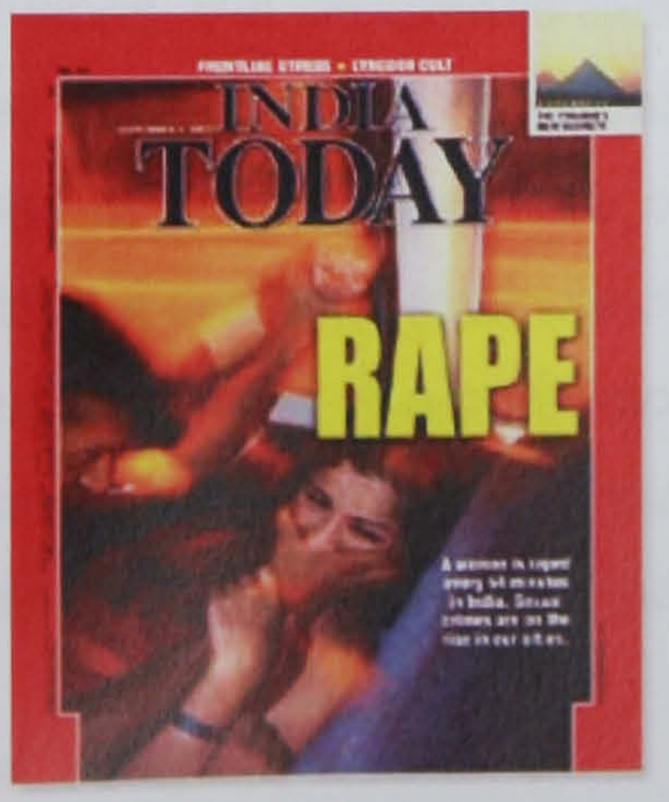

Fig. 7.2 Rape cover (9/9/2002)

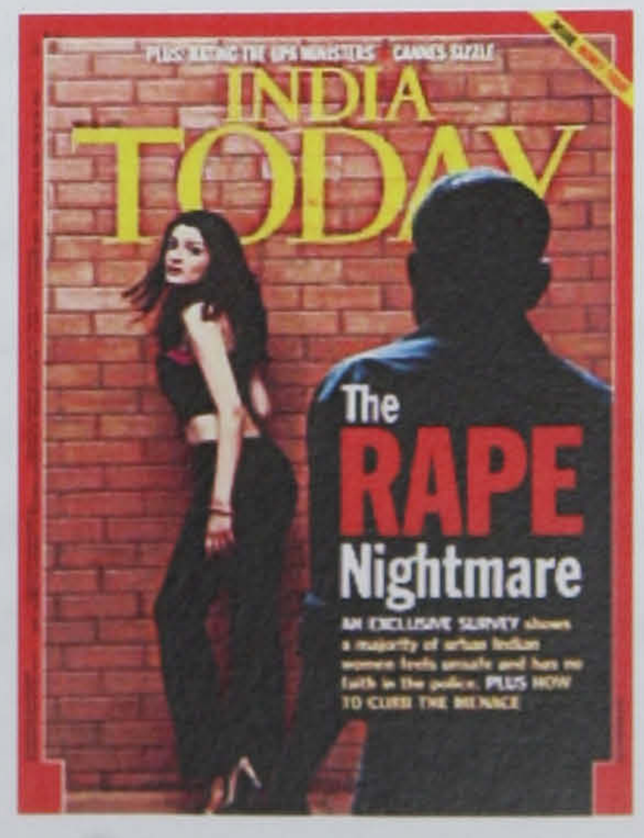

Fig. 7.3 The Rape Nightmare cover (30/5/2005)

Fig. 7.4 Man in Shadows (*India Today 30/5/2005)*

Fig. 7.5 Attacking Hands (*India Today 30/5/2005*)

Although they deal with an attack that has been carried out on a woman's body, these texts manage through a number of discursive and visual strategies to occlude the reader's view of the attacker himself, rendering unspeakable not what is done to the woman's body but who exactly has done it, and why. The images in *India Today* do this quite literally; in the pictures reproduced above the rapist is either a silhouetted figure, is facing away from the camera, and/ or is largely cropped out or obscured. The victim's face, in contrast, is typically in clear focus and in fact dominates the picture. All the pictures suggest that rape usually occurs by sudden assault in darkened, deserted public places, committed by menacing strangers (who are too horrible to be represented). Furthermore, it is hinted, the victims of rape are likely to be attractive young women who are modern in their dress, hairstyle, and makeup. All these implicit suggestions run counter to the evidence (acknowledged in the magazine itself) that demonstrates rape to be most commonly committed by men who are known to the victim, as family members, acquaintances, friends, or partners.

Within the written text of the articles themselves, the actual perpetrators of rape are frequently occluded just as effectively, though not as literally, as in their accompanying images. One way in which this is done is through directing blame for rape onto institutions and processes such as society, the state, the law, the police, and so on, rather than onto the individuals directly responsible for the crime and the underlying causes of their actions. The cover article of the issue entitled 'The Rape Nightmare' provides a dramatic example of such discourses. The articles states that 'The dominant culture of Delhi... is a contempt for a woman's person', that 'society at large is still not accustomed to women on their own', that women's 'liberation is not something society seems ready to accept' and that 'society at large believes it can get away with rape'.

Culture and society are made thus responsible to such an degree that the individual men who actually commit rape are rendered invisible. There is little acknowledgement that roughly half of the 'society' that 'believes it can get away with rape', is comprised of women, who according to Indian law cannot of course commit rape.[28] Society is thus masculinised, and women are implicitly excluded from it and placed instead in their own category of actual and potential victims of 'society's' attitudes and actions. At the same time, the actual men that constitute that society are absolved of blame for rape, it is not 'men' who get away with rape but 'society' which does so. The gender inequalities that underpin rape are thus ignored and even negated.

One paragraph in this article argues that 'Why should girls seemingly have any fun is the subtext of a society that takes vicarious pleasure in consuming the sexcapades of Sarah Jessica Parker[29] and friends on free cable TV or the naughty flirtations of the newest pneumatic music video baby doll. When confronted with it in the flesh, their first instinct appears to be to acquire, and when that fails, to do so by force'. A close reading of this passage reveals that the grammatical subject of the last sentence is in fact absent. 'They' can only refer (ungrammatically) to 'a society' of the previous sentence. The men in that society, who are the true subject of this second sentence, constitute the unspeakable agent of rape, an emptiness at the heart of this narrative. By relocating the responsibility for rape onto society rather than the men who rape, the real causes of rape are masked and the systematic exercise of patriarchal power through sexual violence is glossed over.

In other articles in *India Today*, the blame is not laid as heavily at 'society's' door but at those of the state. In fact every article on rape published in the newsmagazine between 2000 and 2006 blames the national authorities in some way for the problem. The violative nature of rape trials themselves, the insensitivity of police officers, and the inadequacy of rape laws and their enforcement are all held up for scrutiny and condemned. This is neither to say that the responsibility borne by the state should not be addressed, nor that individual perpetrators of rape are never identified in rape narratives such as these. But whereas certain perpetrators are indeed named or otherwise mentioned, the general absence of attempts to pin down the specifics of the gendered power relationships and ideologies that drive individual men to rape women is notable in these articles.

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[28] Even if the definition of rape is broadened to include penetration with something other than a penis, making it possible for a woman to commit rape, such assaults by women are extremely rare.

[29] Sarah Jessica Parker plays the character of Carrie in 'Sex and the City', an immensely popular (both in America and elsewhere) contemporary American sitcom following the (sex) lives of four friends in New York City.

Marian Tulloch and John Tulloch locate this shifting of blame as part of the goal of news media to maximise public outrage over rape. They suggest that 'while horrific crimes can focus the community anger against the perpetrator, community outrage is most likely to result from the failure of public authorities to protect citizens deemed worth of protection' (2003: 108). I touch again on the question of rape narratives' provocation of outrage in due course, but wish to note for now that whatever the cause behind this sometimes dramatic discursive shift of focus from the actual perpetrator to other social elements as blameworthy, the effect is one of minimising both the violation enacted by a man upon a woman's body and the problems of gender inequality that underpin that violation.

Secondly, and again specific to the narratives of violation in *India Today*, where they are made visible by the texts, rapists are often demonised in such a way as to create and heighten a sense of the extraordinariness of rape, and to exclude it from the identities and processes that define contemporary India as modern. Several instances can be found in *India Today* where rapists and abusive men are implied to be inhuman, monstrous, or animalistic. If not dehumanised, they are frequently described with words and phrases that evoke images of film villains and other stereotypical figures. One article mentions the 'lecherous smiles' of lawyers and policemen at the mention of rape in court, and describes how 'the onlookers whistled in sadistic glee' when a female journalist was 'asked in an open court whether she was married, had a boyfriend or sexual experience' (16/12/2002). The first cover story on rape (9/11/2002) builds a detailed picture of men who rape and abuse women as Other to the processes of everyday life and modern India. It states that 'India's mean streets are getting meaner', employing the discourses of Hollywood and Bollywood film tag-lines that conjure up a fictional world of 'goodies' and 'baddies'. Rapists are characterised by 'desperation and depravity', they view women through 'a Stone Age prism' and are 'uncouth', 'the ugly underbelly of society', 'prehistorical' (sic), 'medieval'.

While the article also explicitly states that 'Rapists don't have violent, filmi looks' and that rape is commonly committed by a man known to the victim, there is a constant tension between these more moderate statements and the powerfully emotive and evocative language used to imagine the men in question. The effect of such discourses is to construct an opposition between 'us' who are normal and rapists who are not, removing them from the sphere of everyday life and the gendered power relationships that are performed through its mundanity. As Weaver et al put it, such positionings of rapists outside of normal society 'individualise and personalise the violence... [and invite] the reader to divert blame away from individual men as well as a patriarchal

system which perpetuates structural gender inequalities based on the economic, social and cultural subordination of women' (2000: 178).

Thirdly, the violation of women by men is normalised in certain narratives, a process which can be both harmful and helpful in understanding rape and narratives of rape. Normalisation is harmful when it works by refiguring the violation of women's bodies in terms of natural male desire. Significantly, this tendency is not always as separate as it may appear from that of demonisation, since this kind of normalisation of sexual violence and the demonisation of sexually violent men, are often written through the same narrative figure. Every 'normal' man, these narratives suggest, harbours within him a monstrous rapist, or a caveman-like attitude towards women. As *India Today* puts it: 'Today's male may come in better packages as a father, lover, husband or boyfriend, but inside he is still an uncouth voyeur' (9/11/2002). Written together in this way, these two narrative processes have the effect of implicitly absolving the perpetrator of his crime, since it is both 'natural' and beyond his control, and facilitating the placing of blame elsewhere in the ways that I have shown.

An example of this kind of normalisation is evident in one of the cover articles on rape. This article suggests that part of the reason for rape is 'Lust in males who live in crowded homes and have little opportunity to interact with women', and its examples of rapists include 'groups of youth driving around the capital, their repressed libidos finding brutal release in helpless women on their way home from work or in a college campus'. Such narratives of men who rape women as a morally inappropriate or wrong expression of a 'natural' heterosexual desire, configure their acts as an uncontrollable deviance from their natural urges. Rape is thus constructed as the outcome of biological difference and a man's 'needs', rather than the inscription of gender power, and both the men who rape and the societies that condone their acts, are thus implicitly absolved of full responsibility for their actions.

Simultaneously articulated yet contradictory, the narrative processes that both demonise rapists and naturalise them by situating rape in a context of natural sexual desire, are both problematic in that they ignore the real issues at stake. More common in the discourses of rape in women's narratives, but also in evidence (though not emphasised – in fact quite the contrary) in *India Today*, is the normalisation of rape by situating it in the context of the everyday, in private as well as public spaces, committed by family members as well as, and more probably than, by strangers. Such a construction of rape allows the most scope for understanding it as an articulation of patriarchal power rather than that of desire. Normalising rape by identifying it as part of

the broader context of violation that I discussed in the third section of this chapter, and locating it within spaces of supposed safety in addition to those of public, 'dangerous' space, enables it to be addressed not as something that is exceptional or Other to the processes of modernity that define other areas of life, but as entangled in – constitutive of and arising from – those very processes.

Several novels by Indian women, a few of which I discuss later, explore the realities of what many feminist discourses of rape have suggested: 'that most violence against women is perpetrated by "nice guys", not "beasts"' (Weaver et al 2000: 181). Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (its failings from a feminist viewpoint – discussed shortly – notwithstanding) and Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds no Terrors* and *The Binding Vine*, for example, address the ordinariness of sexual violence against women, in both private and public spaces. The rapists and harassers in women-centred narratives are seldom the menacing, shadowed strangers depicted in the images discussed above, but known and trusted men, often husbands, uncles, and cousins.

Another recent novel, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, in its depiction of the sexual harassment of Ammu by a policeman, grounds such violation in the gendered social structures of power that make it acceptable for men to objectify, use and humiliate women for their own ends:

> 'If I were you, he said, 'I'd go home quietly.' Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap.* As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't. Policemen have that instinct.
>
> (Roy 1997: 8)

Without suggesting that such violation of female bodies is not worthy of public outrage, these narratives highlight that what is truly deserving of criticism is not simply the act of violation itself but the patriarchal system, reinforced every day in countless mundane ways, that makes such violation not just unexceptional but inevitable.

Apart from these last discourses that do address some of the real issues underlying rape, men who rape or otherwise sexually abuse women tend to be constructed by the narratives analysed above in ways that minimise the seriousness of such abuse. These problematic constructions are compounded by constructions of violated women as lacking agency, and their positioning of these women outside of their discourses of modernity. The texts thus enact further violations upon these women, victimising them in multiple ways that are layered on top of the original violation being narrated.

Hapless Women, Risky Bodies

The issues around sexual violence and rape are clearly of equal concern to the authors of woman-centred fictional narratives as to *India Today*. In this section I discuss three novels: Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, and Manju Kapur's *Home*.

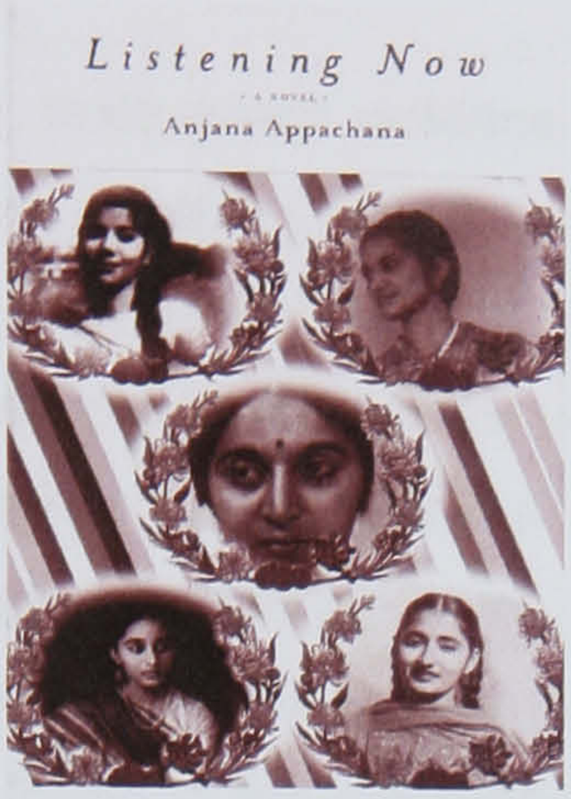

Fig. 7.6 Listening Now

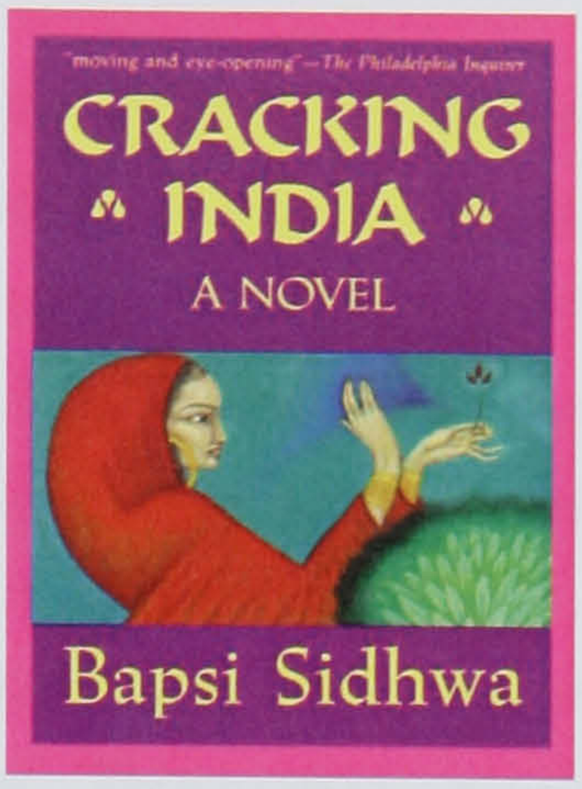

Fig. 7.7 Cracking India

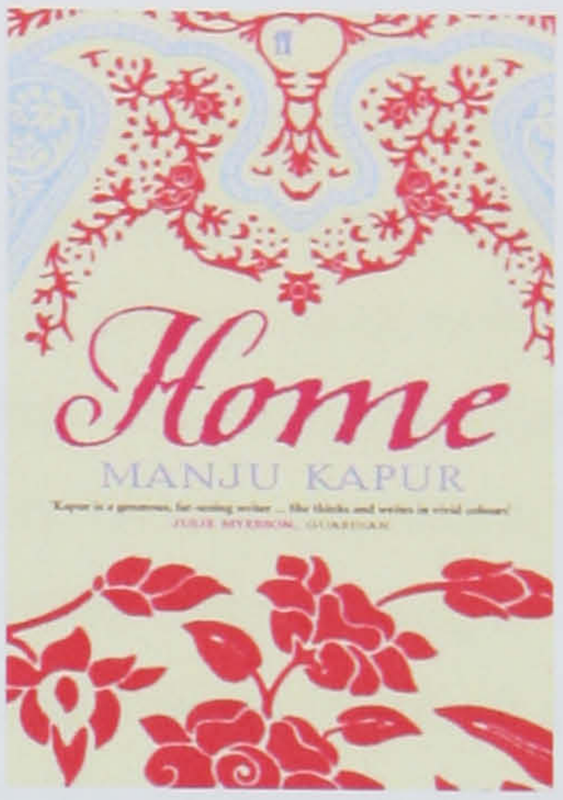

Fig. 7.8 Home

Of these, *Listening Now* is a long novel – in excess of five hundred pages – telling the stories of five women: Padma, her sister Shanta and her friends Madhu and Anuradha, and Padma and Shanta's mother, Rukmini. In addition, Padma's young daughter Mallika plays a central role. Despite the multi-stranded nature of the novel, the protagonist is clearly Padma, as it is she and her secret – her affair with a young man, Karan, who is Mallika's father – that ultimately connect all the characters. *Home* is similar in some ways, as the novel tells the story of the inter-weaving lives of an ever-growing joint family, the Banwari Lals, and their cloth and sari business in Delhi's Karol Bagh, a busy retail district.

The family's patriarch is Banwari Lal himself, who built the business from nothing after the family's forced move to Delhi during Partition. If there can be said to be a 'main' character in this novel, it is Nisha, the (long-awaited) firstborn of the eldest Banwari Lal son, Yashpal, and his wife Sona. Nisha is abused as a child by a relative, Vicky, who shares the family home on sufferance, being the son of Banwari Lal's deceased daughter.[30] The remaining novel, *Cracking India*,[31] is a story of Partition told from the perspective of the young child and semi-autobiographical character, Lenny. Although Lenny is the central character, the story in fact pivots on the story of her ayah or nanny, who suffers abduction and violation during the violence of Partition. As I will show,

---

[30] Custom dictates that joint families are expanded patrilineally. As the son of a daughter, Vicky therefore does not have the same rights to inhabit the family home as do his maternal uncles' children, and his presence in that home and in the business is largely seen as a charitable gesture on the part of the Banwari Lals.

[31] Bapsi Sidhwa grew up in Lahore and *Cracking India* is a semi-autobiographical account of some of the events of Partition. As such both the author, like the more famous Salman Rushdie, and her novel occupy something of a middle ground between what are now the two nations of India and Pakistan.

these three novels, despite having female authors and ostensibly feminist thematics, contribute to the erasure of women's agency enacted by the discourses of rape in *India Today*, and there are significant parallels between these sources. I address in this section four means by which women are discursively violated by the narratives of their physical violation in these texts.

Firstly, texts enact violence on the body of the abused woman by configuring her as passive. In almost all the narratives of rape to be found in *India Today* 2000-2006, raped women are constructed as the passive recipients of abuse, most notably and most simply by the words used to describe them. Emphasis is consistently placed on the woman as the 'helpless' object of the rapist's aggression. Women are characterised by their 'weakness'; they are 'hapless', 'powerless', 'frantic and terrorised'. Such descriptions of the victims of sexual violation appear in almost every narrative of rape to be found in the newsmagazine. These words construct the woman as an object of pity, which further demeans her and distances the reader both from her experience and from her as a subject in her own right, not defined simply by her rape.

This tendency is not confined to news media such as *India Today* but can be found also in many of the women-centred narratives written by Indian women. Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* is one novel whose general emphasis is on women's helplessness in the face of abuse and oppression, their inability to resist or retaliate against everyday forms of violence, public and private, physical and discursive. One reviewer, who calls it 'the ultimate oppressed-woman novel', describes the characters thus:

> All of them are victimized in some way – some by a particular man, some by society, some by their own idiocy... Each character was interesting, but the overall tone of continuous oppression got to me. I began to remember the characters by what particular form of oppression they had suffered. Anu was the one with the unpleasant mother-in-law, Madhu was the one whose husband was insensitive about sex, and so on.
>
> (Chacko: SAWNET review)

Two scenes of public sexual harassment stand out in the novel. The first occurs when Padma, Anu and Madhu visit a fair in a nearby village. Anu has to keep the trip secret as her domineering mother-in-law refuses her any freedom or happiness. At the fair the three women are suddenly encircled by a group of men. The group closes in and the men attack the women, they are 'squeezed and pinched... probed and prodded... rubbed' under their clothes. All three women are lying passively on the ground when their attackers finish with them and abruptly withdraw. Madhu had 'heard her own

scream as she fell on the ground, her head hitting the ground'. When she opens her eyes 'Padma was stumbling to her feet' and 'Anu was still lying in the foetal position' (Appachana 1998: 89). The women help each other to tidy their clothes and hair and quickly leave the fair.

In the second scene, Padma is walking on a quiet road with Karan, who has never understood why she always wants to return to her hostel before nightfall, arguing that since he is with her she has no need to be apprehensive. As they walk, Padma sees a man walking towards them on the same side of the road. Padma is tense with fear as he gets closer. Suddenly Karan stops to light a cigarette, turning away from her to block the wind from the flame, and the man passes by them, hitting Padma hard on the breasts as he does so. 'She made a stifled sound, almost falling back under the impact'. Karan notices nothing and continues with his monologue about the 'courage' and 'fortitude' of his mother who 'never spoke of all that she had to suffer'. Padma grows angry with his admiration of his mother's silence and demands: 'What does keeping quiet have to do with fortitude, Karan?... *You're blind. Blind'* (ibid: 257, author's emphasis).

Despite Padma's outburst here, when Karan later asks her why she had called him 'blind', begging her to explain what her words had really meant, she refuses to tell him about the incident, believing that he does not really want to hear what she wants to tell him. The implication here, as in numerous other instances in the novel, is that there is little point fighting against patriarchal limits and oppression. Women cannot hope to challenge the attitudes or power of men and are forced to accept it as normal and enduring. Such acquiescence is deeply problematic, as Weaver et al point out: 'the acceptance of this normalisation is an acceptance of subordination. Second-class citizens should not expect to walk the streets unhindered' (2000: 183).

The insistence of these texts on female weakness and passivity in situations of physical abuse itself constitutes a certain violation of women's bodies, a denial of the agency that may be expressed by the women concerned. This is not to say that the victims of violation are necessarily *not* weak, physically or otherwise, but rather that the constant reiteration of their weaknesses, in the absence of an equal consideration of their strategies for resistance, recovery, and redress, constitute a reinscription of violence on their already violated bodies.

Secondly, contemporary narratives of rape enact violence against women in ways that are often more subtle than the overt (though likely unintended) strategies of diction and

plot. Reading with a narrative ethic demands an attentiveness not only to the absences and the explicit messages of the text, but also to the ways in which we, the readers, are positioned with respect to the perpetrators and the victims of violence. As has already been suggested, the violated woman is often rendered Other both within the text and in a meta-textual sense, as the reader is invited to identify him/ herself against rather than with her. By thus implicating the reader as voyeur or accomplice to an act of violation, the text multiplies that violation in additional dimensions. A reading of a recent article from *India Today* will help to illuminate some of the discursive practices that serve to implicate the reader in their own violative acts.

The article is about a Pakistani woman, Mukhtaran Mai, who successfully fought a legal case against the 13 men accused of gang-raping her. In this article, Mai's illiteracy is emphasised and she is consistently made Other to the processes of the law within which she has been struggling. She is also thereby made Other to the reader, who is by definition literate (and that in English), educated, and is therefore not-like-Mai. The image evoked at the beginning of the article is one of the underdog looked upon benevolently by her saviours: 'As the presiding judge's English words were translated into Punjabi for the 34-year-old illiterate rape survivor Mukhtaran Mai, the activists, government officials and mediapersons crowding the courtroom were witness to the first smile of relief they had seen on her face in months' (11/7/2005). As readers who are inevitably engaged in the process of positioning ourselves within the text, we are situated by default with Mai's 'saviours', repeating their Othering gaze.

(A different article encapsulates this Othering gaze of both legal professionals and reader in its image of 'a battle between an articulate defence lawyer and a poor nervous woman', in which 'the victory is almost always predetermined' (3/11/2003). The opposition of 'lawyer' with 'woman' in this sentences implies the lawyer to be male, and constructs an image of a gender domination not dissimilar to the woman's physical violation. While it indeed seeks to make the point that rape trials repeat that violation in their treatment of the victim, the article itself unintentionally violates this abstracted raped woman by denying her agency, and positioning her as Other within its own narrative.)

The next paragraph in the article on Mukhtaran Mai continues this process by elevating Mai to the position of an icon for all downtrodden women, if not all disenfranchised Pakistanis: 'the poor, unlettered Mai is a symbol of courage and resilience in the face of brutal injustice and the forces of feudal patriarchy' (ibid.). Such objectification, as we have seen, is underpinned by similar thinking (conscious or not) to that which

'legitimises' physical violation. As such, co-opting Mai to stand for the suffering masses serves to layer another violation on top of the one she has already experienced, denying or at least diminishing her experiences as those of a valid individual in her own right. The third means by which narratives of rape violate again the bodies of rape victims, then, is by reconfiguring them as symbols or icons of the violated masses, their suffering, bravery, or struggles against injustice.

The discourses of this article have striking parallels with those that construct the character of the ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*. Although the text tells us once that the ayah's name is Shanta, she is otherwise referred to only as Ayah, reducing her to her role rather than allowing her an individual identity in her own right. Most of her role in the first half of the narrative is to serve as an object of admiration – for Lenny, who both wants her and wants to be like her, and for the numerous suitors who surround her as she and Lenny sit in Lahore's Queen's Gardens.

In addition, in the context of pre-Partition India, and specifically in what will soon become Pakistan, the Hindu Ayah is constructed by the novel as a centre and a symbol of religious and ethnic harmony, 'the magical goddess of racial harmony, the locus of convergent desire, the border terrain that neutralizes ethnic or religious difference' (Hai 2000: 398). Even as the political tensions are mounting, Ayah continues to embody that unity in the Queen's Garden: 'The Sikhs... are keeping mostly to themselves... We walk past a Muslim family. With their burka-veiled women they too sit apart... A group of smooth-skinned Brahmins and their pampered male offspring form a tight circle of supercilious exclusivity near ours. Only the group around Ayah remains unchanged. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee, are as always, unified around her. I dive into Ayah's lap' (Sidhwa 1991: 105).

As a symbol of unified India, Ayah becomes also the symbol of its 'cracking' or division when the violence of Partition erupts. She is abducted, raped and forced into prostitution by a Muslim suitor. The details of her violation are never divulged by the text, but in a way that is very similar to the narrative of Mukhtaran Mai, 'the ayah's ethnic, gendered, and class position enables her body to become the displaced figure for a nation that is brutalized and ravaged for telling a story otherwise too traumatic to be told' (Hai 2000: 391). Allowed little agency by the narrative before this, Ayah subsequently becomes an even more passive figure upon which the agency of the upper-class Parsee can be enacted, as Ambreen Hai points out, when the women of Lenny's family – particularly her godmother – undertake her rescue. When they visit Ayah, her name has been changed to Mumtaz, representative of her appropriation by

her Muslim abductor, and she barely speaks, managing only a few hoarse whispers. Soon she disappears for the second and last time, returned to her family in Amritsar.

As a Hindu and a servant, Ayah is positioned as doubly Other in this novel whose active subjects are upper-class Parsees. Hai suggests that 'the work that this working-class woman does in the narrative is to become the epitome of absolute otherness' (ibid). The fact that she is also the only female character whose violation is described or dealt with in any real detail by the text, has the effect of also Othering that violation along the lines of class and religion. The identification of this Otherness of class and religion with that of violation, renders the female bodies from whose perspective the story is told (which in this case are upper-class and religiously and ethnically 'neutral') as safe spaces upon which such violence cannot be enacted.

One short rape narrative in *India Today* echoes these class distinctions and privileging. It describes the fight of a student for justice against three men who raped her. Significantly, the girl is a medical student, a prestigious social position, and she is 'one of the city's rising young doctors'. She is thus marked out as well-educated, and therefore most likely from a relatively affluent, middle- or upper-class background. It is significant that instead of rendering her passive and Other in terms of the text and the reader, in the way that so many other rape victims have been constructed by the magazine's discourses, this young woman is described in terms that emphasise her strength: 'the police officer was struck by her resolve', 'she gathered her courage', 'she developed nerves of steel' (30/5/2005). The text remarks on her silence and invisibility, but strongly implies (with good reason) that these are additional markers of her agency: she showed that 'the body can be assaulted, not the mind. What's more, even today, fewer than 10 people know who she is'. This exception to the rule of the passive rape victim raises the question of whether a violated woman discursively constructed in *India Today* can only be shown to have agency when she is already, by virtue of her social position and education, modern like 'us' – the reader, the narrator, or even the author of the text in question.

The most recent novel by Manju Kapur, *Home*, draws together the three forms of discursive violence discussed above – rendering passive the victim of violation, objectifying the violated woman as symbol, and mimicking the act of abuse through narrative structure – in the story it tells of Nisha. Nisha's story, of her as an individual, begins properly when she is seven years old, with a description of her sexual assault by her cousin Vicky. The narrative structure of this incident is built upon 'the recognition that desire is built upon the prolongation of suspense and the postponement of climax'

(Sunder Rajan 1993: 73). The reader's first hint of what is to come is given in Vicky's unusual and unexpected fascination with the newborn Nisha. Although there is nothing obviously sexual in the ten-year-old Vicky's interest in the baby, it is notable for its contrast with that of his cousins: 'Ajay and Vijay were completely bored by the baby – they did not understand how a cricketer like their cousin could even want to hold her. The only thing she was good for were the presents and sweets given on her behalf when rakhi and bhai duj came along' (Kapur 2006: 44). A hint of foreboding is introduced when Sona, Nisha's mother, 'began to wish Vicky shared his cousins' unconcern. "He keeps wanting to hold her," she complained to her sister, "but he is so dirty and sweaty, I don't like it... There he is, dark and ugly, leering like a crow over her..."' (ibid.).

What is kindled here in the reader's mind is fanned a few pages later : 'Of her four brothers, Vicky was the only one who paid [Nisha] any attention, touching and stroking her when he could' (ibid: 53). The use of the word 'stroking' is slightly out of place here, as it is not a form of contact typically associated with the affection shown to babies. The word, with the same oddness, is repeated a few pages later to remind the reader of its previous occurrence and further spark the imagination in a way that imitates the titillating and frustrating effects of sexual temptation and withdrawal. In this way the story mimics the building tension of sexual desire in such a way that the reader becomes complicit in the rapist's urges and his crime. As Laura Tanner writes of a different novel: 'The early warnings of rape that rumble through the novel without ever assuming articulate form tease the reader into a state of protracted sensitivity; in that state, the slightest movement, the least reported sound, triggers an avalanche of imaginative violences' (1994: 20). Moreover, the narrative telescopes time here, compressing seven years into ten pages in such a way as to make the relationship between Vicky and Nisha a focal point of this period, intensifying the tension in this storyline. Each reference to the physicality between the cousins heightens the tension and the reader's anticipation of something more about to happen.

In the scene of Vicky's first assault on Nisha, the narrative tension is carefully built up. Vicky goes up to study on the roof, where jars of pickles are set out to ferment in the sun, and Nisha insists on following him, begging him to play with her. She inspects the pickles and tempts Vicky to taste one in a scene that is symbolically loaded:

> 'Do you want a carrot?' She dropped her fingers experimentally into the jar once more.
>
> 'Mamiji will beat me.'
>
> That her mother would react strongly to any tampering with the jars on the roof was undeniable. Especially if she thought Vicky had a hand in it.

> 'Arre, how will she know?' said Nisha. 'I will tell her I have taken.'
> 'And she will believe you?'
> 'Yes.' The little girl pried open his mouth and shoved the carrot in. Vicky looked at her for a moment and then flung himself on the durrie and moodily opened his books.
>
> (ibid: 55)

If nothing else, this passage is suggestive of the Biblical story of Eve's temptation of Adam,[32] and is therefore resonant with notions of sexual awareness, sin and shame. It also positions Nisha as somehow complicit in her own violation. These suggestions are deepened by several references in the text to the game of Snakes and Ladders that Nisha carries up onto the roof. Beyond the symbolic links in both Indian and Western cultures between serpents and evil, the game of Snakes and Ladders is thought to be a Hindu one which originated in around 2 B.C. for the purposes of teaching moral principles. Its presence in the scene thus adds an additional stratum of suggestion to the developing tension. But even apart from these symbolic references, the scene is focused on the physical closeness between Nisha and Vicky.

When their conversation turns to Vicky's low status in the family, he 'allowed himself the luxury of some tears'. Nisha 'couldn't bear it. She threw herself on his back, and put her arms around his neck. "You have me, Vicky, you have me," she said, rocking against his back, while Vicky snivelled into his sleeve.' (ibid: 56). Eventually he tries to remove her from his back: 'He put his hands around the plump legs, stroked them up and down, while trying to pull her off.' (ibid. 57). The 'stroking' of Nisha's legs 'up and down' is stylistically jarring in this sentence; as before, it does not correspond with expected actions, in this case those of someone trying to extricate themselves from an embrace. It serves the purpose, however, of further alerting the reader (albeit in a rather crude manner) to what is about to happen, building and prolonging the tension.

Nisha slides round into Vicky's lap and he gazes at her while she rights the game which has been upset by their movements (given the history of the game, is this perhaps representative of the collapsing moral structure between the two characters?). The actual scene of Vicky's violation of Nisha is told primarily from Vicky's point of view, which has the effect of positioning the reader as voyeur in such a way that s/he replicates that violation, by sharing both Vicky's gaze and his agitation. While the reader is told that Nisha resists him and begins to cry, s/he is positioned by the text to identify not with Nisha's fear but with Vicky's sensory experience and actions. As it has

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[32] The fact that this novel, of a Hindu family in North India, evokes Christian symbolism is not as odd as it may seem. These and other Biblical stories and teachings are common reference points in everyday and religious/ philosophical discourses among many communities in India.

done in the lead-up to this event, therefore, the text reproduces the increase of Vicky's sexual tension to the point of his release, whereupon the chapter comes to an abrupt end, mimicking that release.

As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out, one implication of building narrative tension around an incident of rape is that the text 'must then seek a further (post-coital) erotic goal', one which is often 'offered in the "trials" – the death or disappearance – of the raped woman' (Sunder Rajan 1993: 74). This, in a metaphorical sense, is precisely what happens to Nisha, since although she becomes from this point a (if not the) key figure in the novel, her agency is simultaneously erased in scene after scene. The first such instance occurs when her abuse at Vicky's hands is suspected by her aunt Rupa, and she is quietly sent to live with Rupa and her husband. The abuse is hardly mentioned again, 'written out' both by the family and the text itself.

This nullification of both Nisha's violation and subsequently also Nisha herself as an active subject, is ongoing through the rest of the novel. Nisha shows promise as a student thanks to her academically-minded uncle, but once at college she quickly loses interest in her studies. She falls in love with a fellow student, Suresh, but he is of a low caste and her family puts an end to their plans to marry by bribing Suresh and his family to disengage themselves from the relationship. The Banwari Lals embark on a desperate search for a husband for Nisha (although she is very pretty, she is also a mangli,[33] which complicates this process), but she pines for Suresh: 'She did not care what happened to her. She ate less, she spoke less, what was there to say?' (Kapur 2006: 201). She develops eczema on numerous areas of her body, is forced to be a constant help to her mother in the kitchen with chores she had not learnt to do during the years spent at her aunt Rupa's, and is eventually coerced into taking a 'time-pass' job at a nearby crèche, but she longs for 'something more, more, more' (ibid: 278). Nisha never succeeds in taking any control over her own life; she is at the mercy of her family, her stars, her own body, her circumstances. More pertinently, she does not take any real steps towards achieving such control – apart from vague longings for 'more, more, more', she effectively yields responsibility for her life to others in numerous small ways.

When she sets up 'Nisha's Creations', a business designing women's clothing that she runs from the basement of the family home, a significant change seems to take place. She becomes a strong, independent businesswoman in control of every aspect of her

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[33] Simply put, Nisha's horoscope indicates her to be an unlucky girl, particularly for her future husband, unless he was born under a similar astrological configuration.

very profitable enterprise, and even lays down the conditions of her marriage: 'She would only consent to a match with a family who let her work' (ibid: 297). For the first time in her life, Nisha has an identity that she has constructed for herself and seems to embody the characteristics of ideal modern Indian womanhood. When, in line with her wishes, her family find a man who agrees to let her work, and even suggests eventually moving her workshop to a location near their own home, it seems that Nisha has gained a significant amount of autonomy. During the marriage preparations, however, she is forced by the demands of the business to enlist the help of Pooja, her brother's wife, whom she dislikes and resents. And soon: 'Her body again decided her fate. Within a month of her marriage she missed a period' (ibid: 325). Pooja takes increasing control in the business, which in a short time becomes hers: 'By the time the next batch of suits were ready, they were labelled Pooja's Creations with an alacrity that suggested the labels had been ordered before Nisha was even asked' (ibid: 334).

The importance of the business very quickly (and strangely, given her sustained passion for it) wanes for Nisha as her pregnancy progresses: 'Strange how distant she felt from it. Her workshop was a dream away; with the baby kicking inside her, she felt no regret, no sadness, only faint nostalgia mediated through the immensity of her belly' (ibid: 335). Everyone's joy is doubled when it is discovered that she is carrying twins, and when they are born, 'One girl, one boy', 'Her duty was over – God had been kind' (ibid: 336). The novel ends with a scene of apparently idyllic completion:

> Nisha sat in front of the havan, and through the smoke gazed at her tiny babies... Nisha clutched her daughter tightly to her breast. Her milk began to spurt and stain her blouse. She quickly adjusted her palla and looked up. Surrounding her were friends, relatives, husband, babies. All mine, she thought, all mine.
>
> (ibid: 337)

The erasure of Nisha's agency in this novel begins at the moment of her violation and continues throughout the book, with the one exception of its description of her involvement in business. She is a character remarkable for her passivity and often for her pathos, whose only source and expression of strength is ultimately negated. Fulfilment, however, appears eventually to be found in the very structures that have repressed her and denied her any self-expression. Nisha becomes the epitome of 'Mother India', presiding benevolently over the family which she both engenders and sustains. By using her to stand for such harmony, the narrative silences Nisha's own desires and autonomy and locates her subjecthood in her role as daughter, sister, cousin, and mother.

Fourthly and finally, certain contemporary narratives of rape display a tendency to construct women's bodies as 'sites of risk' through a number of means that have negative implications for women from a feminist point of view, not least among which is the laying of responsibility for sexual assault upon the woman and the consequent reinforcement of an ideology of respectable, domesticised womanhood. This is particularly relevant in the case of representations of rape in media such as *India Today*, while imaginative literature by Indian women can sometimes in fact provide an important contrast to these discourses in this respect, as I will show.

As we have seen, the images that form part of *India Today*'s articles on rape emphasise the dangers that lurk in public spaces. The written text of the articles provide a similar focus on 'stranger danger' and the perils faced by unaccompanied women in urban spaces. Several articles in the newsmagazine describe incidents of rape in moving vehicles and emphasise the danger of urban spaces such as streets and parking lots (3/11/2003), and the risks of rape 'in broad daylight' (16/12/2002). One article expresses the dangers of public space thus: 'For women across India, fear is a constant companion and rape is the stranger they may have to confront at every corner, on any road, in any public place, at any hour' (30/5/2005). Again and again, it is repeated that women put themselves in danger of rape when they enter public spaces, especially when unaccompanied, 'or with men who are not their fathers, husbands or sons' (ibid.).

The effect of such discourses is to reinscribe the notion of 'private' or domestic spaces as feminine and 'public' ones as masculine. The editorial in one of the special issues on rape makes this explicit with its suggestion that 'While women have adjusted to the demands of working in *male spaces*, the reverse adjustment has not been as smooth' (9/11/2002, my emphasis). As I discussed in a previous chapter, feminist studies have shown the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, in accordance with a rationale of their need for protection, to be fundamental in the perpetuation of their subordination under patriarchal systems of control. While the practices of purdah and associated spaces of the zenana or haveli can by no means be considered wholly oppressive to women, they do provide an extreme example of the kinds of isolation and control of women that can be enacted on the premise of safeguarding their sexuality. The discourses of *India Today* reinforce and refigure such categorisation of space as 'masculine' and 'feminine' based upon similar aims of preventing women's violation. The importance of protection is made clear: 'As women transcend boundaries given to them by generations before them, they lose the protective umbrella of the family: they become anonymous' (30/5/2005).

These implications are strengthened by the narratives' subtle insistence on the respectability of the rape victims whose stories they tell. These women are almost always discursively positioned according to professional, social or familial structures – named as 'college student', 'widow', 'schoolteacher', 'nurse', and so on. As Weaver et al point out 'Such labels serve to establish for the reader a female victim's discursive connection to gendered roles and behaviours which may be regarded as being closely aligned with the (culturally sanctioned) feminised and domesticised private sphere' (2000: 179).

Several novels by Indian women counter these discourses in at least one important way, by drawing attention to the dangers of sexual violence in the 'safe' spaces of the home and in that most intimate of spaces, the marital bed. Several of Shashi Deshpande's novels, two of which I discuss in the next section, are exemplary in this regard. Other novels also discussed in this chapter, such as those of Anjana Appachana and Manju Kapur, also foreground sexual violence and violation within the family. Without denying the realities of sexual harassment and assault in public spaces, these novels expose and emphasise the otherwise largely hidden violences that are enacted in private. In the same way as they 'normalise' men who rape, they refuse the division between public and private spaces along imagined lines of safety.

A further implication of the discourses within *India Today*, and evident also in women-centred narratives, is that not only is the female body at risk by virtue of being in public spaces, it is at risk simply by definition of being a female body – the potential for sexual violence is 'a core component of their *being female*' (Weaver et al 2000: 182, authors' emphasis). Because in *India Today* this suggestion is coupled with the implication that the 'inner' spaces of home are safe(r), greater weight is lent here to the requirement of protection and the inscription of space as accordingly gendered. When not in the supposedly safe spaces of home, it is suggested, women need to constantly police both their own bodies and their surroundings in order to minimise the chances that they will be raped.

India Today explicitly denounces notions that women are responsible for rape because of the clothes they wear, the spaces they occupy, the company they keep or the way they conduct themselves. Implicitly, however, the blame for rape is placed in significant measure upon women who do not minimise their risk. As Weaver et al argue: 'in relation to crimes of sexual violence which occur in public environments, notions of risk are discursively very closely associated with, if not inseparable from, notions of "provocation"' (2000: 172). Discourses of women's risk thus run parallel to those of

women's responsibility for the minimisation of that risk. This can be seen clearly in a cover article on rape where a list of 'do's and don'ts' for 'attacking rape' is printed, structurally emphasised by appearing in bold type with the addition of colour and by being placed in a text box, techniques which lift it out of the normal flow of the article and focus the reader's attention onto it. The list outlines strategies for avoiding or combating stranger violence, all of which position the potential female victim as primarily responsible for avoiding rape.

ATTACKING RAPE

The do's...	...and don'ts
Enrol for self-defence lessons.	Don't talk to strangers.
Always carry a Swiss knife, pepper spray or sockful of coins that can be used as a weapon.	Avoid travelling alone as much as possible.
Women are entitled to legal counsel at a police station. So while lodging a report, insist on a legal representative.	Don't be distracted while travelling alone as women caught unawares are more vulnerable.
If there is a case of assault, molestation or rape, insist on examination by a woman doctor and also on a copy of the FIR and medical report.	Don't surrender to unreasonable demands even if they come from lawmakers or law-enforcers.
While travelling late at night, look out for suspicious people.	As much as possible, avoid giving a perception that you are alone and unprotected.
Cultivate a support group that will look out for you and keep helpline numbers handy.	While you should be cautious, don't live in fear.
If you are out alone with a man, inform the support group.	In case of an assault, fight, struggle and scream for help but not at the cost of your life.

Table 7.1 'Attacking Rape'

The blurring that Weaver et al identify between risk and provocation is evident in this example. If a woman does not carry a weapon, is not vigilant, travels alone or surrenders to 'unreasonable demands' – if she maximises her risk by *not* following this advice rather than minimising her risk by adhering to it, to what extent can it be said that she is in fact to blame for being raped? These discourses that suggest that women can minimise their risk of rape also imply that they can maximise it, effecting subtle shifts in blame from perpetrator to victim.

For these reasons, Tulloch and Tulloch advocate a shift from a risk discourse to a rights discourse. As they put it, 'A body at risk is a person with rights' (2003: 125). While public (and private) discourses of risk can heighten fear and perpetuate the exclusion of women from public spaces, a focus on rights can provide greater impetus

for positive action. In addition, where a discourse of risk constructs as more 'worthy' those who minimised their risk and thus became victims despite doing all the 'right' things, a discourse of rights refuses these implicit value judgements against women who experience sexual violence (ibid: 123).

The texts I have discussed in this section systematically erase the agency of violated women and thereby write them out of narratives of modernity that are underpinned by ideals of individual autonomy and action. This pervasive discursive configuration of female victims of sexual violence as multiply violated and effaced as subjects is evident even in contemporary rape narratives that claim or appear to be produced in accordance with feminist sensibilities. The next section examines two texts that may offer some kind of corrective to these tendencies, opening up ways in which narratives of violated women may be written and read such that the agency of those women is discursively restored rather than denied.

Writing Women In: Counter-discourses of Violation

In this final section I explore two novels by Shashi Deshpande: *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, and *The Binding Vine*.

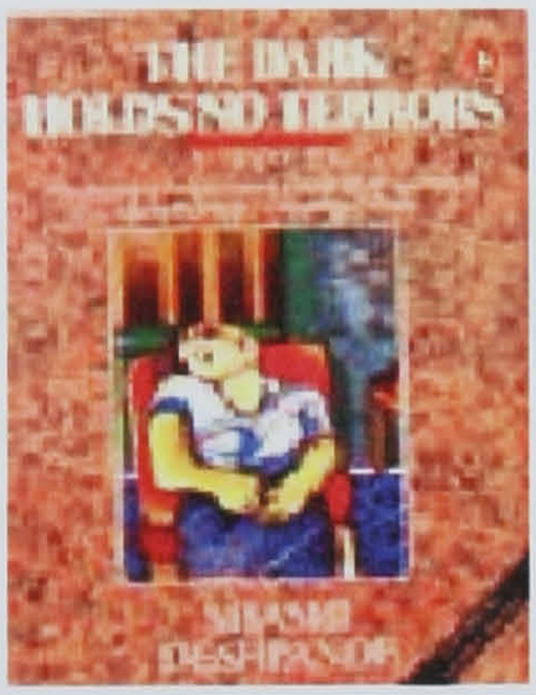

Fig. 7.9 The Dark Holds no Terrors

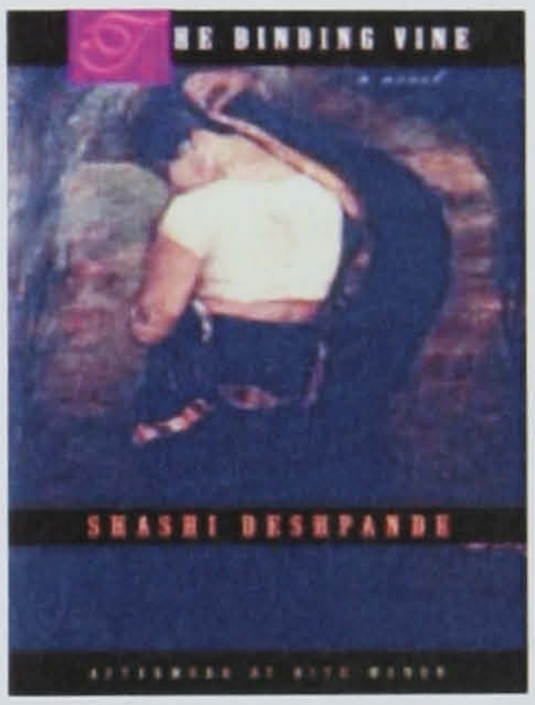

Fig. 7.10 The Binding Vine

These two texts provide a very different perspective on the violation of the female body to the majority of those discussed above, employing both a feminist thematics and structural techniques that subvert the patriarchal and systematically Othering discourses of the previous sources. I therefore devote this final substantive section of the chapter to exploring the ways in which these narratives open up spaces for the reader to engage with the violated female body in a more empathetic and ethical way than is offered by many other texts.

The Dark Holds no Terrors tells the story of Sarita, who leaves her family (her husband and two children) to return for a time to her natal home, to escape her husband's nightly attacks on her body. As the novel progresses, shifting between the past and the present, we learn that Manohar was a bright young poet when Sarita met and married

him, that his career has been stagnant while hers as a doctor has flourished, and that out of the resultant frustration and resentment he has begun attacking her viciously at night – biting, strangling, and raping her – while in the morning remaining entirely unaware of this nocturnal abuse. We learn too that Sarita's story is of her recovery from a dual violation; through flashbacks to her childhood we learn that growing up, she had continually been emotionally violated by her mother, who blamed her for her brother's death: '*You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?*' (Deshpande 1980: 191).

The Dark Holds no Terrors begins with a short (two-page), italicised prologue relating the details of what the reader later comes to realise is Sarita's first experience of marital rape. The first sentences describe both the violation and the narrative itself: 'The beginning was abrupt. There had been no preparation for it. There were no preliminaries either' (Deshpande 1980: 11). This is as true of the act of rape as it is of the text the reader has just picked up. The narrative thus mimics through its structure the events it describes, in much the same way as did *Home*, but the difference here is that through the employment of this structural technique in this case, the reader is positioned to identify not with the perpetrator of rape but with the victim. The narrative does not echo or build sexual tension as the rapist might experience it, but reveals the sudden horror as the victim would. As Sunder Rajan explains with reference to a Tamil short story, 'the position of the rape scene at the beginning pre-empts expectation of its late(r) occurrence. Not only is the scene of rape diminished by this positioning but it is also granted a more purely functional purpose in the narrative economy, and narrative interest becomes displaced upon what follows' (1993: 73).

What follows in this narrative is the gradual unfolding of Sarita's life up to the present, and what characterises her present state is her inability to speak of her violation. The narrative thus reaches a climax not when it describes her violation, but when it describes *her description* of her violation. In this way the focus of the novel is Sarita and the way in which she takes control of what has happened to her and defines herself as a subject in her own right rather than as an object to be abused and negated. The telling of her secret, to her father when he asks her why she has not responded to her husband's letters during this period that she has spent at her natal home, does not come easily. The narrative builds the tension in this scene as skilfully as it defused it in its pre-emptive depiction of the rape at the start. A chapter ends with her father asking her about her refusal to correspond with her husband:

> ... 'What is it, Saru?'
>
> 'Shall I tell you?'

It was a challenge. You've always avoided things... Can you now take this from a daughter you thought you'd got rid of?

'Yes, tell me. What's wrong? Is something wrong between you and your husband?'

'Something? No, everything.'

And now she could feel a withdrawal in him. He didn't want to go on. He wanted to leave it at that.

But he surprised her by saying, 'What is it, Saru? Why don't you tell me what it is.'

(Deshpande 1980: 198)

The break between this chapter and the next serves as a kind of cliff-hanger, the white space at the bottom of the page is a brief hiatus in which the narrative tension is intensified before Sarita begins to articulate her violation. The hesitations in that articulation, and her father's need for her to spell it out, sustain and deepen that intensity:

> 'He's cruel to me... in bed.'
>
> The words came out with reluctance, like a child being forced to betray a friend.
>
> The man waited for her to go on but she did not.
>
> 'You'll have to tell me plainly, Saru,' he said humbly, almost apologetically. 'I don't know much about these things. I don't understand, either.'

(ibid: 200)

Sarita relates the details to her father, difficult though it is for her to speak them, and for him to hear them. The tension that the narrative creates is Sarita's tension, the build-up to her emotional/ psychological release rather than her rapist's sexual one. When he has heard it all, her father offers advice, suggesting they get treatment:

> 'But you can't go on like this, Saru.'
>
> 'What can I do?'
>
> Her helplessness astonished him.
>
> 'Surely you don't mean that?'
>
> 'Why not? Maybe I deserve it after all. Look what I've done to him. Look what I did to Dhruva. And to my mother. Perhaps if I go on suffering...'

(ibid: 204)

The reader is aware now that the novel is nearly finished, as very few pages remain, and it seems as if Sarita will be left as the passive victim of her multiple violations. But the text explodes this expectation in its last pages. When Madhav, the lodger, returns from a trip home to sort out his own family dilemma, he says to Sarita's father: 'I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life, after all', and his words spark something in Sarita. 'It's my life. It's my life. Four words forming a sentence. Go on saying them

and they become meaningless, a jumble of sounds, a collection of letters. And yet, they would not leave her alone' (ibid: 208). The final climactic pages of the novel focus on Sarita's self-realisation. Accepting the roles that have damaged her, she also realises herself as something more: 'The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept those selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more' (ibid: 220).

Accepting that she must face up to the violated 'selves' that are part of her, Sarita also makes a definite and conscious choice about which will take precedence. The arrival of a child at the door as she is waiting for her husband to arrive for what must be a painful confrontation, makes things clear in her mind as in the reader's. The child gasps, 'Come quick, Sarumavshi. Oh, come quick. Our Sunita... she's having fits and mother says...' (ibid: 221). In this moment Sarita makes the choice to be a doctor, a role that she created for herself through hard work and passion rather than one that eats away at her sense of self. Leaving instructions for her husband to be told to wait if he arrives during her absence, she leaves the house to attend to Sunita. The novel finishes, open-ended but with Sarita positioned firmly in this role:

> And now, there were no thoughts in her, except those of the child she was going to help.
>
> Convulsions...?
>
> That could mean...?
>
> Her mind ranged over all the possibilities.
>
> (ibid: 221-222)

In *The Binding Vine*, it is not the protagonist, Urmila, who experiences rape, but it is through her that the reader is introduced to her mother-in-law, Mira, who suffered regular sexual violence from her husband, and Kalpana, a young woman whose mother Urmila meets at the hospital where Kalpana is brought after she is attacked and raped. Mira died after the birth of her second child and both Urmila and the reader get to know her through the journals and poems she wrote during her marriage. Similarly 'once removed', Kalpana's story is really the story of her mother, Shakuntala, or Shakutai (the combination of an affectionate diminution of the name, and the respectful suffix 'tai' meaning 'elder sister'), and the public exposure and circulation of what has happened to her. Through the telling of these stories, the narrative weaves together its themes of violation, silence and speaking.

Similarly to *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, this novel engineers the climax of its narrative not around the act of rape but the exposure of it, subverting in the process the kinds of

rape narratives that themselves again violate, through silencing or objectifying, the victim. The text repeatedly sets up patriarchal framings of rape, only to dismantle them and construct in their place alternative ways of reading female violation. It thus creates and sustains a tension between the necessary exposure of the truths of violation, and the voyeuristic desire of those who might fetishise it.

In a scene early in the novel, several family members – adults and children – are watching an old movie. The narrator sketches out the plot as it progresses: 'The lovers' idyll is rudely disturbed by the villain who desires the heroine as well. He tries to take advantage of her when she is alone, but the hero comes there just in time'. Later however, 'The heroine, decoyed by a message she thinks is from the hero, is all alone with the villain in a ruined temple. He stands, arms akimbo, staring at the girl, a lustful smile on his face. The girl's anger dissolves into terror. A quality of uneasiness fills the room. Suddenly I wonder, should we let the children watch this? Vanaa gets the same thought. "Shall we switch it off?"' Someone responds: 'Don't worry, they'll have done all the censoring necessary', and indeed at the crucial moment, as the villain approaches the girl and her mouth 'opens in a scream', the scene is cut.

> 'Thank God! The censors never fail us, do they?'
>
> 'What happened, mummy? What did he do?'
>
> 'He hit her'.
>
> Priti laughs. Vanaa makes a face at her. 'You're telling lies,' Mandira charges her. 'I know what happened.'
>
> 'Keep it to yourself,' Vanaa says wryly.
>
> (Deshpande 1992: 35)

The narrative's self-consciousness in erasing the scene of rape at this point, and the danger of that kind of erasure, is exposed later through its deliberate focus on Kalpana's rape. The details of Kalpana's injuries, and the horror of them, are foregrounded in such a way as to refuse the reader (and the police who want to record the incident as an accident rather than a rape) any escape from the realities of violent rape: 'You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms... And there were huge contusions on her thighs... And her lips – bitten and chewed. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks. The man laughed at that, he had the sense to give in. Okay, he said, she was raped. But publicising it isn't going to do anyone any good' (ibid: 88-89). Urmila's mind, too, cannot escape the images of Kalpana that have gripped it: 'I am thinking of the girl who has the marks of a man's hands on her arms, of his knees on her thighs, and of his teeth, oh my God, of his teeth on her lips' (ibid: 89).

Aware of the potential of such detailed and repetitive focus on the girl's body to enact further violation, the text immediately points out this danger: 'There is a very ugly sense of being a voyeur; this girl is not to be stared at' (ibid). The issues of whether to 'look at' or to 'look away' are raised again later, when Urmila engineers the publication of Kalpana's story in the newspapers with both positive and negative results. Arguing with Vanaa about whether she should have publicised the story thus, Urmila asks 'Was it fair for her to be raped that way? Imagine what that girl has gone through...' and Vanaa says 'That's not the point, let's not speak of that now'. In anger Urmila responds, 'No, of course not, it's so ugly, let's all look the other way, it's none of our business anyway' (ibid: 171).

Not just looking and not looking, then, but also one's *reasons* for looking, highlighted in Kalpana's story, are paralleled and developed in the story of Mira's writings. Priti wants to use these to make a film of Mira's life: 'Let's make a movie on Mira, let's recreate her life' (ibid: 38). Urmila refuses to give her the papers or to write the script herself, protesting:

> 'But Priti, she's Kishore's mother.'
>
> And she said, 'Do you have to get bogged down in the personal? Don't you understand, she's not just herself, she's a symbol. We need symbols to focus attention on the things the symbols stand for...'
>
> She's not a symbol, she's Mira...
>
> 'Would you use your own mother's life?' I asked Priti.
>
> And she said, 'Yes. One has got to be objective; one has to distance oneself.'

Refusing to objectify either Kalpana or Mira, yet insisting on making visible the victims of rape, *The Binding Vine* thus refuses to collude with patriarchal discourses that seem to see only two ways of dealing with violated women – erasure or objectification. The text insists too on the rejection of the notion that women are somehow to blame for their own violation. At one point Shakutai expresses to Urmila her belief that Kalpana, through wearing makeup and going out in public, brought her rape upon herself:

> 'You should have seen her walking out, head in the air, caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila, all her fault...'.
>
> 'Shakutai, for God's sake, stop this, stop blaming her. Why do you blame her, how is it her fault?'
>
> She looks at me in amazement. 'Whose is it then? We're all disgraced because of her.'
>
> 'She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It's not her fault, no, not her fault at all.'
>
> ...

> 'Whose fault is it then? Whom do I blame?'
>
> 'The man, the man who did this to her. Don't you see, can't you see he's the wrongdoer?'
>
> (ibid: 147-148)

One of the most climactic points of the novel comes at the revelation of the identify of Kalpana's attacker. It was her uncle, the husband of her mother's beloved sister, who attacked her so violently. By grounding the realities of rape within 'safe', domestic structures, both this novel and *The Dark Holds no Terrors* normalise such violation in a way that offers productive ways of understanding it, as I discussed earlier. Exposing its roots in everyday patriarchal patterns of behaviour, these novels articulate rape as the expression of power rather than desire, thus refusing yet another inscription of female violation that ignores the real underpinnings of its perpetration.

Conclusion

Discursive performances of violated female bodies in *India Today* and contemporary women's narratives offer a picture of Indian feminine modernity that is strikingly different to the narratives of transgression and consumption in the same texts. These narratives of violation must be read against the context of the objectification and instrumentalisation of women that is pervasive in various media and forms of public and private discourse, and in which both my empirical sources are themselves unavoidably implicated. The power structures that determine and enable such discursive violations also underpin acts of physical violation perpetrated by men against women, and care should therefore be taken in discussions particularly of sexual attacks against women not to undermine or diminish the violative power of discourse.

I have sought here to read discourses of female bodily violation with particular attention to the absences and marginalisations enacted by the texts in question both through their thematics and their narrative structure. As a result, the analyses conducted in this chapter of a range of texts demonstrate some of the ways in which violated Indian women are positioned by dominant public discourses as being outside of modernity. Both the perpetrators and the victims of violation are implicated in these exclusions. Discourses of rape, to take the most prominent example of violation, often erase or implicitly absolve or excuse the rapist through discursive erasure of his crime and even his presence, through demonising him and thereby rendering him alien to the everyday normality that is modernity, or normalising his actions such that he is rendered helpless against his ostensibly natural sexual desires. In this way the patriarchal social

structures that make the sexual violation of women unremarkable and indeed inevitable, remain unacknowledged and unaddressed by these discourses.

Similarly, the violated woman in these public discourses is placed outside of the processes of modern individualisation through the systematic discursive erasure of her agency. As a passive, helpless figure, the violated woman is also often constructed as the Other of the reader, who is positioned by the text in such a way as to share the vision and sensations of the attacker, who takes the more active role. Furthermore, the objectification and instrumentalisation of the violated woman as symbolic of the nation, of all women, or all oppressed people, is repeatedly enacted by these discourses. Even more problematically, responsibility is often implicitly placed upon the woman for her own violation through an insistence on the riskiness of the female body.

All these discursive processes serve to re-enact violence against the body of the already violated woman, revealing both the difficulty and the importance of a feminist re-reading and re-working of the patriarchal structures of language and narrative. Few narratives from those of *India Today* or contemporary Indian women's writing do engage in such critical re-imagining of how to read and write women's violation. The handful that are thus engaged, however, such as some of Shashi Deshpande's novels, are valuable in pointing the way to a narrative ethics that is acutely sensitive to the potentially progressive politics of agency that surround the violated female body. Such texts offer a new way of reading modernity that does not exclude violated bodies but acknowledges and articulates their individualisation and the value of their agency.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Emerging from the rapidly and dramatically changing landscapes that make up contemporary urban India, the discursive performances of embodied Indian womanhood in *India Today* and contemporary narratives by Indian women unsettle numerous dominant assumptions and paradigms of modernity. Reading the latter through the represented body of the new Indian woman, it becomes clear that understanding it simply as a period of time, as a set of anonymous processes, or as necessarily public activity, can severely limit an appreciation of how modernity comes to be made meaningful in everyday contexts and on scales from the individual to the global. Rather, conceptualising modernity as centred upon individualisation, personal agency, or ways of being and becoming, enables both the recognition of its multiple expressions and manifestations, and the awareness of its necessarily dynamic nature. This understanding of modernity does not therefore seek to encapsulate all that modernity is, but rather to draw out one of its most definitive characteristics and begin to plumb its depths.

The discursive production of modern Indian womanhood is founded to a large degree upon the female body. To say this is not also to reinscribe a Cartesian paradigm of body and mind by arguing that the active mind inscribes meaning upon the body as a static and passive entity, but rather to suggest that the body is best understood as a dynamic process of becoming. The body becomes meaningful through its constant engagements with other bodies and with ideas, taking shape particularly through reiterative discursive processes that are in a very real sense constitutive of it. A reading of what it means to be modern in an embodied sense should therefore not reduce the body to its physical surfaces but seek rather to conceptualise the body as a social and cultural product that is engaged in constant processes of transformation. The articulation of this notion in my thesis draws upon Judith Butler's (1993) theorisation of discursive performativity, or the means by which the body is produced as meaningful through everyday discourse.

Framed by these conceptualisations of both modernity and the body as active processes of being, a reading of modern Indian womanhood illuminates certain important continuities that are seldom captured in gender-blind, often implicitly masculinist, theorisations and analyses of modernity. One of the most important among these is the evolutionary link between tradition and modernity. These ideological categories are more often constructed as oppositional than as allied, and are typically mapped respectively onto understandings of women's oppression and liberation as well as onto particular narratives of private and public geographies, and passive and active identities. Discursive constructions of the new Indian woman, however, highlight some of the key ways in which principles of both tradition and modernity are engaged with and integrated in discursive practices of becoming modern in the realm of the everyday. The categories of tradition and modernity are both made meaningful through action, through both discursive and physical practices. Reading their production through the dynamics of discursively performed womanhood therefore helps to avoid a deterministic view of either. It becomes clear that neither is simply emancipatory or oppressive for women, but that their politics turn on the innumerable ways in which each is enacted and performed as everyday practices.

From my discussions of the sexually transgressive new Indian woman and the consuming new Indian woman, for example, it is clear that explicitly and definitively modern Indian womanhood is discursively produced according to fundamental principles of tradition. These include religious ritual and enlightenment, national and cultural symbolism and iconography, and the reinscription of roles and spaces according to specific social structures of gender and class. Moreover, it is by no means clear that such reinscription of tradition and the institution of 'new yet traditional' (2006: 260) practices and structures of tradition are uniformly oppressive to women. Domestic spaces may be identified as traditionally feminine, but this does not necessarily diminish their potential as sites of empowerment for women. This is demonstrated in the stories of Saroj, Nagaratna's mother in *The Chosen* who runs a successful business from her home; Shoba, who in *Monsoon Diary* uses her cooking to realise her dreams of studying in America; and Margaret in *Ladies' Coupé*, who fights against her bullying husband by feeding him until he can no longer tyrannise her or anyone else.

Reading modernity through narratives of modern womanhood also problematises any easy association of modernity with progress, liberation and autonomy, and foregrounds instead some of the exclusions and marginalisations enacted by dominant discourses. Discursive performances of modern Indian womanhood illuminate the ways in which modernity both perpetrates and depends upon the occlusion and exclusion of particular

individuals and groups of people, erasing particular forms of agency while validating and celebrating others according to specific ideological agendas. What the discourses in question do *not* say has therefore been considered in this thesis to be as important as what they do.

In their construction of feminine modernities or modern womanhood, both *India Today* and contemporary women's narratives clearly delineate some of the boundaries of the modern. As Judith Butler puts it, it is 'as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as it [is] to think about how and to what end bodies are *not* constructed and, further, to ask after how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary "outside", if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter' (1993: 16). An attentiveness to the borders of modernity as it is produced by these forms of public discourse thus demands that we read not just for what is present, but also and especially for the absences and exclusions of the text. This is illustrated most clearly in chapter seven, where my reading of violated female bodies shows the spaces allowed for such bodies to exercise agency as modern to be strictly, although often implicitly, circumscribed.

My emphasis on analytical attention to both the inclusions and exclusions of the text is not meant to suggest that the story that I have told in this thesis of the constructions of modernity in *India Today* and women's narratives has been an exhaustive one even within the limitations of these two bodies of discourse. Rather, it seeks to emphasise the importance of recognising the multiplicity and multi-dimensionality of such stories and of paying attention to the specificities of each. Unavoidably however, and as with any research project, there are logistical limitations both to the approach that I have taken and the amount of empirical ground that this thesis could cover. Thematically, many more connections between modernity, India and womanhood exist and are relevant to the research undertaken here, and those that have been explored are easily rich enough to have lent themselves to an examination of greater depth and breadth. Similarly, an ideal project would have seen the inclusion in this analysis of a larger number of sources of Indian public discourse, perhaps adding cinematic or official political narratives to the fictional, autobiographical and journalistic ones explored here. Private discourse such as conversation would undoubtedly also have opened a new and exciting window on the ways in which modern womanhood comes to be meaningful in contemporary India. All of these issues and sources would merit their own thesis-length studies, however, and may serve as avenues for future research projects into Indian modernities, a potentiality that emphasises the multiplicity even of modernity that is thus explicitly contextualised.

Of course, the selections that I have made from among the many sources that could have been chosen, inevitably demonstrate certain assumptions that I have made in accordance with my own political views. My choices were informed, however, by the opinions and insights of my interviewees in Bangalore, by my own observations of modern India, and by both theoretical and empirical writings on modernity and India. Drawing on these bodies of knowledge, I chose from my empirical sources three themes that seem to be among the most significant in crystallising the connections between modernity and contemporary embodied Indian womanhood, highlighting both the spaces and the boundaries mapped by those connections as well as suggesting what or who might lie beyond them. Throughout the processes of selection and analysis I have tried to maintain a keen self-reflexivity and transparency, aware that my own experiences and biases mean that this research, like any other, is situated and partial.

The lens through which I have chosen to read modernity, the discursively performed female body, has been productive in illuminating the themes dealt with here but has also revealed its own limitations. Most obviously perhaps, reading the global phenomenon of modernity through the intimate scale of the gender- and culture-specific body disallows a big-picture approach within the confines of the Ph.D. thesis. That is to say that although I offer suggestions of how such global modernity may be affected by this carefully contextualised reading, I do not myself approach the question of modernity on any macro-scale here. This is done in conscious affirmation of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's assertion that 'the particular is often universally significant' (2002: 501), and is not to 'argue against all forms of generalization' or to privilege 'the local over the systemic, difference over commonalities, or the discursive over the material' (ibid.). Rather, it is to emphasise in each case the illuminative power of the former over the latter, and to demonstrate that power through grounded analysis of the specific.

This thesis is an acknowledgement that no single work can present the big picture; it does however seek to contribute to the re-drawing of the universal, helping to produce a big picture of modernity that is significantly different to the one that is dominant in contemporary social theory. It suggests moreover that the changes needed in this research field can only finally be engendered through work that is thus explicitly situated within the specific contexts of modernity's global heterogeneity. The methodological interdisciplinarity of this thesis is an integral part of this contention, suggesting that the most fruitful explorations of modernity are those which are attentive not only to the culture- and gender-specific ways in we become modern, but also to the

ways in which diverse methodologies may open up new ways of asking these questions.

As part of a new big picture (or perhaps more accurately a 'big mosaic') of what it means to be modern, this thesis points to, enters into, and expands some of the spaces that are being opened in contemporary social theory for deeper exploration into what modernity might mean. It highlights the fact that ways of being modern are neither unified nor necessarily convergent, but rather are determined according to numerous social factors among which culture and gender should be regarded as pivotal (although they are of course inseparable from other factors such as class, race, nation, and sexuality) and are available to be read through multiple lenses. I do not therefore simply enter into one or both of the debates on a) alternative or non-Western modernities and b) gendered modernities, but insist on the need for each set of questions to actively engage with the other in grounded research that is not bound by discipline, and demonstrate one way in which such an engagement may proceed.

A further specific distinction of this thesis is its positioning of this new and multi-faceted approach to the question of modernity within the realm of the discursively performed body, including in its analytical scope not only the written content of the text but also its narrative structure, formatting and illustrations, as well as the absences of the text. The emphasis I place on reading discourse as itself a socially and politically significant performance of the body represents a serious consideration of 'the possibility that representations are the world' (Smith 2005) rather than mere signifiers pointing to a somehow more genuine reality lying beyond themselves. This acknowledgement of public discourse as itself directly constitutive of the modern body enables the illumination of some of the contradictions, ambivalences, oppressions and violations of modernity that are less visible in mainstream accounts of social research, while also offering new ways to read some of the varied and perhaps unexpected ways in which modern agency may be manifested. In its emphasis on the dynamisms of both modernity and the body, this thesis rejects the common-sense and academically dominant paradigm of modernity as rupture and offers instead a conceptualisation of its evolutionary and transformative nature, not divorced from but in constant dialogue with tradition in everyday discursive practice. In so doing this research raises new questions about how the specific inclusions and exclusions of modernity may be enacted and suggests alternative ways to read and write the narratives of what it means to be a modern subject.

There are clear resonances here with emerging research into the connections between the female body and modernity (Ardis and Lewis 2003; Hodgson 2001), and indeed a substantial amount of such work has been conducted within the context of the Indian subcontinent and the South Asian diaspora (Munshi 2001; Puri 1999; Ruby 2004, 2006; Thapan 2004). The intersections between womanhood and modernity are evidently of increasing concern to South Asian feminists, and my research both draws on this growing field and pushes its boundaries to suggest that it is modernity itself that requires reconceptualisation in such a way that the embodied modernity of South Asian women may be more fully recognised.

A key part of the feminist task is of course to read with a sensitive eye those narratives that structure our societies, a category in which all the texts that constitute my empirical data are included. Another part of that task, however, is to shed new light by dismantling and reworking those narratives that are exclusionary or damaging, and in so doing to construct entirely new narratives that capture the ways in which particular social realities are determined by multiple factors. Therefore, as itself a narrative of how modernity comes to be defined according to gender, and how the female body comes to be made meaningful as a modern body, this thesis is part of a larger feminist project that seeks to recover women's realities from the margins of the narratives of both everyday public discourse and social research. Moreover, it aims to contribute to the rewriting of those very narratives, not as another grand narrative but as multiple and partial accounts that are attentive to the micropolitics of social life. Therefore, the explicitly situated story told here of some of the ways in which embodied Indian womanhood is discursively performed seeks to add a chapter to a new conceptual narrative of what modernity might mean for us all in the twenty-first century.

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Appendix 1: Details of Interviews

Interviewee/s: Manager of LBP Publishers and Distributors, Bangalore
Date and Time: 9 February 2005, 11.00
Location: Manager's office, LBP
Recorded: No (interviewee declined)

Interviewee/s: Priya Menon, lawyer, and her mother, housewife
Date and Time: 18 February 2005, 9.30
Location: Bedroom in Priya's mother's house
Recorded: No (impromptu interview)

Interviewee/s: Manager of Premier Bookshop, Bangalore
Date and Time: 9 March 2005, 15.30
Location: Premier Bookshop
Recorded: No (interviewee declined)

Interviewee/s: Rajan, manager, and Madhu, sales assistant, both at Crossword Bookshop, Bangalore.
Date and Time: 11 March 2005, 11.00
Location: Crossword staff offices
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Shashi Deshpande, author
Date and Time: 16 March 2005, 15.30
Location: Living room of Shashi's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: M.K. Raghavendra, journalist and film critic
Date and Time: 17 May 2005, 14.00
Location: Living room of Raghavendra's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Urmila Lakshmanan, businesswoman
Date and Time: 17 March 2005, 15.00
Location: Urmila's office
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: K.R. Usha, author
Date and Time: 25 March 2005, 10.30
Location: Living room of Usha's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Mrinalini Sebastian, fellow at the Centre for the Study of Society and Culture, Bangalore
Date and Time: 29 March 2005, 10.30
Location: Garden of the Centre
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Srilata Rao Seshadri, author
Date and Time: 1 April 2005
Location: Living room of Srilatha's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Jumna Pani, publisher: Dronequill
Date and Time: 5 April 2005, 16.00
Location: Living room of Jumna's house
Recorded: No (interviewee declined)

Interviewee/s: Prasanna, teacher
Date and Time: 23 April 2005
Location: Koshy's restaurant
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Ammu Joseph, feminist activist, publisher and writer
Date and Time: 27 April 2005, 15.00
Location: Living room of Ammu's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Anuradha, poet and artist
Date and Time: 28 April 2005
Location: Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Shanta Raghavan, retired bank manager
Date and Time: 5 May 2005, 18.00
Location: Living room of Shanta's house
Recorded: Half (interviewee declined)

Interviewee/s: Kala Krishnan-Ramesh, journalist
Date and Time: 15 May 2005, 11.00
Location: Front yard of Kala's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Vaasanthi, Tamil writer
Date and Time: 20 May 2005, 9.00
Location: Living room of Vaasanthi's house
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Vandana Goswami, housewife
Date and Time: 28 May 2005, 11.00
Location: Balcony of Vandana's apartment
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: C.K. Meena, journalist and author
Date and Time: 31 May 2005, 16.00
Location: Koshy's Restaurant
Recorded: Yes

Interviewee/s: Kusum Choppra
Date and Time: May-June 2005
Location: Via email
Recorded: N/A

In the world, 'typically the domain of the male', one might therefore engage in material modernisation, but the home, which is represented by and therefore also encompasses the female, must remain pure. Chatterjee points out that:

> If we now find continuities in these social attitudes in the phase of social reforms in the nineteenth century, we are tempted to put this down as 'conservatism', a mere defence of 'traditional' norms. But this would be a mistake. The colonial situation, and the ideological response of nationalism, introduced an entirely new substance to these terms and effected their transformation... The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But it had failed to colonise the inner, essential, identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture.
>
> (ibid: 238-239)

Still following Chatterjee's argument, a more problematic issue arises around the transgressive new Indian woman. This is the question of whether the ideologies that underpin the valorisation of the women's spatial transgression as modern, are in fact substantially different from those that locate femininity in the home and are thought of as definitively traditional. According to Chatterjee, the effect on notions of womanhood of investing the inner spaces of the home with the true identity of the nation, was the production of a 'new woman', the bhadramahila or 'respectable woman', characterised by her 'womanly virtues' such as 'chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labours of love' (ibid: 247).

These attributes contrast markedly with those of the contemporary new woman, but the narratives of transgression that suggest women to be flouting these 'traditionally Indian' rules of femininity by crossing the boundaries of inner space are nonetheless inherently problematic for much the same reasons. As Chatterjee shows, the particular constructs of femininity that are being rejected in these narratives are not those of traditional womanhood but rather those of the nineteenth century 'new woman' that came into being in accordance with a nationalist agenda. The nationalist framework that underpins these ideas of womanhood can now be seen to be echoed in ideas of modern womanhood, since the new Indian woman is by definition being constructed within a nationalist framework. Not only is she less of a break from tradition than she may seem, it is not at all clear that the contemporary new Indian woman represents in fact any productive resistance to ideologies of nationhood that instrumentalise women.

I return to this relationship between woman and nation in the final section of this chapter, and to what are perhaps its most damaging implications in chapter seven, but

Appendix 2: List of Novels Cited

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Deshpande, Shashi (1980) *The Dark Holds no Terrors.* New Delhi: Penguin.

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Malladi, Amulya (2004) *Serving Crazy with Curry.* New York: Ballantine.

Mehta, Rama (1998) *Inside the Haveli.* New Delhi: Penguin.

Misra, Jaishree (2000) *Ancient Promises.* London: Penguin.

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Sidhwa, Bapsi (1991) *Cracking India.* Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed.

Usha, K.R. (2003) *The Chosen.* New Delhi: Penguin.