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Café Culture: Socio-Historical Transformations of Space, Personhood and Middle Class in Pune, India

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Café Culture

Socio-Historical Transformations of Space, Personhood and Middle Class in Pune, India

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Abstract

Café Culture is an ethnographic snapshot, taken in 2008, tracing the effects of globalisation from the perspective of young middle class urbanites in post-liberalisation Pune, India. It captures what was happening that sets this young generation apart – the first to grow up in post-liberalisation India – as a group in historical time, in relation to other life worlds in India, to 'Western' versions and as a rounded life world in itself.

In 1991 India conclusively opened its economy to the global market economy. My ethnography shows that trends following economic liberalisation in unprecedented ways spurred changes that were already underway. It facilitated not only the emergence of a commodified leisure culture in the form of cafés, targeted at and appropriated by the young urban middle class, but also the creation of new fashions, more living space, national and international employment, mobility and economic independence. These tangible changes went hand in hand with transformations in practices and moral aesthetic standards.

The young generation was challenging their parents' and wider society's values in order to negotiate who they wanted and felt they ought to be in their rapidly changing world. In their friendships, café culture activities, fashion choices, education and love lives they increasingly valued, encouraged and expected equality, freedom and the expression of individuality. However, the different chapters highlight that these trends were measured and limited by class- and generation-based practices and moral aesthetic standards which amended rather than negated older patriarchal arrangements predicated on the ideal of joint family life. The young café culture crowd was negotiating to follow their hearts, while preserving strong family bonds and inter-generational dependencies. They were thus modifying what it meant to be middle class Indians in our contemporary world of flow of people, capital, ideas, images, information and goods.

Table of Contents

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Introduction

The emergence of a commodified leisure culture in the form of cafés, targeted at and appropriated by young adults from the *middle* and *upper classes*, is a striking phenomenon in the transformation of urban life and city-scapes in India since the economic liberalisation in 1991. Economic liberalisation commonly denotes a series of reforming policies which culminated in 1991, marking India's entry into the global market economy. The influx of foreign companies, goods, people, ideas and images increased. It triggered unprecedented changes and raised the hope that India would finally draw level with other industrialised countries. The policies of economic liberalisation were accompanied by public discourses and media images, which not only attributed the rise of the *middle class* to the success of the economic reforms, but also saw the *middle class* as the main beneficiary. However, while the emergence of the *middle class* as a cultural ideal was given much attention, there was little ethnographic research exploring this class and the socio-cultural changes involved (Fernandes 2006:xvii).

So in 2008, I set out to explore how the Indian *middle class* understood and positioned itself in its rapidly changing world of Pune. Initially I faced one of the problems of doing fieldwork in a city: how to spend my day and to start fieldwork. One of my strategies was going to cafés during the day. Rather randomly, I built up a network of friends amongst the young generation frequenting cafés. They were born in the 1980s and thus between 19 and 29 years old. It was the first generation to grow up in post-liberalisation India. It soon became apparent that the cafés fulfilled a need for space away from home for these young *middle class* Puneites. They promised freedom. What was possible in the café culture deviated considerably from what was possible at home. The young adults felt they were constantly moving between two worlds in Pune, the café culture and the '*traditional*' world of their parents and grandparents. By engaging in practices that their elders and wider society disapproved of, such as *timepass*, conspicuous consumption, smoking and drinking alcohol, premarital relationships and sex, the young adults of the café

culture were challenging and asserting their independence from their parents' values. There was a strong sense in India, expressed by both the young generation and their elders, that a momentous change was happening between their generations. Certainly life is like that: every situation is fresh, with new problems and no clear solutions. Such shifts have occurred before, again and again. This thesis proposes that the Indian middle class was reinventing India as a global player in a post-Cold war world by constructing a narrative of pivotal change.

My ethnography is a snapshot that captures a moment in historical change. It shows what was happening to the young urban *middle class* in post-liberalisation India that sets them apart as a group in historical time, in relation to other life worlds in India, to 'Western' versions and as a rounded life world in itself. My ethnography describes trends following economic liberalisation which expedited, in unprecedented ways, changes that were already underway. The young generation transcended the local and domesticated the global through their use of space like the cafés and through their various activities. They were negotiating to follow their hearts while preserving strong family bonds and generational interdependencies, and to be part of the contemporary global world of flow of people, goods, capital, ideas, information and images. They thus modified their parents' ideas of what it meant to be *middle class modern Indians*. Hence I wondered: 1) In what ways do free global market economy and 'globalisation' change the way people see themselves and their world? 2) To what extent might Indian practices modify the practices of 'western' individualism implicit in Indian modernism? Of general interest is the question of the relationship between a seemingly globalising modernity and local traditions.

Modernity, Globalisation, Personhood and Autonomy

Nowadays, the ramifications of what is commonly called 'modernity' can be found increasingly all over our world: nation-states, democracy, industrialisation, global systems of communication, information and other technologies, the military, international finances and markets – to name just a few. However,

when a particular social reality or condition of living is identified with modernity, its definition becomes more problematic. Amongst the most common ideas associated with 'modernity' are space-time compression, individualisation, commodification and disenchantment (Englund/Leach 2000). Sociocultural anthropologists face two problems. On the one hand, assuming that 'modernity' is everywhere, they might be accused of ethnocentrism. Imposing external concepts from a specific cultural context, 'the west', might alienate people elsewhere and leave them no room to express their own views. On the other hand, arguing that the social reality of people elsewhere should be formulated distinctively, anthropologists might be criticised for constructing a permanent 'Other' that will never catch up. This form of creating a mirror image of 'western' categories has been labelled 'Orientalism' (Said 2004 [1978]).

> "This problem is connected with the term modernity itself: nobody wants to be excluded from a form of living or an overarching concept which is propagated by many users of the term as the only possible one in the contemporary world, which has achieved global dimensions and moved beyond local confinements, as the term 'globalization' indicates." (Werth 2002:145)

This quandary has led many anthropologists to speak of 'multiple modernities'[1] in order to stress the diversity within this universally invoked notion. However, to speak of multiple modernities might still assume to find 'local' versions of originally 'western' ideas, and potentially favours 'scientific knowledge' over 'local knowledge' (Englund/Leach 2000). Yet it also seems unreasonable to create a permanent 'Other' since that would presuppose that the 'Others' were unaware of 'modernity' or 'the west'. This is rarely the case anymore in our contemporary world of flow of people, goods, capital, ideas, information and images.

Throughout India the discourse of *modernity* is highly cultivated and in use. It is a social reality with which to be reckoned. Chakrabarty (2008 [2000]:4) argues:

> "The phenomenon of 'political modernity' – namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise – is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe." (emphasis in original)

However,

> "No concrete example of an abstract can claim to be an embodiment of the abstract alone. No country, thus, is the model to another country, though the

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[1]   Cf. Englund/ Leach 2000 for a comprehensive bibliography.

discussion of modernity that thinks in terms of 'catching up' precisely posits such models. [...] Our historical differences actually make a difference. This happens because no society is a *tabula rasa*. The universal concepts of political modernity encounter pre-existing concepts, categories, institutions, and practices through which they get translated and configured differently." (ibid.:xii)

This assumption has three consequences, Chakrabarty argues. First, it must be true for any place, including Europe or 'the west'. Therefore in the so-called 'western' world modernity has many faces as well. Secondly, the distinction between a pure, abstract universal and its local practical implementation is exaggerated and biased. Thirdly, the universal concepts of modernity cannot be pure and universal after all. They are always imbued with local history (ibid.:xii-xiii). Therefore,

"European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations [...]." (ibid.:116)

In tandem with terms like 'globalisation' and 'neoliberalism' (Rofel 2007:2), 'modernity' has come to imply a uniformity of experiences around the world. Furthermore, they are often employed to propose a "monolithic emergence of novel subjectivities" (ibid.). However, recent anthropological writings suggest that the translation process is not smooth but involves "friction" (Tsing 2005), namely the sticky, temporary nature of transnational encounters. They describe differences and similarities, unexpected strategies and social practices arising out of gaps or misunderstandings. Thus I suggest that 'modernity', like 'globalisation', is not an a priori coherent external structure within which cultural encounters occur. Rather "contingent encounters constitute and situate that which in momentary figurations we might call 'globalisation'" (Rofel 2007:25) or '(post-)modernity'. Inspired by Rofel (2007:2) writing about neoliberalism in China, this thesis argues that 'modernity' is an "ongoing experimental project". Rofel proposes that neoliberalism began in the global south where nation-states had to redefine themselves to be part of the post-Cold War order. Equally, (post)modernity would be unthinkable without the global south. Countries like India used to serve as the 'traditional opposite' of modernity. In the "light capitalism" of post- or fluid modernity capital, ideas, images and goods travel light (Bauman 2000:59). India is part of this global flow, which is exemplified by its transnational companies and its significance as home to BPOs (business

process outsourcing). Thus in today's world '(post)modernity', 'globalisation' and 'neoliberalism' should be conceived as ongoing experimental projects and tools which countries in the global south use flexibly to reinvent themselves to participate in the post-Cold War order.

The social reality, or the condition of living, is complex and manifold in any given society, in the west as well as in India. Alongside dominant values, there are bound to be alternative and even conflicting influences. Thus western life styles entail numerous alternative dimensions in addition to modernity (or postmodernity). Similarly, the social aspects in Pune involve more than can be addressed in this work alone. Hence when exploring the importance of social relations, families and friendships in Pune, it should be obvious that those relationships and their values have not disappeared in the west. Besides, to make such a point more specific settings should be compared, and 'the west' not taken as a unified point of comparison. However,

> "[...] there are general guidelines in societies which formulate general dimensions and directions in which societies move, or which organize social reality in a somewhat similar way as magnets organize pieces of iron which come into their field." (Werth 2002:144)

These organising themes are also referred to as 'ideology' or 'cultural dominant'. They are taken for granted by participants and form the distinct character of the social reality of a society.

The cultural dominant of contemporary western societies is perhaps best circumscribed as 'individualism', as used by Dumont (1986[1983]), whose work is rarely consulted in the debate about modernity. Other authors have attributed a central role to the individual in western modernity (e.g. Bauman 2000, Beck 1986, Giddens 1991). The underlying idea is that, in western societies, the human being is conceptualised as an individual, i.e. an "independent, autonomous, and thus essentially non-social moral being" (Dumont 1986:25). It is assumed that being human means to be free from the dependency on the wills of others and from "the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)" (Mahmood 2005:8). 'Freedom' has become one of the highest values of the modern era. European liberalism linked self-realisation to individual autonomy (ibid.:11), hence defining it as the

ability to realise one's 'true will' rather than tradition, custom or social coercion. Society no longer provides its members with roles, concepts, ideals, dreams, etc. as guidelines that are passed down to them. The individual is free and compelled to actively construct and shape herself. Basic questions such as what to do, how to act, who to be, whether to marry and have children or not, or one's sexuality have to be answered by the individual (Giddens 1991:70). The burden of decisions, actions, successes and failures lie with the individual alone. This autonomy forces enormous pressure and isolation on the individual.

Hand in hand with "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000) in 'western societies' went a "light capitalism" (ibid:59) or "neoliberalism" (Rofel 2007). Citizens are primarily fashioned as individuals and consumers. The world is conceived as an endless collection of possibilities and chances. One is free to become anything, and everything is a choice, except the compulsion to choose. The individual is doomed to shop for life's choices without guaranteed satisfaction or security. Happiness depends on our own competence which is never enough (Bauman 2000:74). Contemporary consumerism feeds insatiable desire rather than need. Desire links consumption to self-expression, taste and discrimination. The individual expresses herself through possessions (ibid.75). However, the ideal of the individual is just an ideal. After all,

> "In the land of the individual freedom of choice the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically *not* on the agenda." (ibid.:34, original emphasis)

Last, but not least, dependencies and inequalities are disguised by the ideology of individualism because they are considered secondary. For example, children are dependent on their parents and one spouse might depend on the other if one is without salaried work. Gender and other inequalities remain. In Germany, for instance, children of academics are five and a half times more likely to go to university than other young adults (Deutsches Studentenwerk 2008).

The cultural dominant of India has been described as "holism" (Dumont 1986), 'socio-centrism' or 'collectivism'. Contrary to 'individualism', the main value is the society as a whole and not the individual person. Entities, be it human beings or any social units, are primarily defined by their relationship with each other and

with the social whole. Generally these relationships are hierarchical in nature[2]. Thus the social whole, be it society or any social unit, subordinates human beings, who are not valued in themselves but represent in their relations and actions other social values. Thus the Indian person is primarily defined by his social context and as contributing to the social order. Giving primary importance to relationships translates into a highly socially connected self, social norms of generational reciprocity and interdependence within the family, mutual involvement and caring, and establishes social hierarchies. These hierarchies include those of age, gender, caste and class.

India is part of the global movements of goods, ideas, people and power that characterise our contemporary world. Many of the consequences of modernity can be found in India such as the nation-state, democracy, the military, market economy, industrialisation, and contemporary technology as well as the effects of globalisation produced by modern means of transport and information technology. Post-liberalisation India is said to have become a consumer society, or at least the middle class is increasingly cast as consumers. In socialist India prestige rested on access to government jobs and state resources; in economically liberalised India status lies in the accumulation of wealth in the market through jobs and commodities. A strengthened consumer culture has introduced the "imperatives of choice" (Srivastava 2007:15) into daily life in general and into family life in particular. It promises "autonomy, leisure and possessive individualism" (ibid.:274). The café culture embodied this development. It offered spaces away from home for self-expression through consumption, friendship and falling in love which augured freedom: "the freedom 'to achieve', to individual choice, to be part of the 'real' world, and, finally, to 'fulfilment'" (ibid.:153). As Rofel (2007) argues aptly for China, embracing consumer practices as status markers leads to a domestication of 'the global' even if the goal is to transcend 'the local'.

I propose that the young people of the café culture in Pune in 2008 were striving for more autonomy and asserting their independence from their elders through

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[2] This is said to apply to South Asia in general, except for some foraging societies (Alvi 2001:46, fn4).

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their various (illicit) activities, their friendships and their use of space like the cafés. They were aspiring for freedom from the control of their parents and at the same time challenging social hierarchies, such as relations between generations within the (extended) family, as well as gender and caste hierarchies. Above all, they were striving for more autonomy with respect to their own life, independent of parents, customs and traditions. Embracing consumer practices as status markers, they were transcending the local while domesticating the global. Desiring to express themselves utilising consumerist opportunities, these young adults underwent a process of individuation.

However, this did not mean that the young Puneites' decisions and actions necessarily and always went against their parents' wills, customs and traditions, nor did it mean that indeed they were independent. Most of them still lived at home, received money from their parents, were accountable to them and sought their advice and approval regarding career choices and marriage partners. Some of their decisions and practices contradicted their rhetoric of freedom, while others represented compromises with their parents or social norms. A strong orientation towards family and friendship groups suggests that the person was primarily valued as a highly socially connected self. People of the *middle class* in Pune wanted and felt they ought to navigate the landscape of family, marriage and life-decision making which did not put all the burden on a single person. Close-knit family bonds and life-long mutual dependencies amongst family members were a source of pride and of 'being Indian'. Self-realisation was not pegged to individual autonomy. One can realise oneself by turning to and embracing ideals and tools outside oneself, given by society or one's community (Mahmood 2005:151). Not every life decision was a (consumer) choice. Marriage and parenthood, for example, continued to be perceived as essential aspects of 'being human'. Fulfilling social norms, one's social role or other people's expectations could be a source of content and self-realisation. Negotiating self-realisation and family obligations, the young adults of the café culture in Pune in 2008 were asserting their 'being modern', 'Indian' and 'citizens of the world'.

Hence I argue that, despite a trend towards individuation amongst the café

culture, (western) individualism has gained momentum but is not the cultural dominant in India. I am far from the first to make this argument (e.g. Busby 1997, Dumont 1986, Marriott/ Inden 1977). This does not mean that individuals as such, individuality, personal will or personal qualities and happiness are not recognised in India – as some authors seem to suggest (e.g. Mines 1994). Rather it implies that relationships and the social units they form are valued higher than the individual. Persons are conceived as socially connected moral beings. This in turn challenges western liberal notions of the person. The idea that a human being is characterised as an autonomous individual realising her own interests independent of custom, tradition and others' wills is not universal. To grant the individual the monopoly of reason sustains the feeling of superiority within western cultures based on the individual as a prime value. It leads to a perversion of individualism: a human being is defined as equal to all others and free on a physical base.

> "Thus, people who seem to lack this common physical base, and even societies where individuals are subordinated and defined with respect to other values, are effectively excluded from the common human base." (Alvi 2001:47)

Individualism, western culture and society constitute one particular form of humanity, not the only valid way of describing conditions of life (Dumont 1986:207-13). In Pune people of the *middle class* realised themselves by performing, inhabiting and experiencing social norms and roles. 'Being human' meant to be part of a social whole, such as family or friendship groups, which was valued above the individual. The western individual and the Indian person are two different versions of being human, each within their own reason. Differences between societies or cultures should not be highlighted to show who has a right over the other or to claim the monopoly of reason for one. Rather differences should be carved out in such a way that each society's specific ideas, values and its understandings of a person are recognised in their own reason.

The Indian Middle Class

> "It is the middle class's extraordinarily complex culture – with its myriad forms of competing cultural capital, its ambiguous and anxiety-inducing relationship with the capitalist market, its intricate systems of dissimulation (whereby it hides its

class privilege in everyday practice) – along with its increasingly dominant role in cultural process worldwide, that makes it an important and timely subject of anthropological inquiry." (Liechty 2003:10-11)

The recent growth and increased visibility of the Indian middle class has sparked a public debate in India as well as academic interest (including Ahmad/ Reifeld 2001, Baviskar/Ray 2011, Béteille 2001, Dwyer 2000, Favero 2005, Fernandes 2006, Gupta 2000, Joshi 2010, Mazzarella 2003, Mines 1996, Osella/Osella 2000, Srivastava 2007, Varma 1998). The debate reflects that it is a deeply complex and controversial issue to determine who exactly constitutes the middle class, and how it is internally distinguished. Estimates of its size range from around 50 to 250 million people or five to twenty-five percent of the total population (Donner 2008:56, Mawdsley 2004:84). This spectrum demonstrates the variances in conceptualising the Indian middle class. Several factors make it notoriously difficult to grasp. The definition of the middle class as a social and cultural entity has always been ambiguous, not just with regard to India. Furthermore, being middle class in India is a constant work in progress. Finally, studies exploring the Indian middle class have shown that the term is stretched to cover a startling diversity of socio-economic and cultural situations.

The Indian middle class conceives of itself as "both Everyman and elite vanguard" (Baviskar/ Ray 2011:23). It considers itself as representing all Indians and at the same time as being the pioneers of Indian modernity. Baviskar and Ray (ibid.) argue that this contradictory ideological conception allows the Indian middle class to leave its mark at home and in the world. The middle class has to negotiate 'the local' and 'the global'. It oscillates between the elite, to whom 'space does not mean anything' because they can choose where to be, and the lower classes, to whom 'space means everything' because they cannot afford to move and are hence stuck (Bauman 1998). In the post-socialist world of economic liberalisation, middle class status is achieved through the accumulation of wealth in the market through jobs and commodities. Through consumption as a status marker, the middle class transcends the local and domesticates the global. Class has become a site of contest rather than an easily definable social or economic category (Srivastava 2007). Thus the recent growth and increased visibility of the Indian middle class might reveal

contemporary Indian ideas and values, that is specifically Indian "momentary figurations we might call 'globalization'" (Rofel 2007:25) and modernity.

The Rise of the Middle Class in India

The Indian middle class did not emerge over night but its beginnings are disputed. Most historical accounts ascribe the origin of the middle class to the introduction of western-style education in colonial India with the declared intention to establish a new class of Indian administrators (e.g. Varma 1998, Ahmad/ Reifel 2001, Fernandes 2006). Others have argued that the incipient middle class was the business community that traded with the East India Company, i.e. a 'bourgeoisie' that existed prior to the arrival of the British (cf. Bayly 1983, Dwyer 2000). Recent scholarship argues that the Indian middle class was culturally invented by means of changes in the system of law, public administration and education, but structurally limited due to colonial economic control (Baviskar/Ray 2011, Chatterjee 1992, Fernandes 2006, Joshi 2010). What seemed to distinguish the colonial middle class was its dependency on the colonial state through trade, employment and education (cf. Fernandes 2006). Many have described the colonial middle class as characterised by the participation in certain projects such as the English education of men, the creation of new professions, social reform with special emphasis on the role of women, modifications of practices and values of family and marriage, religious reform, regional literature and language, struggles over dress codes, and the anti-colonial struggle (Donner 2008:55, Baviskar/Ray 2011:4).

The middle class of colonial and post-colonial times is commonly referred to as the "old" or "Nehruvian" middle class (Mazzarella 2005:2). Amongst the attributes distinguishing this class are particular values characterised by a certain attitude towards modernity.

> "It meant being open-minded and egalitarian; following the rule of law and not being swayed by private motive or particularistic agenda; being fiscally prudent and living within ones' means; and embracing science and rationality in the public sphere. It demanded setting aside the primordial loyalties of caste and kinship and opening oneself to new affinities and associations based on merit, and to identities forged in the workplace." (Baviskar/Ray 2011:5-6)

This 'old middle class' was made up of the upper rungs, but not the very top, of

the Indian society: they still had to work to earn a living (Joshi 2010:xvii). Indeed, recent scholarship argues that the Indian middle class was a product of "cultural entrepreneurship" by male upper caste Hindus and Muslims, a "project of self-fashioning" between the powerful elite and the common people (ibid.:xviii-xix, Baviskar/Ray 2011, Fernandes 2006). The middle class has eagerly protected its upper-caste privileges, promoted its own interests and thus reinforced, rather than improved, inequalities. Consequently, the middle class embraced contradictory opinions in its values and practices: reason and sentiment, change and preservation of tradition, liberty and authoritarianism, equality and hierarchy (Baviskar/Ray 2011:6).

Joshi (2010) argues that these contradictions are constitutive of the old Indian middle class. First, the middle class has never been a "monolithic entity" (ibid.:xx). Apart from regional, religious, caste and other differences, there was also a great variety of opinions amongst the middle class. In the debates about social and religious reforms, the middle class occupied both camps: conservative and liberal, reformist and revivalist, modernisers and traditionalists (ibid.:xlii). Second, the middle class from its very beginnings was involved in a discussion about its authenticity (Joshi 2010: xxvi-xxvii). On the one hand, the middle class was accused of copying 'the west'. On the other hand, it was celebrated for aspiring to be 'modern' pursuing enlightenment, freedom, progress and prosperity. Third, the contradictions constitutive of the middle class, often condemned as hypocrisy, were the results of different pulls: a) claiming to be modern and enlightened representatives of the whole country, b) distinguishing itself from lower classes (Baviskar/Ray 2011:6-7), and c) distinguishing itself from 'the west' (Fernandes 2006:xxxii). Joshi (2010:xxi) emphasises that this is not a disappointing deviation from an authentic European middle class. Rather, the notion of an authentic middle class – secular, enlightened, progressive and liberal – is a myth. As Latour (1993) argued prominently: *we have never been modern*.

These insights have led scholars to understand middle class not as a given, taken-for-granted, natural, universal, sociologically bounded category, but rather

as a discursive and performative space and ideological project (e.g. Baviskar/Ray 2011, Donner 2008, Fernandes 2006, Joshi 2010, Nisbett 2009, Srivastava 2007). Defining the Indian middle class in terms of income, occupation and education did not do justice to its diversity. Objective conditions might demarcate the number and kind of people which belong to the middle class but the people also create and transform these objective conditions. Differences in caste, religion and region mattered as much as gender and age. Therefore, it needs to be illuminated in conjunction with cultural capital and human agency, rather than characterising it exclusively in terms of objective factors.

The Post-Liberalisation Middle Class as Model Consumers?

The impression of the Indian middle class as a cultural project was fortified by trends since economic liberalisation. The politics of economic liberalisation produced an "obsessive public cultural concern" (Mazzarella 2005:1) with the category 'middle class' and its role in contemporary India. Policies of liberalisation put the middle class into the limelight. The intention was to promote the middle class – finally freed from state regulations – as consumers, in order to power economic growth. Following liberalisation popular, academic and political debates in India discussed issues such as westernisation, globalisation, modernisation, Hindu nationalism, consumerist liberalisation and the fragmentation of national politics (Mazzarella 2005). The discourse is itself a middle-class phenomenon. It tells the story of the shift from an 'old' middle class – restricted by state regulations and promoting production, saving and austerity – to a 'new' middle class[3], which embraces consumption and spending. The story was usually presented in one of two forms. Proponents of liberalisation, advertising and media images portrayed the middle class as a sizeable market with affluent consumers. Measuring the middle class, it was assumed, would give an idea of the size of the market for consumer goods and thus of India's potential for economic growth. The middle class' ability to consume was seen as

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[3]   Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) point out that India's new middle class does not correspond to what sociologists of the west usually define as the new middle class – educated technical and professional white-collar workers – as opposed to the old property-owning petty bourgeoisie.

an index of progress. The intended message read:

> "To be middle class in India today means to be no longer confined to the 'waiting room' of modernity" (Baviskar/Ray 2011:8).

In this image of proponents of liberalisation the newness of the middle class consisted in the adoption of social practices of taste and consumption that marked a new cultural standard (Fernandes 2000:89). Furthermore it suggested that the middle class was growing due to upwardly mobile segments of the Indian society entering the middle class (Fernandes 2006:xviii). Opponents of liberalisation, on the other hand, criticise the negative social and cultural effects of the new consumer culture, especially devotion to materialism and moral decay. Varma (1998) for instance provoked a national debate on the middle class' gradual abandonment of ethical and moral responsibility to the poor and to the nation. Gupta (2000) argues that the middle class never fully endorsed democratic values. Rather it advocated its own privileges and prospered on personal connections. Furthermore, he claims, members of the middle class undermine, rather than support, public institutions. These critical voices evoke the ideals attributed to the middle class to be secular, enlightened, liberal, progressive and to lead the country out of poverty and corruption.

These two different reactions to economic liberalisation reflect both the middle class' internal diversity, as well as its ambiguous relationship with free market economy. Proponents and critics alike take part in the discursive production of the middle class in India, in which the new middle class becomes a sign of a new national model of development and of a new cultural standard (Fernandes 2000:91). In this historical moment the idea of the middle class took on new meanings. The middle class was conceptualised as a cultural ideal symbolising and claiming the benefits of liberalisation (Fernandes 2006).

> "To be a part of the middle class is to express oneself through consumption, and to establish one's identity as being distinct from the lower classes through a set of cultural markers that proclaim one's 'good taste' and style" (Baviskar/Ray 2011:8).

Furthermore, the claim of the middle class to be the common man and to represent the interests of all Indians reached its peak with economic liberalisation (Baviskar/Ray 2011). The middle class assigned itself a progressive role in promoting capitalism and a civil society. This link between the middle class, democracy and capitalism has been argued by many and can

be traced back to Marx (ibid.:3-4) and Weber (Liechty 2003:11-16). According to Fernandes (2006:xviii), the newness of the post-liberalisation middle class is not due to upward mobility, but due to the social and political construction of the middle class as a cultural ideal. The iconic middle class figure is celebrated as an English-speaking, higher educated, urban white-collar worker (ibid., Baviskar/Ray 2011:5). The underlying assumption is that it is open to upwardly-mobile segments of the Indian population. Anybody could acquire the cultural capital to join the middle class.

Anthropological, sociological and historical research has amended this self-understanding of the Indian middle class[4]. Is the new 'creamy layer' of the dalits in the same way middle class as the Brahmin doctors who have been part of the middle class since generations? Does the entrance of lower castes into the middle class change what it means to be middle class? Despite its diversity and the difficulty to be defined, the middle class is an identifiable and notably growing part of the Indian population (Donner 2008:54). However, recent scholarship has shown that even in the most generous estimate, the middle class constitutes only twenty-six per cent of the Indian population (Sridharan 2011). Seventy-four percent still live in – often abject – poverty. Clearly, the middle class is not the majority of the India population. It succeeds in presenting its elite interests as the interests of the entire nation by claiming to be 'everyman' and to speak on behalf of all Indians (Baviskar/Ray 2011:8). Furthermore, fifty percent of the middle class belonged to the upper castes, even though they only constituted a quarter of the population (Sridharan 2011:53). This signifies an increase of the proportion of lower castes since colonisation, which was made possible by reservation policies guaranteeing state employment and higher education to disadvantaged segments of the Indian population. However, the middle class defends its upper-caste privileges fiercely as proven by student agitations against the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in 1990 (Mankekar 1999). Moreover, the middle class now strives for employment in multinational companies, especially IT companies, as a marker of middle-classness instead

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[4] My use of the singular 'middle class' throughout this thesis is not to deny its internal diversity, but to indicate that the middle class is a shared cultural project.

of state employment (Upadhya 2011). Upadhya argues that the IT industries reproduces, rather than ameliorates inequalities, for which it was celebrated by the Indian middle class. Further evidence of the middle class' promotion of inequalities was the flare-up of religious nationalism during the 1980s and 1990s.

> "If the middle classes seemed eager to adopt modern lifestyles through the acquisition of consumer goods, they also became the self-appointed protectors of tradition" (Mankekar 1999:9).

The formation of the hindu-nationalist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) fell in this time, which redefined modernity with an emphasis on family values and religion (Dwyer 2000:76). This had great appeal to the majority of the middle class, which is apparent in the immense popularity of television religious soap operas, produced by the middle class for the middle class. The 1980s and 1990s generally witnessed the emergence of a mass-mediated idiom of culturally conservative "Indianness" on television and in Hindi cinema (Mazzarella 2005:9). The political and cultural dominance of the middle class recreates, rather than alleviates, inequalities in the Indian society.

Research has shown that caste, religion, gender and region of origin not only remain important factors in class formation along with income, occupation and profession. In fact they are also middle class projects. The middle class reinforces and transforms those notions as part of its own cultural ideological production (e.g. Baviskar/Ray 2011, Donner 2008, Fernandes 2006, Joshi 2010, Mazzarella 2003, Nisbett 2009, Osella/Osella 2000, Srivastava 2007). The middle class disguises its class privileges in everyday practices and in rhetorics of progress, achievement, merit, modernity etc. Consumer practices play a crucial role in these processes since they form a key cultural dynamic of middle class life. They are not the evidence of "passive capitalist victimization" but are indispensable for being and becoming middle class (Liechty 2003:34). Rather than "*having* or *possession*" consumption for the middle class is about "*being* and *belonging*" (ibid.). Practices of consumption are used by the middle class to distinguish itself from the past middle class, from contemporary lower and upper classes, and to identify with the social group one aspires for (e.g. Baviskar/Ray

2011, Donner 2008, Fernandes 2006, Joshi 2010, Nisbett 2009). By embracing consumption as status markers, the middle class was transcending the local while domesticating the global (Rofel 2007). Srivastava (2007:313, 324) speaks of a "moral economy of consumption" or the "moral middle class". The middle class employs specific consumer practices to denote middle class status as distinct from upper or lower classes and from westernised consumer practices. Cultural work has to go into a consumer practice to indicate a certain status (Donner 2008:60). These issues of inclusion and exclusion have to be maintained, reinforced and transformed at each historical moment. To understand the Indian middle class, the contradictions constitutive of the Indian middle class have to be considered at the same time.

> "These ways of being middle-class and striving to master its cultural codes require not just material resources, but the imaginative work and self-discipline essential to cultivating new forms of subjectivity (Mahmood 2005)." (Baviskar/Ray 2011:8)

The middle class grows out of cultural practices which have both local, national and global roots.

The Rhetoric of Pune's Middle Class

The way members of the middle class in Pune understood being middle class confirmed that the Indian middle class is an economic and social category, as well as a cultural-ideological project and a site of contest. Furthermore, it evidenced the importance of consumption as markers of 'middle-classness' and the moral aspect of consumption. Asked what it meant to be *middle class*, most of my interlocutors explained that it meant to be neither rich nor poor, to be happy/ satisfied/ content/ comfortable with what one had, to have a moderate/ comfortable/ simple/ relaxed lifestyle and to have down-to-earth principles. The *middle class* in Pune perceived itself to be the majority of the Indian population. However, even in Pune it constituted only 30% of the population (Palshikar/Deshpande 2008).

Most commonly my interlocutors discriminated between *lower, middle and*

upper middle class. My research is biased in that the majority of my acquaintances belonged to the *middle* and *upper middle class*. Most of them were members of the *middle class* for at least two generations. Access to the *lower middle* and to newcomers to the *middle class* proved difficult. On the one hand this was due to my access through the Indian family who were Brahmins. On the other hand it owes to the way I met people in public places such as cafés, youth centres, universities, etc. Nevertheless there were people from the *lower middle class*, from lower caste backgrounds, some of whom were first-generation members of the *middle class* amongst my acquaintances and interviewees, as well as people who belonged to the so-called *poor* and *elite classes*. However, lower caste people are conspicuously absent from my sample. Pune's local, i.e. non-immigrant, population was dominated by high castes and many people agreed that though the middle class had become a multi-caste group, high castes prevailed. Amongst the café culture crowd there were only two people with a lower caste background. The underrepresentation of lower caste members amongst the café culture indicates an implicit relation between class position and caste status. This relation is perpetuated by justifying endogamy and '*caste habits'* such as a certain diet, disguising middle class privileges as merit and achievement, by uttering discontent with reservation policies for lower *backward* classes and by reinforcing inequalities through emphasising their expensive English school education, and privileging social capital and cultural knowledge of the middle class such as communication skills including good English, "undeferential courage and self-confidence needed in [job] interviews" (Fuller/Narasimha 2006:260). Since these skills are predominantly in the hands of the educated, professional, urban middle class and they understand them and their importance best, the middle class possesses and perpetuates the advantage (cf. Fernandes 2006, Fuller/Narasimha 2006).

Prima facie my interlocutors in Pune took *middle class* to be an economic category. It meant to be neither poor nor rich, to have a lifestyle that is neither luxurious nor bad, to have neither too much nor too little. Some people went into more detail observing that being *middle class* meant to have a good salary; own

a *house*[5]; a car; a TV and a phone; to be able to afford a good education for their children; to have the money to go on vacations and to eat out in restaurants. Hence income, profession, education and consumption were highlighted as *middle class* criteria. There was some consent that the *lower middle class* generally lived in a 1BHK[6], that a 2BHK apartment was *typical middle class* housing and that having a 3BHK qualified for *upper middle class*. *The rich* lived in bungalows and poor people in rented rooms or shanties. However, there were differences in opinion. Some people thought that only if one owned a house without debt one qualified for *upper middle class*. Three people – one each from the parents, the forty-something-year-old and the young generation – owned *bungalows* and still considered themselves *middle class*. A university professor in his sixties, who was from a Brahmin family and lived in a *bungalow* with a lush garden surrounded by other *bungalows* in an affluent neighbourhood, said he was "poor but *middle class*". He pointed at his neighbours saying they were rich because they had a house, a car, modern gadgets and travelled abroad. Yet the same was true for himself. He said being *middle class* was about status not money. Another university professor in her sixties – also from a Brahmin family, who lived in a 3BHK in a *middle class* neighbourhood – claimed to be *upper middle class*. She and her husband both worked and she additionally ran a small business with her son. She said being *middle class* was about valuing that simple joys not money make life happy. Another sixty-something-year-old Brahmin woman, who lived in a *bungalow* with garden in a newly developed affluent neighbourhood, said she was *middle class* which meant to have a moderate lifestyle: "not too much, not too little. It's alright if you have the discriminating power where to spend. In India one does not need much: five or six outfits, 3-4,000Rs for groceries. We are careful with other expenses like car and telephone. We only pay taxes on our house because we own it. We don't overdo things, so we are alright." Her husband was a retired engineer who had worked in Germany and Brasil. She still earned money by teaching language classes. These accounts show that the 'economic middle' was conceived and experienced in varying ways. Different levels of income generate different *middle class* lifestyles.

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[5]   In Pune *house* referred to a flat, while a free standing house was called a *bungalow*.
[6]   BHK denotes bedroom, hall, kitchen. So a 3BHK refers to an apartment with three bedrooms, a hall or dining-cum-living room and a kitchen.

Money played an important role in the rhetoric of how people in Pune understood being *middle class*. The recurrent mentioning of money suggests that its value was changing. Srivastava (2007) comprehensively explores the shift from frugality to consumption as a marker of 'middle-classness' in the wake of an emerging "moral middle class" in post-liberalisation India. It was one of the most frequently mentioned distinctions between the older and the younger generation in Pune in 2008: the older (grandparents and parents) generation valued saving and frugality, the younger (forty-something-year-olds and café culture) generation appreciated consumption. Indeed it was mostly the two younger generations which listed consumer practices as *middle class* criteria such as owning a house, a car, a TV, mobile phones and computers, going out to eat and on vacations and being able to afford a good education for one's children. What used to be luxury items were now conceived to be crucial markers of being *middle class* (cf. Mankekar 1999:5). Many young adults said that they did not value money like their parents. They also did not want to "slug their asses off" like their parents. This suggests that the middle class' spending power has increased as well as the availability of consumer goods. However, consumption was not just a marker of 'being middle class'. The way they constructed the past in their parents' lives – determined by hard work, frugality and constraints – implies that consumption was considered a means of freedom. This mirrors a general shift, not restricted to India, towards consumption as a way of self-expression, identification and distinction (Cole/Thomas 2009, Herrera/Bayat 2010, Rofel 2007, Srivastava 2007). Rofel (2007) argues that the creation of a self through consumer practices leads to a domestication of the global even if the goal is to transcend the local. Entering the transnational spaces of the café culture and donning clothes with the right logos of an "international cultural reference system" (Herrera/Bayat 2010:17), for example, young people in Pune in a comparable way brought the world home while aspiring to transcend the local and be part of the world. Consumption for the café culture thus not only marked 'middle-classness' but also a better, up-to-date, globally connected and savvy person than their parents, whom they tended to see as *traditional* and *conservative*.

Though the financial situation is important for understanding the *middle class* in Pune, it is not sufficient to grasp how it represented itself. Being *middle class* was framed by "personal and social etiquette" (Srivastave 2007:274) which differed from one fraction of the *middle class* to another and between generations.

Not any kind of consumption marked 'middle-classness' in Pune in 2008. People moralised about consumer practices. Members of all generations highlighted that being *middle class* meant to have down-to-earth principles, to live a very grounded existence or to be a low-profile person. This entailed that simple joys, not money, made life happy. *Bhel*[7], a cup of coffee with friends, a movie or going to a medium-priced restaurant were much preferable over a five-star hotel. Good value and taste were better than "artificial high society life". Members of the forty-something-year-old and the young generation highlighted that more money would not corrupt them. They did not aspire to be "super-rich". They did not need a Mercedes or BMW and a big bungalow. Even if they had more money they would still have only one car and live in an apartment. These statements were intended to distinguish the *middle class* from *the rich*. Not having a bungalow or a Mercedes was a choice and not a lack of finances. *The rich* were accused of being materialistic and morally corrupted. As some claimed *the rich* played cards in clubs all day, only talked about being rich, threw lavish parties with too much alcohol, created bored housewives who had a new boyfriend every week and engaged in wife swapping. Being *middle class* was understood as a fine balance between embracing consumerism and not spending lavishly. The *middle class* presented itself as morally superior to *the rich* by ways of *moderate* consumption and sound *Indian* morals.

However, in some respects being middle class was perceived as an ambivalent status. Some young adults explicitly stated that they would like to have more money to spend despite claiming that they were satisfied with what they had. For others *upper class* referred less to *the rich* as to a less ambiguous situation, either in financial terms or regarding values. While most of my interlocutors felt

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[7]   *Bhel* was Pune's most popular roadside snack.

financially and morally "comfortable", for some being *middle class* had the taste of a compromise or as a precarious position for some. Others emphasised their financial security by stressing that they were *upper middle class* rather than *middle class*. Yet others distanced themselves from the *middle class* by invoking values or a certain mindset. One woman in her early sixties – a Sindhi widow, who lived alone in a 1BHK and worked voluntarily in a hospital – said financially she was *middle class* but value-wise she was *upper class* because money was not the most important to her. She had a liberal mindset, was helpful and generous. The *middle class*, she claimed, was *conservative*, hypocritical and materialistic, which meant to do things just because society expected them, not because they made sense. A forty-two-year old owner of two restaurants from a Brahmin family observed that he came from a *middle class* family but was not *middle class* anymore. To him, *middle class* people were *conservative* because they did not take risks, always needed to excel and money meant everything to them. He considered himself, in contrast, to have the mentality of a rich person because he took risks and money did not matter to him. An engineering student from a Brahmin family said his family was *middle class* because they did not have a high income, but they were *upper class* because they were well connected and possessed many assets. By contrast, the *middle class* was just making ends meet and had no backbone. They were chasing the American dream which meant to have a house with a life-long mortgage. He claimed that he was well beyond that. This diverging variety of internal differences within the *middle class* in Pune suggests the existence of different groups with differing attitudes towards modernity (cf. Srivastava 2007:242).

The young generation of the café culture distinguished itself from past ways of being *middle class*, *the rich* and *the poor* in several ways, while it identified with the social group it aspired to. Practices of consumption were the main means to that end, exhibited in the activities of the café culture. Evidence indicates that the Indian *middle class* has grown and has become more affluent. Consumer goods were more readily available since economic liberalisation. The young adults have not only grown up with the "promises of consumption as individual autonomy and achievement" (ibid.:280) and leisure, their families were able to

afford it. One young adult explained that he had a "more independent, free, comfortable and relaxed life" than his parents because both his parents worked, he had only one sibling and he grew up in a nuclear family out of the reach of his grandfather. Thus there was more money for a bigger *house*, his own motorised transport, a longer education period, fashionable clothes, mobile phone, computer and TV. Furthermore, he was not subject to his grandfather's decisions. The café culture – a world outside of family and home – was conceived to facilitate greater self-expression. It promised the possibility to become a different person through chance encounters, glances and the like. It reinforced the idea of leisure as a *middle class* marker (ibid.:299). The café culture used "sign-rich consumption" (ibid.:241) to distinguish and express itself. To engage in the café culture activities (Chapter One), fashion (Chapter Two), friendships (Chapter Four) and in dating (Chapter Six) marked someone as a particular person, namely as *middle class*, *modern*, *liberal*, a citizen of the world and not *conservative* or *backward*.

The young generation was constructing the parents' past as traditional culture in order to transcend that local past and become "desirable, globalized subjects" (Rofel 2007:126). Thus my research suggests the emergence of a self-assured *middle class* in public spaces. Furthermore, it enlarges on understanding the Indian middle class mainly as an interactive category, as a performative and discursive space (cf. Liechty 2003). I do not wish to define the *middle class* but understand how its members themselves understand and construct it interactively. To do so I italicise throughout these chapters those words that the *middle class* used to understand and position itself, such as *middle class*, *modern, Indian, the west, conservative*, *backward*, *traditional*, *liberal*, *cool*, etc. These words cover an imaginative space and are part of the moralising the *middle class* in Pune employed. Favero (2005:14-15) made a similar point calling such notions "phantasms" to capture the "contextual, shifting character and the multiple layers of meaning". However, I wish to treat them as indigenous concepts and not as phantasms. In my analysis, they are part of the moralising that people do to praise and censure one another and oneself in terms of moral aesthetic standards (cf. Chapter One). Thus *middle class* or

modern are aesthetic as well as moral judgements. Depending on the situation, they are appropriate and good, or they are not. What it means to be *middle class* is only partially a preconceived notion following objective criteria such as income, profession and education. Mostly 'middle-classness' is negotiated – created, maintained and transformed – in interactions between people. These interactions determine a person's practices.

The focus of my analysis lies on the café culture's habitus, i.e. their practices and moral aesthetic standards in general. For that purpose I adopt a useful term from my own language, German. The 'Leib' (same etymological root as 'life'), as differentiated from the 'body', originally refers to the self or person, i.e. the bodily self. It is defined by its potential to live the world. Every human being *is* a 'Leib' in contrast to *having* a body. Thus I developed the Leib perspective (Platz 2006, 2011) from Csordas' paradigm of embodiment (1990). Bourdieu's (1990 [1980]) concept of habitus is the point of departure. The Leib learns how to perceive, act, and feel in culturally specific ways by practically imitating and engaging with other Leibs in a structured social world. Cultural knowledge is thus passed from Leib to Leib, and in fact the knowledge is not separate from the Leib: Leib *is* cultural knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception (1945) contributed the idea that the self becomes aware of itself as a perceiving, acting, thinking, and feeling Leib in relation to other Leibs and the social world. To this I wish to add Carrither's (2005, 2010) theory of the rhetoric of personhood. Cultural competence is gained by acquiring cultural tools which a person uses flexibly to make and remake herself as the person she wants and feels she ought to be (cf. Carro-Ripalda Forthcoming). Thus in embodied form, we hold the tools with which we understand and position ourselves in our worlds and make things happen for ourselves. Furthermore, moralising is the work that we do to praise and censure one another and ourselves according to moral aesthetic standards (Carrithers 1992, 2005b). We judge whether a practice is good and appropriate. My ethnography focuses on how participants of the café culture made and remade themselves as the persons they wanted and felt they ought to be in their rapidly changing world in Pune in 2008.

My ethnography explores the impact of economic liberalisation and globalisation from the perspective of young *middle class* Puneites thus contributing to the growing body of ethnographies on globalisation. It confirms previous findings that the Indian *middle class* constructs a moral space of 'middleness' between the elite and the poor (e.g. Donner 2008, Fernandes 2006, Nisbett 2009). This is important for an understanding of the *middle class* as an 'Indian' phenomenon. However, the Pune material also nuances previous observations. Few have taken the perspective of the young generation in India and fewer have included young women. It was argued that the public spaces young men used to nourish their friendships were male spaces (Favero 2005, Nisbett 2008). The participation of women in the café culture suggests the extent of the ongoing changes and their permanence. Nisbett and Favero also did not integrate the young people's lives at home. Exploring this sphere in my ethnography allows us to see how the young generation defines itself as *modern*, *middle class* and *Indian* partly in distinction from their parents and other parts of the *middle class*. But it also allows us to see the continuities that Donner (2008) describes in her analyses of *middle class* households in Calcutta, such as the ideal of the joint family life and marriage. Focussing on the young generation furthers an understanding of where the ongoing change is headed. The young generation modifies the meanings of what it means to be *middle class Indian*. The comparison with the parents' generation and the world at home highlights the café culture as a distinct group in historical time.

By focussing on practices and the appertaining moral aesthetic standards, I hope to further not only an understanding of the *middle class* in India but also of socio-historical change in general and of how people make and remake themselves as the people they want and feel they ought to be in particular. This approach helps to illuminate the relation between 'the local' and 'the global'. Both are interactive projects. They are cultural tools that people use to understand and position themselves in their world.

The Café Culture in Pune

Emerging youth cultures in post-economic liberalisation countries are increasingly attracting academic attention. Research from Africa (Cole/Thomas 2009) and the Middle-East (Herrera/Bayat 2010) to China (Rofel 2007) and South Asia (Favero 2005, Jeffrey 2010, Jeffery et al. 2008, Liechty 2003, Nisbett 2009, Osella/Osella 1998, 2002) reveal the emergence of common trends within youth leisure activities and lifestyles, such as consumption and sociality. But they also suggest that inequalities and exclusions are reproduced or reinvented, and that reactions to economic liberalisation differ based on class, community and gender.

These studies share the assumption that young people have the potential to create a distinct culture and habitus, even if only temporarily, and to challenge dominant structures. This view is inspired by the so-called Birmingham School, especially Willis (1982), and modified with Bourdieu's theory of practice (e.g. 1980). Thus it is argued that young people create (youth) cultures and a distinct habitus based on class-, gender- or (in the case of India) caste-based potentials to mobilise cultural, social and economic capital (e.g. Herrera/Baya 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010). The category of 'youth' emerged in modern times, largely as a result of prolonged schooling. It is understood as the phase between childhood and adulthood. Herrera and Bayat (2010) emphasise that the current generation of youth, born between 1979 and 1993, is dealing with particular historical circumstances. It is "the most highly educated generation in human history" (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2005:13, cited in Herrera/ Baya 2010:9). In an era of "mature neoliberalism", however, education has not necessarily led to better opportunities or security (ibid.). Furthermore, this generation of youth has come of age "during a technological and communications revolution" (ibid.:10). Finally, this young generation grew up in a post-socialist, post-Cold War era filled with hopes for a just global order guided by human rights (ibid.:9).

The above-mentioned accounts explore the strategies that young people around the world employ to manoeuvre the multiple opportunities and

constraints they are facing. Two interrelated issues feature prominently. First, un- and underemployment amongst educated young adults play a major role in many youth cultures since they delay the transition into adulthood. Young adults create diverse strategies to cope with the consequences of unemployment such as not being able to consume desired goods or to marry. Jeffrey's et al. (2008) argue that education was a "contradictory resource" (ibid.:210) which had the potential to both challenge and reinforce established inequalities and exclusions.

> "Thus arises one of the most unsettling paradoxes of contemporary globalization: at almost the precise moment that an increasing number of people formerly excluded from mainstream schooling have come to recognize the empowering possibilities of education, many of the opportunities for these groups to benefit from schooling are disappearing." (ibid.9)

Their study of rural areas in North India shows that "the ability of young men to benefit from education depended crucially on money, social resources and cultural capital" (ibid.:208). Jeffrey (2010) explores the nature of "waiting" enforced on these unemployed educated young men in North India. He describes how these young men from the "lower middle class" cultivated their "waiting" through self-conscious strategies of hanging out and "timepass" into a youth culture (ibid.:2). He highlights, like others, the "socially productive nature of hanging out" (Jeffrey 2010:92, cf. Cowan 1991, Favero 2005, Nisbett 2009). Contrary to the young middle class adults in urban areas such as Pune, Delhi (Favero 2005) or Bangalore (Nisbett 2009) these young men in rural North India did not emphasise hanging out as leisure and pleasurable distractions between bouts of work. Rather they perceived it as a necessity out of lack of more meaningful things to do (ibid.:80). The authors of the book edited by Herrera and Bayat (2010) look into the question whether Muslim youth around the world are exceptional because their marginality – youth bulge, un/underemployment, poverty, political corruption and exclusion – drives them into the arms of fundamentalists. Indeed, these authors find that there is no correlation between marginality and fundamentalism. Rather young adults react to their economic and social exclusion with a great variety of strategies ranging from turning to radical politics (Hasan 2010) to completely withdrawing from public life (Herrera 2010) or leading a "minimal life" (Simone 2010:148).

Secondly, young adults are concerned with pursuing a certain lifestyle. The post-Cold War era replaced socialist and other experimentations with the "universal human nature" (Rofel 2007:3). At the heart of this ideal of human nature lies the desiring subject: "the individual who operates through sexual, material, and affective self-interest" (ibid., cf. Bauman 2000:73-7). Consumer practices, education, youth leisure activities, media, love and sexuality are considered features of 'being young' around the world, even if in diverse ways. The rhetoric and practices of this desiring subject are used to draw a distinction with older generations. Young adults struggle with controlling parents, repressive regimes or secular values that they perceive as preventing them from pursuing their lifestyles (Herrera/Bayat 2010). Rofel (2007) argues that 'desire' in China "has been assigned the weight of throwing off historical constraints and of creating a new cosmopolitan human nature". Engagement with public culture in the form of soap operas, museums, window displays, newspapers, movies etc. was crucial in the work to embody a desiring subject. However, anxiety surrounded the conception of the right way of being a desiring subject, which led to the exclusion of certain social segments. The authors of the book edited by Cole and Thomas (2009) show how young people in various African countries used different media to educate themselves on companionate love. This type of love, they said, distinguished them from their parents. The authors argue that companionate love was an ideal and part of a wider effort to claim "modern" and "civilised" status (ibid.:16, Spronk 2009). Thomas (2009) shows that young Africans enjoyed watching Bollywood movies because they felt these showed that individual happiness was possible without sacrificing family honour or family as a multigenerational whole.

These studies show that economic liberalisation and neoliberalism serve as national imaginaries to create a post-Cold War world in the global south (Rofel 2007:20). Like modernization and globalisation, they are powerful imageries through which countries in the global south must reinvent themselves in order to participate in this new global order (ibid.). The ubiquity of

> "[c]apitalism is a world-transforming project that has the capacity to reach into the sinews of our bodies and the machinations of our hearts" (ibid.:15).

However, they also show that "neoliberalism is a historically produced dialogue

and encounter between cultures" (ibid.:17). Global encounters fall on different local grounds and hence produce different rhetorics of personhood, namely who people want and feel they ought to be.

Neither youth cultures around the world nor globalisation, namely the flow of people, ideas, images, goods and capital, are processes of 'westernisation'. Rather the increasing contemporary 'connectedness' allows young people from one country to interact with ideas, images, goods and people from many other countries. The main reference point remains their physical world 'at home' and they look not only to 'the west' but to other countries to understand changing conceptions in their world. Unpredictable encounters produce and locate what might be called 'globalisation' in momentary configurations; rather than an a priori coherent, external structure called 'globalisation', 'neoliberalism' or 'global capitalism' enabling cultural encounters (ibid.:25).

This thesis continues this important work on youth cultures by exploring the impact of economic liberalisation on how young people in India wanted and felt they ought to be, how they understood themselves and the world around them. I chose to call this youth culture 'café culture' because hanging out in cafés constituted the major activity. Students formed the majority of this group because school and college gave young adults time and space away from home and pocket money. However, young professionals and married young adults also sought out the spaces of the café culture. The café culture was a *middle* to *upper middle class* phenomenon, contrary to the youth cultures in India explored by Jeffrey et al. (2008), Jeffrey (2010) and Nisbett (2009). Furthermore young men and women together participated in the café culture, which is a significant difference from other accounts which described exclusively male youth cultures (Favero 2005, Jeffrey et al 2008, Jeffrey 2010, Nisbett 2009, Osella/Osella 1998). Last but not least, though my ethnography describes the changes going on in India from the perspective of young people, I compare and contrast the café culture to the worlds at home and in college. It is not explored as a world separate from these other worlds, in the way that Favero (2005) and Nisbett (2009) explored urban youth cultures in their ethnographies.

The groups of friends I encountered in Pune consisted of young adults with very different backgrounds regarding caste, religion and region of origin, similar to Favero's and Nisbett's observations. This was noticeable in a society like India which was considered to form communities based on these markers of status and highlighted segregation. The differences in background amongst these friends were obvious. Out of 25 young adults[8] (10 women, 15 men) 19 grew up in Pune. Eleven had Maharashtrian parents, seven had parents from Pune. Three had one Maharashtrian parent and one parent from another Indian state (two from Gujarat, one from Rajasthan). Two young adults had parents from Gujarat. There was one young adult respectively whose parents were from Karnataka, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. Most were Hindus (18), three Sindhis, one Parsis, one Muslim, and one Christian. One had a Parsi father and a Christian mother. Another one had a Sindhi father and a Hindu mother. And yet another had a Muslim father and a Hindu mother. With regard to caste or *community*[9] the diversity had limits. Out of the 25 young adults five were Brahmins, four Marathas, three Sindhis, one Muslim, one Parsi, one Rajput, one Roman Catholic, and two said they did not know their caste. Not knowing one's caste suggests that the caste did not command any respect and the parents wanted to forget it. Arun later explained that his mother was from an OBC caste and his father from a "non caste, just Hindu". Sixteen young adults lived at home with their parents, three had their own apartments, five rented student rooms and one lived with her in-laws. Some had grown up in rich neighbourhoods, others in the new suburbs, yet others in the crowded old centre of Pune. Most of my young informants had friends of both sexes. All of them were proud to form these diverse friendship groups.

All of these young adults had received at least some schooling in English and a secondary school degree. 23 of the young adults had gone to English medium schools and spoke English fluently. The remaining two went to Marathi medium schools. Five said that English was the main language spoken at home. Six spoke Marathi and English at home, another six Hindi and English. Only four

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[8]   The sample size was limited to the people I got to know better.

[9]   *Community* was used by most people when referring to caste. People from outside of Maharashtra often stated either their place of origin (e.g. Gujarati) or their religion (e.g. Sindhi) as their *community.*

said that they talked exclusively in Marathi at home. All of the young adults knew at least three languages: Marathi, English and Hindi. Some spoke another mother tongue such as Tamil or Gujarati.

All but one of the 25 young adults had completed or were doing a university degree. Eleven pursued engineering, six commerce, business or management and seven humanities and social sciences. Nine were working at the time, four of them in their family's business. The rest were still in education. Amongst their parents, 19 fathers had a university degree, one a diploma and five had no university degree. Four of the latter were running family businesses. Nine of the 25 mothers had a university degree, six of them were pursuing paid work, 19 were housewives. Of the 31 working parents (25 fathers, 6 mothers), ten ran their own businesses, eight were engineers, three were teachers, three doctors and two managers in multinational companies. One mother was a judge, one father worked for the Bank of Maharashtra and three did other jobs such as working for BSNL, an Indian telecommunication company, or selling insurances.

Despite the differences in family background, the young adults all considered themselves to be part of the *Indian middle class*. Their parents had obtained considerable social, cultural and economic capital. They all had access to motorised private transport. All in all they were in a relatively privileged position. Furthermore they belonged to the same generation, the first to grow up after liberalisation and with mass consumerism in India. Last but not least they all cultivated the idea that their world was very different from their parents world, and they wanted to be different. They desired to choose their own friends and (sex) partners. One of the 25 young adults was married. Twelve were dating at the time of my research, ten were not currently in a relationship but had dated before, and two were seeing different people in the course of a year. In general, the young adults often shared more time and had more in common with their friends than with their families. They welcomed the present change wishing that India should change for the better, which meant preserving what was good in India and not just 'blindly aping the West', as they said it.

The commonalities between these friends in Pune resemble what Favero's (2005) informants had in common but differ in one aspect from Nisbett's (2009). The latter describes his informants as lower *middle class* who go to cybercafés to fulfil a need for space similar to that of my young friends in Pune. In 2001 in Bangalore, these young men could not afford to frequent the cafés that my informants did in Pune in 2008. What all three of our ethnographies have in common is the description of a distinct habitus that differentiates the world of the young adults as young, *middle class* and *Indian*.

The Study

My ethnography is based on material collected during fieldwork from February 2008 until March 2009 in Pune, Maharashtra, India. In short, the experiences of my entire time in Pune were regarded as 'data'. The first four months I was generously hosted by a Maharashtrian couple. Their two adult sons and their wives lived in England. I thus experienced first-hand what it meant to be a young adult and a 'child' in a *middle class* family in Pune. My host parents are very loving and caring people, and we soon developed close relationships. They were in many ways the foundation of my fieldwork, not least by giving me a home and caring like family. Through our discussions and misunderstandings, we learned a lot from each other. Experiencing Indian family life provided me with an intimate understanding and ability to relate to the young adults I befriended in the course of my fieldwork.

In general, my own reactions and feelings were often the most valuable resource to understand the Indian ways of being that are discussed in these chapters. This might hold true for most ethnographic work and has been a valid approach in social anthropology since the publication of *Never in Anger* (Briggs 1970). That Laura Bohannan published her book *Return to Laughter* under a pseudonym in 1954 demonstrates that ethnography based on the ethnographer's experiences was not approved of at the time. However, Carrithers (1992:148) argues that this reflexive style in anthropology is actually the chief method of anthropology. 'Participant observation' is better described as

"engaged learning" (ibid.), he argues, "in order to capture the inescapably sticky and involving nature of the process":

> "Anthropologists learn how people judge each other by being judged themselves, or by being so closely a part of the scene that they react directly, intimately and inwardly, often with discomfort and perplexity, to people's judgements of each other. So anthropologists are forced to learn about aesthetic standards in much the same way that children do, using the same equipment."

Hence anthropological research is generally based on personal experiences and capacities, "a minor variant of a great theme in human life" (ibid.). The researched community corrects the ethnographer's ideas and insights since "one's whole person is exposed and subjected to the judgments and corrections of others in the process" (Carrithers 2005b:437). This reflexive approach seems especially useful for my work. Far from indulging in navel-gazing or "I-witnessing" as Geertz lamented it (1988: 73-101) I make use of what Riesman coined "disciplined introspection" (1998 [1977]: 2). I compare how I experienced particular situations to what I can discern from how *middle class* Puneites experienced them. Fieldwork among the young urban *middle class* often made it difficult to achieve a critical distance. The contexts seemed familiar and were hence difficult to analyse. My own confusions were a good indicator for differences and similarities. I speak of 'the west', 'the North-Atlantic world of my experience', Europe or North America, on the one hand, as a means of – admittedly potentially perilous – comparison, not as a benchmark. The comparison is intended to support the formulation of the distinct quality of the social reality or the condition of living I encountered in Pune's *middle class*. 'The west' is as much an idea as a locale. Thus, on the other hand, I treat *the west* as an indigenous Indian term, indicating its local meaning invoked by Puneites.

This introspective approach is supported by a wide range of forms of data gathering such as extensive field notes (more than 1,300 pages) and interviews (more than 80 hours recorded and transcribed material). I experienced everyday life in an urban *middle class* family. I attended numerous family get-togethers ranging from dinner invitations and birthday parties, to weddings and the celebration of festivals to rituals at home. I interacted with family members and friends belonging to four generations. However, the majority of the couple's regular company consisted of people of their own age, i.e. fifty and older.

My hosts also introduced me to my 'yoga ladies'. This was a group of about thirty women, mostly housewives, aged forty and older who did yoga on a daily basis in a school in the neighbourhood under the guidance of a female teacher. Through them I gained access to other homes and was invited to their social functions such as weddings and rituals. Most of them lived in the same neighbourhood. They spun an interesting web of caring and gossip around me.

In search of freedom and to meet young adults, I also took up different urban activities such as visiting cafés, joining a class in a dance school founded by a famous Bollywood choreographer, and participating in different activities of Open Space[10]. Many of the young adults became my friends and I met their friends. I visited them at home, met their families, celebrated birthdays, attended parties, and went out for dinners and to nightclubs with them.

Cafés were not only my way of access to young adults, they also became important meeting venues. Here the young adults could express themselves freely and I could share in their conversations. I even conducted some interviews in cafés.

By this public way of the café culture, I befriended more young men (15) than young women (10). The main reason is that young women were subject to stricter curfews and were less often allowed to go out to meet friends. I spent the most time with my closest female friend, Mira (29), at her home. My closest male friend, Arun (21), by contrast I mostly met in cafés, bars, restaurants and nightclubs. Though his circle of friends consisted of men and women, it was again the young men who had more freedom to spend their leisure time outside their homes. Furthermore it would have looked suspicious had he invited me home too frequently without occasion or without his parents around. All my young acquaintances enjoyed visiting me in my small flat into which I had moved after living with the family.

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[10] Open Space is an NGO: "the civil society and youth outreach initiative of the Centre for Communication and Development Studies", "a social network for young people interested in exploring and building a more equal, sustainable and inclusive world" (http://www.openspaceindia.org).

At Open Space I met and befriended a journalist, Ravi, who was in his forties. He in turn introduced me to some of his friends of the same age. This generation constituted the link between the young adults and their parents. They were at the beginning of their careers at the time of the economic liberalisation in India. This is the generation of the young men in Delhi that Favero (2005) describes.

Most of the data on which my thesis is based was obtained by spending time with people, be it in their homes chatting over tea, watching TV or participating in different household activities, or in cafés and other public places. Of all those with whom I spoke more than once, and who were thus allocated a case node in NVivo, the majority were women (57%). This is mostly due to my daily interactions with the 'yoga ladies' and partly to the gender segregation in India. Overall, however, I was introduced to people randomly and hence their age and gender were arbitrary.

This rich material was augmented by life story and family history interviews with people from different generations. Interviewing and working with people from four different age groups, sometimes from the same family, provides a sense of continuity and change. For one of the interviews with an eighty-year-old Indian great-grandmother her granddaughter-in-law was present to assist with translating. Two of the family histories were conducted with couples, and one started with two sisters when, one after the other, all their other four siblings and their children joined in. Different points of view, mutual rectifications and even omissions tell their own story, often unintended by the teller.

Overall the number of women I interviewed was slightly higher (19) than the number of men (12). I'm inclined to relate it to the overall proportion of men and women I met. Both men and women of all generations were ready to work with me. Gender segregation seemed no issue. Furthermore, to explain it with women having more time on their hands would distort the picture. Housework is a time-consuming business and many women I interviewed were employed.

Ethical Concerns

All persons in my ethnography were anonymised by not using their real names and by distorting other personal characteristics as much as possible. However, some of the people in this account will recognise themselves and others. Therefore negotiating ethical issues happened in three stages: before and during fieldwork and while writing up. I had been granted ethical approval by the ethics committee of my department before leaving for India. It had been agreed that I would ask for informed but not written consent according to good research guidelines. This approach worked out very well for me. While in the field I took notes in front of people even if I spent time with them on a daily basis in order to remind them of what I was doing. In the beginning I was wary to 'work with' my host family. I felt I was crossing boundaries by writing about them since they were friends of my family. So when I found something particularly intriguing I asked whether I could write it down. After some time they explicitly told me to make a note of something. Other people such as my friends from the younger generation occasionally requested to not have something they said or did included in my research. While writing up I kept stumbling over issues that I felt were sensitive, sex in particular, or recounting an argument or other situations that were presumably negative. Modern media of communication such as email and chat programmes allowed me to ask for consent in hindsight.

Self-conscious reflexivity is necessary and useful because I am part of the *western* world which often is equally aspired to (for its lifestyle) and despised (for its morals), and often blamed for the bad changes in India. With some distance from the field, I am now able to understand that *the west* was not always the point of reference, nor was I. Often it was referred to something in the Indian history which might involve an Indian interpretation of *the west*. Being part of a European middle class, I also pondered the different way in which Puneites understood this concept. Last but not least, despite the leniency granted to an outsider, I was never made more aware that I am a woman and have, therefore, less freedom in my movement and conduct.

The reflexivity provoked by postmodern anthropology is furthermore necessary

to highlight power relations. My major concern has been to stay true to the people I have met and grown fond of in Pune. The issues at the centre of my thesis were also central to people's lives. However, I had the final editing power in choosing topics and what I would let people say. Some of my friends have read parts of my interpretations of their lives and were happy with it. I hope the rest are too.

Pune

The interest in the *Indian middle class* sparked by liberalisation went hand in hand with an urbanisation of ethnographies on South Asia where researchers have previously focused their attention on rural India and not seldom on the disadvantaged segments. Pune seemed ideal for my research because it was a medium-sized city with a relatively high *middle class* population which had hardly been studied.

Pune – or Poona as the British called it and as still many Puneites refer to it – is a rapidly growing city of four million inhabitants[11] in the state of Maharashtra, India. It is situated 220 km (137 miles) south-east of Mumbai on the edge of the Deccan plateau. Pune is a multi-faceted city which is reflected in its various nicknames: "Queen of the Deccan", "Pensioner's Paradise", "Detroit of India" and "Oxford of the East".

Throughout my fieldwork I lived in a so-called *cosmopolitan*[12] neighbourhood called Dhole Patil Road in the South-east of Pune. It was a typical *middle class* neighbourhood with the obligatory adjacent slum which provided the service personnel for the *middle class* households. Gradually expanding my network I also learned more about the city itself. Its urban morphology is important to

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[11] World Gazetteer. Accessed 22 March 2010 (http://www.world-gazetteer.com)
[12] *Middle class* Puneites used c*osmopolitan* to refer to spaces where people of different castes, religions, and regions of origin met and lived in close proximity, such as a neighbourhood. It might also refer to a space where ideas, goods and images of different origins met, such as a city or a shop. For a summary of the academic debate on cosmopolitanism see Mookherjee 2011a,b.

understanding its inhabitants. Not least because where someone lived may be an indicator of the religious, regional, economic and caste background. While some neighbourhoods like Dhole Patil Road were considered *cosmopolitan*, others were described as *conservative, traditional*, Maharashtrian, or *lower middle class* neighbourhoods. The city, or rather the part where someone resided, featured frequently in explanations for people's practices such as clothing or visiting cafés (cf. Chapter One).

Pune was regarded to be dominated by upper castes, particularly orthodox Brahmins (Palshikar/ Deshpande 2008). In the eighteenth century the Peshwas (Maratha Chief Ministers) made Pune their capital city. The eighteen *peths* or wards emerged which constitute Pune's characteristic core. Despite the absence of functional zoning, the organisation of the *peths* was based on caste, dominated by Brahmins (Diddee/Gupta 2000:12). When the British conquered Pune at the beginning of the 19th century they built a second city, the military cantonment called Camp, to the east of the *peths* city. Though next to each other these two cities seemed worlds apart.

> "The native city of Pune […] was […] a confusing medley of narrow winding lanes, clusters of houses and huts dotted with gardens, shops and numerous temples and shrines of every description, while British Poona or Camp […] was a well-laid-out garden suburb with bungalow complexes, barracks, parade grounds, clubs, imposing public buildings and a neat grid pattern layout." (ibid.:13).

In spite of this diversity and the predominance of non-Marathi speakers in many areas, the city retained its image as a centre of Maharashtrian Hindu and orthodox Brahmin culture until the mid-twentieth century (ibid.:240).

In the 1930s and 40s well-to-do parts of the population started building on the other side of the river in the areas which became Deccan Gymkhana, Prabhat Road, Koregaon Park and Bund Garden (ibid.:13). Leading the way at the turn of the 20th century were educational institutions which required huge grounds unavailable in the city (ibid.:215). Due to its comparatively bearable climate the British, Anglo-Indians and high caste Indians of money had summer houses or retirement homes in Pune. Distinctions were immanent. While the Brahmins of the western *peths* area considered themselves a homogenous and elitist home

of Marathi culture, they perceived the upper class and caste neighbourhood of Deccan Gymkhana, Prabhat Road, Koregaon Park and Bund Garden to be "westernized and belonging to the 'bungalow-culture'" (ibid.:237). The Indian population of Camp was thought of as uncultured and commercial. Camp residents considered themselves to be "cosmopolitan, open and more westernized as against the orthodox and unchanging people of the 'city'" (ibid.:237). It was these *cosmopolitan* neighbourhoods that bred famous Independence fighters such as Phule, Ranade, Tilak and Gokhale.

When the British left after Independence Parsis, Christians and migrant Muslims – groups which closely worked with the British – occupied the bungalows in Camp. The partition migrants preferred to settle in the East of Pune, i.e. at the periphery of the eastern *peths*, in more *cosmopolitan* Camp and the eastern parts of the city surrounding the train station (ibid.: 244). Hence these areas became more *cosmopolitan* in contrast to the Hindu *conservative peths* area. Pune also remained an important military centre (ibid.:247) which contributed to a steady influx of non-locals.

The Emergence of Modern Pune

In 1948 the University of Pune was founded. At the time, eighteen colleges were affiliated to it and over eight thousand students were enrolled. By 2009 more than six hundred colleges were affiliated to the University of Pune and over half a million students were enrolled in total (www.unipune.ac.in). Especially since the 1980s colleges have been mushrooming in and around Pune attracting an ever growing number of national and international students. Hence it acquired the nickname "Oxford of the East" or "Oxford of India".

In the 1960s Pune started its economic growth spurt. When restrictions on industrialisation were implemented in Mumbai, Pune offered a mild climate, basic infrastructure and an educated and skilled workforce (Diddee/Gupta 2000:14). The industrial township of Pimpri-Chinchwad was built at the outskirts of Pune. It started as a 4,000 acre industrial estate and developed into the

largest in Maharashtra with 7,000 units (ibid.:261). Heavy industries and high technology companies moved to Pune such as Kirloskar Oil Engines, Ruston and Hornsby, Cooper Engineering Works, Sandvik Asia, Thyssen Krupp (formerly Buckau-Wolf), Atlas Copco, Alfa Laval and KSB Pimps. When industrial giants like Telco and Philips opened units in Pune, they established Pune as an industrial city (ibid.:262).

In the 1970s and 1980s, car manufactures such as Tatas, Bajaj Auto and Mahindras and Kinetic Engineering settled in Pune. Basic metals, electronics, chemicals, paper, plastic, glass and petroleum were also being produced in Pune (ibid.:263). Pune's industry continues to grow. In 2009 Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen opened manufacturing plants in Pune. The creation of employment attracting people from all over India to Pune led to an explosion of the population in the 1980s (ibid:14). Pune experienced two kinds of immigrants: poor, unskilled workers from the countryside and white collar, highly qualified professionals from other states in India (ibid.:266). The growing number of *middle clas*s professionals and businesspeople continued to settle in a ring around the old city in Deccan, Koregaon Park and Bund Garden (ibid.:249). In the 1990s *middle class* residential areas started to move outwards swallowing the surrounding farmland. Kothrud was long considered the most attractive area in Pune and was known as the fastest growing suburb in India (Diddee/Gupta 2000:253).

Infosys, the NASDAQ listed global consulting and IT services company, was founded in Pune as early as 1981. By the 1990s Pune had become an IT hub. Mahindra Tech (formerly Satyam), Xansa, TCS and others followed. From 1991 onwards, companies such as HSBC Global Technology, IBM, Siemens, EDS, I-Flex, Cognizant, Symantec and Zensar opened Software Technology Parks around Pune.

Since Independence Pune has developed into a hip and trendy city, a cutting-edge educational and industrial hub, attracting people from all over India and

the world. As such, it has become very diverse with regard to people's region of origin and may serve as a safe haven from social discrimination for both the highly educated (*middle class*) as well as unskilled workers. This image of Pune is important for the self-perception of its inhabitants. The café culture feeds on and contributes to Pune's globally relevant image.

At the same time, right-wing Marathi vernacular and Hindu nationalistic politics have been animating the political landscape in Pune for the past twenty years. The 1990s in India witnessed not only the liberalisation of the Indian economy but also the rise of Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is often captured in the word *Hindutva*, a form of nationalism based on the assumption of the supremacy of Hindus (Guha 2007:646). Promoting Hindu nationalism, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party = "Indian people party") became the second most influential party in India with the INC (Indian National Congress). A considerable percentage of the middle class supported the BJP because it offered a market-oriented economic policy, an US-American friendly foreign policy and "an appropriate dosage of chauvinistic cultural-nationalist assertion" (Palshikar 2001:172). Maharashtra saw a similar development where the BJP ruled together with the Shiv Sena from 1995 to 1999 (Palshikar 2004:1499). The Shiv Sena was founded in Mumbai in 1966 as a small group promoting the interests of the Marathi-speaking job seekers. It wanted Maharashtra for the Maharashtrians and campaigned against immigrants from other states. It expanded beyond Mumbai in the 1980s and rose to national prominence in the 1990s (ibid.:1497). At the beginning of the 21st century, the Shiv Sena realised that it cannot sustain political power without non-Maharashtrian voters and that it had to acknowledge the reality of globalisation. It continued to promote the interests of Marathi speakers and pursues Marathi vernacular politics but incorporated a strong ideology of Hindutva and the interests of people who live in Mumbai or Maharashtra more generally.

Although Mumbai remains the Shiv Sena's stronghold and the centre of most political agitations, issues of Hindu nationalism and discourses on the role of immigrants and Marathi speakers played a role in Pune as well. The Shiv Sena

was governing the Pune municipality in a coalition with the National Congress Party since 2007 (Sahi 2008). Note the strategic political use of space by right wing parties like the Shiv Sena and the BJP for their interests. In Pune the Shiv Sena and the youth arm of the BJP, the BJYM (Bharatiya Janta Yuva Morcha), have repeatedly raided nightclubs, bars, college parties and public places where young couples meet (Habersack 2010:122-3). They conceive their work to be social as well as political. Their proclaimed aim is to defend 'Indian culture' against 'westernisation'. Activities such as going to nightclubs and bars or dating are considered to not be 'Indian'. They thus try to reinvent Pune as a stronghold of 'Marathi', respectively 'Indian culture' (ibid:120-24).

While the *middle class* might endorse the BJP and its Hindu nationalism, it was unlikely to vote the Shiv Sena since this party did not represent its interests (cf. Palshikar 2001). For example, many members of the *middle class* in Pune were themselves immigrants from other states. Furthermore they were well aware that their comfortable lifestyle depended on the work of migrant workers. Palshikar (2001:158) argues that the Shiv Sena gets more support the lower one gets on the social ladder – caste and class-wise. The young people of the café culture I met were apolitical in the sense that they did not participate in any political party activities. This was a general trend amongst the Indian middle classes and especially the middle class youth who were disgusted with mainstream politics and increasingly engaged in new social movements such as NGOs (ibid.). Thus some of the café culture members were involved in environmental or social awareness movements such as Open Space. They disagreed with the ideologies of the Shiv Sena and the BJYM which they perceived as *conservative* and *backward*. These parties clearly did not act in the café culture crowd's interests. Going to bars and nightclubs, and engaging in dating was part of the café culture.

According to a survey conducted in 2006 (Palshikar/ Deshpande 2008), upper castes continued to dominate Pune numerically. Almost half of its population were immigrants, however. This profile was reflected in the *middle class* people I met. The *middle classes* accounted for about thirty per cent of Pune's

population.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One sets the stage by describing the café culture: its spaces, its participants and their shared practices and moral aesthetic standards. The cafés fulfilled a need for space of young *middle class* Puneites that was not fulfilled anywhere else. The chapter also introduces the theoretical framework of my analysis. Chapter Two explores how the café culture crowd understood and positioned themselves in their world through their dressed bodies. I argue that by wearing jeans they not only clearly distinguished themselves from their elders and the rest of society but also communicated 'normality' before an imagined global audience. In Chapter Three the morality of Indian conviviality as experienced by young adults at home is introduced, i.e. what was regarded as appropriate behaviour in interpersonal relationships. Based on the ideal of the patriarchal joint family, the assumption was that one lives in life-long dependency on one's parents. Filial obedience, mutual involvement and caring were valued highly. However, the young generation grew up under different circumstances. They were literally and figuratively given more space. They strived for more individual autonomy, freedom, privacy and independence.

Chapter Four examines the distinct character of the café culture friendships and its relation to *Indian* personhood. Friends often spent more time in company of each other than with their families and have assumed some of the roles of the family such as caring, control, protection, learning, guiding, communion, etc. Through practices of sharing, caring, teasing and collectively participating in frowned-upon activities that they considered *cool*, the young adults were nurturing a strong sense of community, as well as breaking down social distance and hierarchies. They thus asserted their independence from their parents and expressed individual autonomy and preferences. However, I argue that friendship was interpreted as a more caring relationship than I was used to, involving a sense of intimate concern for the wellbeing of friends, which often

felt intrusive and like a kind of control similar to that of parents over children. So individual autonomy was measured and limited by this mutual involvement and control.

Chapters Five and Six illuminate two major life decisions which in the past were made by parents or elders: education and marriage. Chapter Five explores the nail-biting, agonising importance of education for the *middle class* in India. More often than not, young adults pursued the careers that their parents had chosen for them. But education and career were increasingly considered a means to self-fulfilment. More and more young adults were struggling with their parents to follow their hearts. Chapter Six discusses the practices of dating, sex and marriage amongst the café culture crowd. Though marriage continued to be the norm and a family matter, the young generation had found ways of negotiating the when, how and who – not least with previous generations paving the way. How better to express one's autonomy and independence as a woman than by wearing tight jeans, drinking alcohol, and having boyfriends and premarital sex? There was a move observable from patriarchal, or at least gerontocratic arrangements, towards more negotiated practices which included the children in decision-making and promoted equality.

1 Café Culture

It is three o'clock in the afternoon and Mocha's is getting busy. There is a group of college students, some discussing homework, a couple cuddling and others sharing a hookah. Two young women are trying to blow rings in the air with the smoke. Three young men in suits drink beer and share a hookah. A young woman sits down, smokes a cigarette and leaves again. A young couple takes her place. Later another big group arrives. They order hookahs, the guys drink beer, the young women alcopops[13].

Pune, 22 March 2008

"Ours is an arranged marriage. My mother's friend and his mother's friend is the same lady. So they came over to our house, his parents and him. And we chatted for a while, with our parents first and then I said I'm interested in meeting him alone. And then he said the same thing. And then we met up for coffee, three or four times."

Reshma, 24 years old (10 February 2009)

"Post 91[14] was created as a faith in the new India. As a faith in the awareness of what wealth can do for our society. And wealth can do the wrong things too. [...] But the advantages of being wealthy cannot be ignored. And I'm showing a faith in that. So I'm celebrating that. By creating this concept. Which is a buffet. Lots of food. Lots of alcohol. Drink with your responsibility. I mean I don't wanna tell you 'don't drink!' I'm just gonna tell, you know, you know your body. Drink as much as you want as long as you can walk straight. You know. And you don't drink and drive. I'm fine with it. So you drink as much as you want. You celebrate your life. You have money. Spend it. Because unless you spend it, it's not gonna go around. I wanted people to believe in the new process and the new India. In an economics which is not only growing but also perception of people towards wealth. Indians generally throughout their existence have always admired poverty. I mean I'm not talking about now. I'm talking

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13 Flavoured alcoholic beverages.
14 Post 91 is the name of Pravin's second restaurant. The name is a reference to the post-liberalisation era which began in 1991.

about when I was growing up.”

Pravin, 42 years old, owner of two restaurants (7 January 2009)

Cafés and similar spaces, such as restaurants, bars and nightclubs fulfilled a need for space by young *middle class* Puneites that was not met anywhere else. In his statement Pravin highlighted the interrelations between money, changing social values and the emergence of new social spaces. He advertised the celebration of wealth, instead of poverty, as a departure from the past. Implicit in his call for celebration was an invocation of a 'right to leisure' with individual responsibility. Pravin invited the consumption of alcohol, which used to be an illicit activity, as long as people drank responsibly.

The cafés offered space away from home, out of the reach of parental control. This implied that the young adults could not do what they wanted at home and that there were things they would not do at home that they engaged in at the cafés. Friends coming together in cafés was crucial for the creation, performance and transformation of a distinct café culture habitus. I understand habitus to be a cultural competence, embodied as cultural tools that people can use flexibly to make things happen for themselves and move others.

Young Puneites knew exactly what was possible and impossible in the social spaces of the café culture as opposed to at home. Through their use of space like cafés and their various activities the young generation sought to distinguish itself from their parents and the past. The café culture promised freedom from past constraints. It allowed one to transcend the local and domesticate the global (cf. Rofel 2007). One young man in Pune acknowledged the different worlds at home and in the café culture thus: "Keeping a balance is not a problem once you get used to it. It probably depends on at what age you get exposed to the other stuff". I inquired what 'other stuff'.

> "Not the *conventional* or *traditional* stuff that you know from home. I got exposed to it after school. It broadened my horizon and changed my views. That's when your views start to differ from your parents' views."

Young people in Pune characterised their parents' as the *traditional* world. Like young people in post-socialist China (Rofel 2007:126) they sought to transcend this tradition "in order to become desirable, globalized subjects". It was part of a

young person's habitus to be able to move with ease between the more *traditional* world at home and the café culture (cf. Favero 2005:127). Jeffrey (2010:20-1), paraphrasing Bourdieu, highlights that the ability "to succeed routinely within multiple spheres of social competition" distinguishes the *middle class* and instills confidence. The emergence of a highly visible commodified leisure culture targeted at and appropriated by the young *middle class* fostered the creation of new social practices and values. It served to distinguish the young from the old generation. The café culture promised freedom: from a supposedly austere and constrained past, of individual choice, to be part of the world, of self-expression and fulfilment. Through their practices the young adults embodied who they wanted and felt they ought to be: by embracing consumerism to express their selves they can claim the global and to be part of the world, while at the same time domesticating the global (Rofel 2007:123).

This chapter describes the spaces of the café culture, followed by an exploration of the friendship practices young adults enjoyed in these spaces. Both were vital for the café culture habitus.

Spaces of the Café Culture

The cafés my young informants frequented were a relatively recent phenomenon. They were part of the transformation that city-scapes in India have undergone since the economic liberalisation in 1991. They were a manifestation of what Favero (2005:6) calls "travel of imagination", an exchange of ingredients coming from all over the world creating the multi-referential life-world my young informants lived in, appropriated and shaped. That the cafés mushroomed after economic liberalisation suggests that prosperity and free markets are necessary to actually participate in a wider range of possible lives, i.e. not only imagine but also experience them. These spaces of global consumption presuppose and foster a change in the way people understand themselves and their world.

There were two types of cafés: the coffee shops and the cafés-cum-restaurants.

Two major Indian coffee shop chains competed for costumers in Pune. These types of cafés are modelled on the USAmerican café chain Starbucks, which in turn was inspired by Italian coffee corner bars. Travelling from Italy to the US and on to India the concept morphed each time.

Café Coffee Day (CCD) was the first Indian café chain launched in Bangalore in 1996. With forty-eight branches, it was the best represented café chain in Pune. In its internet presentation (http://www.cafecoffeeday.com) the customer profile stated that "the café is a meeting place for 15-29 year olds, both male and female […]: teen-agers form 25% of our customers while 38% of the customers are between 20 and 24 years and another 23% belong to the age group of 25-29 years. Students and young professionals comprise around 72% of our customers." The cafés cater to "the need for a relaxed and fun 'hangout' for the emerging urban youth […]". The customer profile shows that the café culture is framed by age and lifestyle. The interiors of the CCD branches in Pune followed the international trend to contrive cafés as lounges. Sofas, TVs showing MTV India, Indian and international popular music playing in the background, and dimmed light in the evenings promoted a living room like, relaxed atmosphere. The menu offered the worldwide standardised variety of coffee choices, from espresso to Americano and cold coffee sundaes, along with other drinks such as tea and milkshakes. CCD served a mix of *Indian* and *Western* food, from chicken hot dogs to vegetable samosas and doughnuts. As common in Pune the menu was divided into *veg* (vegetarian) and *non-veg* (non-vegetarian) food choices.

Barista, the other big coffee shop chain, opened its first branch in 2000 in New Delhi. It had four outlets in Pune. Its internet presentation read similar to CCD's. Barista put more emphasis on the coffee bar aspect. The array of coffee choices ranged from Italian espresso and cappuccino to American flavoured varieties and to South Indian coffee. The food was a blend of *Indian* and *Western*, e.g. chicken *tikka* sandwich, chilli *paneer* wraps and muffins. As in CCD, the waiters in Barista were young people, mostly from less privileged backgrounds than the patrons, wearing uniforms, often including a baseball cap.

All the CCD and Barista branches in Pune were air-conditioned.

Jane Cowan (1991:190) argued about the emergence of the *Kafeteria* in Greece that it created a "sophisticated" and "European" atmosphere and conveyed "prestige as symbol of modern sophistication and civilized luxury" (ibid.:199). This resembles the development in Pune, except that 'American' should perhaps be substituted for 'European', as Nisbett (2009:64) suggests for Bangalore. Like American-style fast-food restaurants in China, these cafés in Pune expressed "cleanliness, impersonality, and a world that can be carried anywhere" (Rofel 2007:120). Rofel (ibid.) aptly describes American fast-food restaurants in China as the "new dreamworlds of cosmopolitan consumption". The food was not the attraction but the "enclosed space of temporality where one can distance oneself from what appears antiquated, including the recent past" (ibid.). Furthermore it was about displaying that one was able to navigate these spaces, which were a combination of a "non-place" like an airport (Augé 1995) and a "street fair" (Rofel 2007:121). I argue that the same holds true for the spaces of the café culture in Pune. They were not evidently *Indian*. However, Favero's (2005:213) explications have to be added that these popular leisure spaces reveal the "co-existence and exchange of messages between 'Indian' and foreign worlds" and the young Indians' fascination with '*India*'. For one thing, inspiration did not only come from *the West*, as will become clear shortly in the description of other types of cafés in Pune. Furthermore *Indian* things were presented as *cool* alongside foreign things as apparent, for example, in the fusion food. Hence the café culture transcended the local, while at the same time domesticating the global, similarly to Rofel's (2007) observations of practices of young people in post-socialist China.

Another feature most branches of CCD and Barista shared was a number of seats placed along window fronts looking out onto busy streets. These windows may be interpreted as an invitation. They reflect what lies, according to Fernandes (2006:xviii), at the "heart of the construction" of the new *middle class*, i.e. the assumption that anyone can become part of it. Phadke (2007:1514), on the other hand, argued that the windows function as barriers which keep out "risks and uncertainties" in the form of lower classes. In her

understanding coffee shops are not

> "public 'public' spaces, but privatised spaces that masquerade as public spaces, where entry is ostensibly open but in reality regulated through various subtle and overt acts of (intentional and unintentional) intimidation and exclusion." (ibid.)

Phadke opines that the suggested safety renders them attractive places for the *middle class* to be entertained, especially for young women. However, the patrons of cafés had to enact a "class habitus" or "class respectability" (ibid.).

An alternative interpretation of the window fronts relates gender and safety in a different way. If secluded from public view this kind of public space facilitated illicit activities such as drinking alcohol, smoking, dating and potentially even worse. Hence they used to be regarded as male spaces. The windows guaranteed and allowed everyone to see that there were no illicit activities going on. Thus young women and men could frequent them without fear of losing their respectability. However, before the October 2008 public smoking ban, some branches offered partly secluded outside areas where the young patrons were free to smoke. Not only young men but also young women used these spaces to light a cigarette.

The cafés-cum-restaurants differed in several meaningful ways from the coffee shops. They were secluded, smoking was allowed and they often served alcohol. This did not mean that they were less frequented by young women. It rather meant that here they were hidden from prying eyes, which facilitated the consumption of cigarettes, hookahs and alcohol or engagement in other frowned-upon activities such as dating. In the following a selection of these cafés is described.

With its surrounding walls, its cosy sofas, divans and porch swings 'Mocha – Coffees and Conversations' was the only café chain which offered this ambience in Pune. It opened its first branch in Mumbai in 2000 and has two cafés in Pune (www.mocha.co.in):

> "Mocha draws its inspiration from the […] Coffee House of Morocco and Turkey, where people used to gather over hot coffee, Hookahs and just talk, and enjoy each other's company. […] The service is informal, casual, and even laid back. We encourage our patrons to linger. […] the ambience is inspired by different parts of the world, like a flea market, with world music setting the mood."

Mocha served the greatest variety of coffee blends and specialities from all over the world, including two Indian coffee varieties, along with a fusion of *Indian* and foreign food (*veg* and *non-veg*), e.g. *panini* with chicken *tikka* topping. Things *Indian* and foreign were hardly distinguishable. They blended into a colourful, comfortable setting. The reference to a flea market was echoed by many of my informants who stated that India was taking the best from all worlds.

East Street Café, another place that offered seclusion, was an interesting blend of *Indian* and foreign images. It opened in 2007 and was known for the red double-decker bus marking the entrance. The downstairs dining area was designed after London' Oxford Street, including shop fronts and old street lamps. The upstairs area featured "Moroccan-style booths" to relax, as my informants called them. Like Mocha's, it was open for lunch and dinner and invited patrons to hang out all day. The coffee was rather simple compared with other places, but it served alcoholic beverages and hookahs. The food section of the menu was divided into *Indian*, *International* and *Chinese* cuisine.

Shisha's opened in 2003 as a Jazz Café. The divans laid out with Persian carpets and the popular hookahs gave it an oriental flair. The food menu offered *Indian (veg and non-veg), Iranian* and *Western*. The coffee was also rather simple but they served alcohol. Here Indian and foreign musicians regularly performed. Sometimes they jammed together. Shisha's was popular with foreigners. Indian businesspeople liked to take their foreign guests there.

Though the above mentioned cafés were new, the very existence of such places was not. They have antecedents in coffee houses, hotels, and in Iranian cafés. Coffee houses were first opened by the British at the end of the 18th century (Burton 1993). By the 20th century the English-educated Indian elite had taken to coffee and opened coffee hotels (Venkatachalapathy 2006), followed by the India Coffee House which attracted the Indian elite, intellectuals, politicians and businessmen alike (BBC 2009). *Irani cafés* presented an alternative to other eateries because they "offered a chance for variety and a more leisurely enjoyment of inexpensive meals" (Conlon 1995:102).

According to Diddee and Gupta (2000: 235) the Pune *middle class* was initiated to the delights of eating out in the 1930s. The earliest eateries that cropped up were located in the old city and served "traditional fare". The first *Irani* restaurant was Lucky Restaurant in the Deccan Gymkhana area.

> "[...] it also served the forbidden eggs and bread. To go in there was itself an act of courage for the young men of the city and to order an omelette an act of revolutionary dimensions! Lucky Restaurant became a part of the consciousness and nostalgia for generations of students who passed time there discussing politics or pursuing romance." (ibid.)

Lucky Restaurant did not exist anymore but one of its earliest successors, Cafe Good Luck, was still serving *Irani* food in 2008. Another place that has seen generations of students, businesspeople and families was Vaishali's.

Farrukh Dhondy recounting his childhood in a Parsi neighbourhood of Camp in the 1950s writes about two corner cafés:

> "The two cafes were the hangouts of the older schoolboys, the college boys, the idle petty businessmen who ran the bakeries or the bicycle hire shops, the pious retired gentlemen with Parsi caps and newspapers who'd while away their hours in the bustle of company, the unemployed, the thieves, the layabouts and the few masters of the Chowk who live, in one way or another, off them all." (Dhondy 2008: 3)

The author also confirms the economic differences that were apparent in the different kinds of cafés:

> "The Naz cafe on the corner of Main Street [...] was an altogether grander place than either the Kayani or the Sachapir restaurants on the Chowk. It had glass tables and a garden and terrace. If you sat in the garden in the dry seasons, or on the covered terrace, you had to buy a double char. The poor stayed downstairs. College boys hung around there all evening, showing off their clothes by parading Main Street and returning periodically to the Naz which was used as a meeting place and a low-grade bistro. It had a juke box and the reputation for being the fastest place in town." (ibid.:102)

To this café Dhondy ventured more during his college days in the early sixties. However, there is yet another step up on the economic ladder:

> "[Ajit Gandhi] set out to conquer Poona society and began spending the money his dad sent him in the expensive cafes, sitting in the Central Coffee Bar, or CCB as we called it, and flattering the rich young people who drive cars and showed off shamelessly." (ibid.:119)

> "'I've been with the heavy punters,' Ajit Gandhi would say when he returned each month from the Central Coffee Bar set to the humbler company of the Chowk. [...] 'From riches to rags, from espresso coffee to single char, that's the story of my life, sonny,' Ajit would reply." (ibid.129)

Dhondy's memories show that coffee-drinking and going to certain kinds of cafés were status markers. He also vividly elucidates that cafés were social

places where Pune's young male adults enjoyed spending their leisure time or pursuing a romance (ibid.: 92). The eateries and cafés that emerged in the 20th century catered to the male *middle class*. Just like in Europe until relatively recently, coffee houses and eateries in India were considered male spaces (cf. Cowan 1991, Nisbett 2009, Osella/Osella 1998).

What was new in 2008, however, was the pervasiveness of such social spaces and the sharp rise in prices. Before the 1990s few alternatives existed to either five star hotels on the top end or to roadside tea and coffee stalls or *dhaba*[15] type places on the lower end. The new cafés hence fulfilled the *middle class'* need for space. Furthermore the cafés were a novelty because they catered explicitly to the young generation, providing them with a new space. This was especially true for young women who were for the first time openly and on a large scale invited to be out in the public in certain 'privatised public spaces'. The cafés thus challenged gender norms (cf. Jeffrey 2010:101). Last but not least these spaces were new in that their interiors were not recognisable as *Indian*. They could have been anywhere, thus transcending the local. Yet the global was also 'Indianised' by designing the interior after Oxford Street in London, by creating a Persian Jazz café or by serving fusion food. They represented one momentary figuration of globalisation (cf. Rofel 2007).

The above list of cafés is by no means exhaustive. The examples chosen are rather an illustrative selection of these types of new social spaces. Furthermore, it was not only cafés that fulfilled the need for a social space for this particular group of young people. Again, in what follows I have no intention of listing every locale in Pune. The examples are illustrative.

Alternative Social Spaces

With flashy red or orange decorations and young people in jeans hanging out inside, outside, and around the tightly parked motorbikes on the road, cafés have changed the Indian city-scapes. But there were other, old and new, social spaces frequented by young Puneites. The restaurant scene in Pune was

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[15] Dhabas are simple street eateries known for their "sometimes frantic functional concern for eating quickly and without distraction" (Conlon 1995:102).

flourishing, constantly expanding the variety of food from all over the world, which ranged from *Chinese* through *Italian* to Domino's pizza with *Indian* toppings and spices, in addition to the *veg* and *non-veg Indian* restaurants. Except for some very expensive five star ones, restaurants were generally affordable for the café culture crowd. They ranged from small, rather inexpensive places to fancy, more expensive ones. The following is a sort of typology of different places differentiated by nuances of habitus.

Twenty-one-year-old Arun used to almost daily meet one or two of his (male) college friends, who lived in the same neighbourhood, in a *teashop* nearby. He described it as a "dark hole in the wall". Meeting his friends there was a secretive act – in front of his parents – since the main purpose was to smoke cigarettes. Sometimes they would only meet for the length of two cigarettes and a chai. Other times they would sit for hours and talk over several cigarettes, chai and some snacks. A (typically small) glass of chai was Rs3, snacks between Rs10 and Rs30. I wanted to join them once but Arun replied: "It's not exactly a girls place. You would get lots of strange looks." He elaborated that it was "not really a *middle class* place". Sometimes there would be some students; however the workers who mainly frequented it were *lower middle class*. Hence young *middle class* men had the option of using these more affordable and accessible places as alternatives to fulfil a need for space away from home. However, Arun's choice of words indicates that even he and his friends thought that it was not quite 'proper'. Contrary to the above mentioned cafés it was 'typical Indian'. Here the functionality (proximity, affordability) and the friendship seemed to dominate for young men.

Vaishali's was a typical *Indian middle class* restaurant from the pre-liberalisation era. Serving South Indian food since the 1950s it was a favourite eatery with young and old. It was close to several colleges and hence constantly spitting out herds of students. Most young informants mentioned it as one of their favourite hang-out places along with a CCD or Barista. It was an institution in Pune. With a meal costing around Rs50 it was at the lower price range compared to CCD or Barista where a simple coffee would start at Rs50. By comparison roadside food stalls, competing for customers at busy places such

as colleges, bus stations and office buildings, offered popular Maharahstrian snacks such as *bhel puri*, *pani puri* or *vada pav* starting at around Rs10. Vaishali's seemed to represent the 'globalisation of the local': it was Indian and global at the same time, popular with all generations.

Two of Arun's best college friends lived on their own since their parents resided in different towns. The three of them would eat at Foodies periodically, a small restaurant with a long menu divided into *Indian* food (from vegetarian to tandoori chicken kebabs), *Chinese* food and "our special menu for the people from other lands" offering "Fish'n'Chips" (English), "Kentuckey Fried Chicken" (USAmerican), "Malai Curry" (Thai) but also "Chicken Kofta Curry" (Indian) and "Aloo Bhaja" (Bengali). Here prices ranged from Rs55 to Rs300 for a meal. Foodies had several branches in Pune, all located in newly built *middle class* areas. They were frequented by young *middle class* couples and families who often took the food home. This place exemplarily showcases the *middle class*' desire for global yet 'Indianised' consumption.

This desire was also evident in the ever growing variety of restaurants specifically catering to the *middle class*, e.g. *Indian veg* and *non-veg*, *Chinese*, *Italian*, *Thai*, and *Swiss*. Prices ranged from Rs200 to Rs500 for a meal. These restaurants were favourite places for a date, a birthday or a group of friends coming together on a Saturday afternoon. Contrary to the cafés-cum-restaurants these restaurants were also frequented by families. No alcohol was served. However, some of these restaurants explicitly catered to the young generation. In the evenings and on weekends they were restaurants-cum-bars. A DJ would play Indian and international music, a barkeeper showed his handicraft. These were places for a Friday night out with a group of friends and with the purpose of having fun, which might include getting drunk. Late at night, after a night out in a club, five star hotel were the only 'appropriate' places open which served food. Friends would share a couple of meals and split the bill. Five star restaurants were also popular choices for a date.

In Pune the passage from restaurant to bar or nightclub was fluent since all bars and nightclubs also served food, and many restaurants served alcohol and

played music. There were several bars and pubs in Pune. Going to a pub or bar was called *pubbing* based on the expression 'clubbing' for going to a nightclub. Thousand Oaks was an *Indian* interpretation of a *British* pub. It was a solitary stone and wood house with a big garden where people enjoyed *Indian* meals. The inside was decorated with wood and colourful windows. The front part was reserved for people eating. The rear part housed a big bar with typical bar seating and a DJ. Here smoking was allowed and alcohol flowed steadily. Mixed groups of friends indulged in alcoholic beverages and sang along with the music, whether *Indian* or *English*. High Spirits was a bar with a long cocktail menu, fussball and table tennis tables in its big garden, a two-storey indoor space with dance floor, karaoke nights, film evenings and live music. During the year of my fieldwork a Hard Rock Café opened. Its prices lay at the upper end. Another very expensive place, Stone Water Grill, opened right next to it and combined restaurant, bar and club. Most of the space was outdoors. The long bar was shiny and lit in red and orange. At its very end was the DJ booth. A tent-like building housed the dinner tables. The entire outside area was filled with various seating arrangements. There was a water labyrinth and leather seats carved out of it with tables that glowed. The premises led down to a garden at the river banks. My young friends often complained about the enormous bills one had to pay there. Admission alone was Rs1500. Prices on the menu started at Rs500. However, if asked to join a group or invited for a birthday party they were all eager to go.

Pune offered diverse nightclubs. They were basically designed like nightclubs all over the world: darkened rooms, big dance floor, DJ box, wooden and/ or shiny decorations, lit bars and loud music. The 'Indianisation' of nightclubs was evident in the fact that one could order a full course meal in most of them, that a lot of dance remixes of Bollywood songs were played, that the patrons were (more often than not exclusively) Indian and that some parties ended abruptly when the police came and demanded more *hafta*[16].

The above list followed a loose order with places getting more expensive

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[16] *Hafta* is a bribe paid to the police, in this case to allow the club to stay open late even though it probably already had a license to that effect.

towards the end. Most frequently young Puneites visited cafés where they sometimes ordered nothing. Restaurants, bars and nightclubs were visited rather occasionally, on weekends and for special occasions. Simply the fact that young adults had the money to spend on meeting their friends in such new social spaces places them at least in the *middle* if not *upper middle class*. That young adults for the first time had disposable money and were hence attractive consumers was only part of the story. Society's attitude also had to change to allow young adults to seek out their own spaces and cultivate new social norms.

However, there was a cheaper way of hanging out, namely at someone's house. Arun had the apartment to himself since his brother moved to Bangalore two years earlier and both his parents worked until five p.m. He occasionally had parties at his house involving alcohol, smoking and food. Arun also had a friend who had his own apartment. His parents lived in a different city and Arun described him as "filthy rich". His apartment lend itself to have (male) drinking parties. Arun regularly met his (male) football friends on the society's grounds where they used to play football to hang out, drink and smoke. Young women entertained themselves in a similar way. Parents out of town or out for a dinner invitation would present an opportunity to invite friends over and drink alcohol. I did not know any young women living on their own. My *house* regularly became a place to drink and smoke, especially late at night. In general there were more young men than women when going out to bars and nightclubs. Young women were subject to stricter curfews and restrictions of movement in general. However, many young women employed sophisticated strategies to outwit their parents. It was common practice to tell parents that they were sleeping over at a friend's house. This way they were free to go to a nightclub with whomever they wanted.

Maps of Café Culture

This section takes up Favero's (2005:222) suggestion that "maps of leisure", or where people go in a city, sheds light on the way social actors understand themselves and the world around them. Where my young friends went regularly within Pune centred around education or work, consumption and leisure. On a

daily basis, they travelled relatively long distances, especially to meet friends, hang around in cafés or go out to restaurants and bars. Their mobility was a distinctive feature of their generation and their class. All of the young adults I met had access to motorised transport. *Two-wheelers* were the most popular option. While most young men had their own motorbike, young women tended to ride a motor scooter. A young man with a scooter was subject to teasing from his friends. A young woman with a motorbike was admired. Few young adults had access to a car. Leela once commented:

> "Going out is less of a problem for the *upper classes*, the very rich people. The parents are more lenient. The kids go out with the driver or drive a car themselves. The problem is more in the *middle class*. They are influenced by everything. The poor live in an all-together different world. To them it does not even occur since they do not have the money. It is all happening in the *middle class*."

Pune's concentration of cafés, restaurants and bars sheds more light on the café culture and socio-spatial relations. Three neighbourhoods form the focus of my ethnography: Koregaon Park, Camp and Deccan Gymkhana. These were the places my young friends frequented predominantly.

The best known and most popular neighbourhood for going out was Koregaon Park which attracted a constant crowd of locals and tourists, day and night. Koregaon Park was situated far northeast of the old *Peth* area and north of Camp. It developed from a jungle into the luxurious home for Indian princes during the 1920s to 1940s and later for government officials (Diddee/ Gupta 2000: 194). After Independence, Koregaon Park became part of planned neighbourhood developments which attracted *middle class* residents. Since the 1980s more and more plots were sold, the old mansions torn down and exclusive apartment blocks called *societies* built. This was a Pune- if not India-wide phenomenon. In 1974 the Indian mystic Osho moved to Pune and opened an *ashram* in Koregaon Park. Its international organisation yearly attracted thousands of foreigners and Indians to Pune. Though some of the cafés, eateries and bars catered to international tourists, the bulk of the money was earned with young Puneites. It is only in the last five or six years that international cuisines, from *Chinese* to *Italian* and *Southeast Asian,* have found lovers in Pune (Diddee/ Gupta 2000: 287). Koregaon Park was the nucleus for these restaurants. There were constantly new places opening. High Spirits and

Shisha's lay on a road that extended from Koregoan Park and was full of restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

Camp was the colloquial name for the Cantonment area which was built by the British army and taken over by the Indian army after Independence. Its Eastern part was still mainly a bungalow neighbourhood, while its Western part – closer to the old city and populated by Parsis, Muslims and other communities who had business with the British – was a tangle of narrow lanes and densely populated plots. The dividing line was North Main Road, now called Mahatma Gandhi Road. It was a very popular shopping area, especially for "*Western* clothes" as my young informants declared. Main Road and the parallel East Street hosted many restaurants, old and new, including the first *Chinese* restaurant in Pune, branches of CCD and Barista each, the East Street Café and several pubs such as Thousand Oaks.

Deccan Gymkhana and Erandwana evolved when educational institutions were looking for large grounds at the turn of the 20th century. Fergusson College (1895), Gokhale Institute of Economics (1905), Ranade Research Institute and the College of Agriculture (both around 1908) were located here (Diddee/ Gupta 2000: 215). Many intellectuals and national leaders such as Gopal Krishna Ghokale and Mahatma Phule built their houses here. After Independence and especially in the 1960s both areas were part of the same planned neighbourhood development as Koregaon Park and became one of the most attractive *middle class* neighbourhoods in Pune. Due to the many colleges this area was always bustling with students who enjoyed their breaks in either one of the old restaurants such as Café Good Luck and Vaishali's, like generations before them, or in one of the new establishments such as Barista, Café Mocha or CCD.

Few young adults lived in these neighbourhoods. Most of them travelled quite a distance to meet their friends in these places. It is noteworthy that they rarely visited the old centre of Pune which they classified as "poor", "*conservative*", "*orthodox*" and "more *traditional*". Favero (2005:222) described a similar phenomenon for young men in Delhi who described Old Delhi as "the 'authentic'

part of the city" but hardly ever went there unless for a specific reason. Young Puneites headed to the centre to buy *Indian* clothes or go to the temple. Mostly they avoided it, however. It seemed as if it were the *India* they wanted to leave behind.

Pune's café culture in 2008 gathered in the three parts of the city which evolved as the princely neighbourhood, as the British seat of colonial domination and as the educational hub. For Koregaon Park one can trace a development from princely residences to civil servant's residences to *middle* and *upper class* residences. Camp developed from a (British) army/ civil servant and businesspeople residency to a *middle class* residency. Deccan Gymkhana was first populated with educational institutions, then by educators and finally also developed into a *middle class* area. Hence one might conclude that the leisure culture was always designed for an educated, English-speaking elite.

Defining the Indian *middle class* this way is not new. Indeed it was part of their self-understanding to be English educated. However, the *middle class* did not see itself as an elite. Rather the elite was what they distinguished themselves from on the upper end. The *middle class* saw itself as the "common men" or "Everyman" (Baviskar/Ray 2011). (*Middle class*) Politics and media successfully created this image of the *middle class*. Pravin, the restaurant owner, an intelligent man, for example said:

> "I come from a *middle class* family, which is primarily quite the largest bulk of Indians that you would see anywhere. I think the numbers now are close to about four hundred or three hundred fifty million people in this country."

Given that India has more than one billion inhabitants, considering the *middle class* "the largest bulk of Indians" can only be interpreted as a conviction based on the *middle class*' conceived importance rather than on its actual size. Pravin actually hinted at that by adding: "largest bulk of Indians that you would see anywhere". Since the economic liberalisation the Indian *middle class* has become more and more visible in the media as well as on the street. They are depicted and perceived as the main beneficiaries of economic liberalisation. In this regard they claimed elite status, namely being the avant-garde of the country promoting modernity, democracy and economic liberalisation (ibid.).

The café culture realised this public display of the *middle class* as the main consumer class in India. It provides the image of a prospering, globalised India. It shows that the young generation valued consumption as a means for freedom and distinction from parents and the past. Through their consumer practices, they embodied who they wanted and felt they ought to be: citizens of the world, at the same time transcending the local and domesticating the global. They did not perceive this as a process of *westernisation* coerced from outside like their parents did. Rather they felt they were part of creating "momentary figurations we might call 'globalisation'" (Rofel 2007:25).

The second half of this chapter illuminates how young Puneites used the spaces of the café culture and what these spaces meant to them. Through their use of the spaces like cafés and the appertaining activities the young generation distinguished itself from their parents and the past.

Morality of Conviviality: Amongst Friends in the Café Culture

Thus far I have described the new social spaces that the café culture has carved out and appropriated. Now I turn to the new social norms, the practices and moralising about them, which challenged the values of the parents' generation and wider society. The activities included *timepass*, consuming, sharing, caring and teasing, dating and public display of affection, smoking cigarettes and hookahs and consuming alcohol. While cafés provided the space for these activities, they were carried out in the context of friendships (cf. Nisbett 2009:67). Similar to Nisbett's observations of young middle class men in a cybercafé in Bangalore, getting together as friends was essential to the creation and appropriation of a young *middle class* habitus in Pune. Other work on youth cultures has observed the "socially productive nature of hanging out" (Jeffrey 2010:92, Cowan 1991, Herrera/Bayat 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Liechty 2003).

This section hence illuminates the Indian *middle class* not just in terms of consumption – as many authors have since the economic liberalisation – but also in terms of a shared moralising as Nisbett (2007), inspired by van Wessel

(2004), suggests. Van Wessel argued that the middle class in Baroda understood consumption in moral terms. We moralise about aspects of life in the sense of trying to figure out what "proper" or "good" people do, what is appropriate, what is possible and impossible in a particular social setting. Carrithers (1992, 2005b) argued moralising is the work we do to praise and censure one another and ourselves in terms of moral aesthetic standards. We thus position ourselves and others in our world. This may be done by visiting a café, by choosing to wear certain clothing, by perceiving jeans as *modern*, or by relating what a young unmarried woman should want to do. And we comment on how others position themselves in the world. Rofel (2007) describes aptly how young Chinese employed a rhetoric of desire (from consumption to work to sex) to distinguish themselves from their parents and the past. Consumption thus promised a freedom from the past. However, the rhetoric of desire in China also involved moral judgements and the expression of anxiety to inhabit 'desire' properly. Class inequalities were expressed by criticising marginalised groups for not embodying 'desire' properly.

The morality of conviviality explores what people considered appropriate behaviour in personal interactions, how people should deal with each other, in the café culture in Pune, India, 2008. Hence three aspects are important: 1) individuals creating, maintaining and transforming a habitus, 2) the social achievement of conviviality, and 3) moralising comments on habitus and conviviality.

"I Just Can't Be Myself at Home"

The cafés fulfilled a need for space because they were outside of parental control. Here young adults could indulge in peer-group activities that were frowned upon by parents and the wider society, such as smoking, drinking, dating, etc. Other observers of South India (Chopra/Osella/Osella 2004, Favero 2005, Jeffrey 2010, Nisbett 2009) have noted the emergence of public spaces which lay beyond the regulatory influence of family and work, and where masculinities could be expressed that diverged from restrictive practices of hegemonic masculinities. I extend this statement to young women in order to

62

argue that these spaces facilitated a café culture habitus that diverged from the parents' generation's and wider society's values.

Whether college students or professionals, young *middle class* adults in Pune spend rather little time with their parents. This was a constant source of lament. Parents scolded their children for and lamented about them going out too much. The young adults complained about their parents not allowing them to go out. Nilima was so afraid of both her sons getting into trouble and of the "generation gap", understood as the unwillingness of parents and children to understand and talk to each other, that she invited her sons' friends over almost every day "so they would at least be under my eyes. After college young people go everywhere. They go where all the women are and look at them. They smoke, drink and take drugs. You cannot control your children."

In India the transition from childhood to adulthood involved the expectation that one lives with and in permanent dependency of one's parents and other elders (cf. Chapter Three). My young friends were regularly "irritated" with still being "accountable" to their parents and with their parents' permanent control. Young adults spent most of their time with friends, while the time spent with parents was limited to evenings and weekends (cf. Chapter Four). They often saw their parents only for meals at home. They rarely visited each other at home, unless the parents were not there or it was for a special occasion such as a birthday. Arun once commented after a weekend he had spent entirely with his friends except for dinner on Sunday: "I just can't be myself at home." Arun expressed what all of my young friends felt: at home they could not do what they wanted. The activities they would not want their parents to witness ranged from simply relaxing and hanging out with friends, to smoking, to drinking alcohol and going on a date. Nisbett (2009:74) wrote:

> "[...] by participating in it together, they were asserting their independence from their elders and helping to create a shared space of their own."

Thus who these young adults wanted and felt they ought to be was constructed in distinction from their parents and in connection with consumption.

Timepass: Hanging Out with Friends

When they got together the young Puneites often called it '*timepass*', a common expression used to describe killing time without pursuing any specific task (cf. Nisbett 2009:72). For the unemployed educated young men in North India from Jeffrey's (2010) account, *timepass* was a necessity due to the lack of meaningful things to do. For the young adults in Pune in 2008, it was a pleasurable leisure activity providing welcome distraction between busy bouts. From their parents they inherited the notion that the Indian *middle class* was hard-working (cf. Chapter Five, Fernandes 2006:12). A weekend, in the European sense, did not exist for most people in Pune. Shops and restaurants were open even during weekends and public holidays. Many private companies required at least half a workday on Saturdays. Going on vacations seemed to be a new phenomenon. Even when at home over the weekend many people worked in the mornings and did household chores or visited family or friends in the afternoons. The fathers often worked long hours and took work home with them. In the case of a business owner, they did not feel like they could leave their shops or businesses alone. They were afraid that people would not do their jobs properly. Employed women did household work in the evenings and on the weekends. Asking Arun about the major difference between his and his parents' generation he replied:

> "In my family it's all about education and work. That's all they know and believe in. But I don't. I don't understand why dad [who worked in a bank] is slogging his ass off while other people just come and they don't take work home. He doesn't even get paid accordingly. Dad could just leave at five p.m. and say 'That's it, I'm done.' But he doesn't do that. He has never taken more than three or four days of holidays."

Nilima often told me that she had started to learn how to cook from her mother when she was ten years old. "I always have to do something with my hands, like my mother and her mother." Approvingly she said about her young neighbour: "She works very hard and never complains." That seemed to be the general attitude in the parents' generation: work hard and never complain.

The young generation strived for a better work-life-balance. Leela, who had just finished school and still had to decide what to do with her life, got to the heart of the matter when she talked about having arguments with her parents about

going out and about what to do with her life:

> "They say, 'We have worked so hard all our life to give you better chances. And you don't care at all.' What do you say? It's not true but they don't seem to understand. For me all this is normal. I know nothing else."

> "I see how my parents are working so much. I'm just not made for that."

Hanging out at cafés with their friends during the day, in the evenings and on weekends was a rejection of their parents' values and lifestyle. This is not to say that these young people did not work hard. Rather they wanted to work less and have some free time to relax as well. They enjoyed having the mobility, the space and the time to meet their friends and hang out.

For What It's Worth

Another difference between the café culture generation and their parents was their attitude towards money. From both sides I frequently heard that the older generations saved their money, while the young generation spent it. Considering themselves to be frugal was a *middle class* value intended to distinguish themselves from the elite and the poor alike (Fernandes 2006:12). Indeed many of my informants belonging to the fifty plus generation told me that they were *middle class* but poor. Sitting in his spacious bungalow, surrounded by a lush garden, an anthropology professor claimed he was a Brahmin but poor. I was repeatedly told that in the wake of Gandhi's moral leadership and the adoption of socialism with Independence, the *middle class* felt urged to identify with the poor and not parade their assets. Srivastava (2007) elaborately discussed the shift from frugality to consumption as a marker of 'middle-classness' in post-liberalisation India. Srivastava explains this shift similarly to what Rofel (2007) says about post-socialist China. Middle class status in post-Independence India was attached to professional and bureaucratic careers and power, namely access to state resources. Post-liberalisation consumer culture has taken over as status marker. Middle class status now rests on the wealth one achieves in the market through jobs and commodities (ibid.:34). This mirrors a general shift – not restricted to India – towards consumption as a way of self-expression, identification and distinction (Cole/Thomas 2009, Herrera/Bayat 2010, Rofel 2007). To be successful in the market is both an opportunity and a burden: decisions, actions, successes and failures are

accredited to the individual. In post-liberalisation India "being middle class is in the nature of claims, aspirations and negotiation rather than settled 'fact' and self-assured pronouncement" (Srivastava 2007:31).

It served both generations as a marker of distinction to emphasise that the old generation valued saving and frugality while the young generation embraced consumption. Especially the grandparents and some of the parents lamented that today's *middle class* was all about money. They said they had no money to spend on themselves when they were young. Taking a loan was unthinkable. They felt that their children and grandchildren had more money but were less happy because they got corrupted by the money and forgot Indian values and traditions, especially the value of the close-knit Indian family. Indeed it was mostly the two younger generations which listed consumer practices as *middle class* criteria such as owning a house, a car, a TV, mobile phones and computers, going out to eat and on vacations and being able to afford a good education for one's children. What used to be luxury items were now conceived to be crucial markers of being *middle class* (cf. Mankekar 1999:5). A thirty-year-old architect recounted that in her college days during the early 1990s Nike and Levi's were just as desirable as today. But back then there used to be only one little shop which stocked branded items and they were unaffordable to most. She said she learned the value of money from her parents and that life was not about wearing brand clothes: "You still have to struggle to make a living." Members of the café culture, who were less than ten years younger than her, not only desired those branded clothes but they were readily available in many shops and malls, and most parents were able to afford them. Some young adults said that they did not value money like their parents. They also did not want to "slug their asses off" like their parents. This suggests that the middle class' spending power has increased as well as the availability of consumer goods.

The change economic liberalisation brought on was also reflected in people's attitudes towards going out. Nikki, a forty-two year old IT professional, remarked that during his school days (in the 1970s and 80s) it used to be a "big thing" to go out for dinner with his parents. It happened perhaps once a month or once

every two months. At school he would mention it to friends as a big event. Others equally emphasised that only very special occasions justified going out to eat. At that time there were not many places to go out. Now going out for dinner had become a "normal thing to do". Nikki and his wife used to go for dinner after work two or three times a week. Arun said his father would always choose the place and his meal very carefully when taking the family out for dinner. "He always thinks twice about it. And he's the one who's earning money. While we [Arun and his brother] don't think twice about it." Arun also felt that it was not appropriate for his father, a bank director, to go to work by bus. Public transport was associated with the lower classes and hence not adequate for his father's position.

Being able to afford hanging around in cafés – sometimes almost on a daily basis – might be interpreted as conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1994 [1899]), but was certainly an indicator of an economic, if not a social status. Less privileged youngsters hung out in public outdoor places (Favero 2005: 224, Jeffrey 2010) or cybercafes (Nisbett 2009). The prices were an obvious marker and the first and foremost hurdle to entering the café culture. In the above mentioned cafés a tea cost at least 25 INR (0.35 GBP) which would be Rs 3 to 5 in a roadside tea stall. Regular coffee started at 50 INR (0.70 GBP) and may go up to 150 INR (2 GBP) or more for more exclusive variants. Food started at about 100 INR (1.40 GBP) for a snack. By comparison a meal at Vaishali's was priced around 50 INR which itself would not be cheap to poorer people. A snack from a roadside stall cost only around 10 INR. Going to a night club or bar was even more expensive. The entrance fee alone could be 700 to 1,500 INR (about 10 to 20 GBP). Couples got in cheaper while single men generally paid most. Going out to Mauve's, the most popular club in town at the time, with Leela and her friends I asked her about the patrons. She replied: "Most of the girls here are from a very rich strata of society. That's why there are so few. The guys are from all classes. They are mostly call centre employees." She thus confirmed the importance of money as an access criteria to the café culture.

However, not everybody who had money wanted to be part of the café culture and some people participated who did not have the money to drink coffee every

time they went. It was also about "being *cool*," as Kiya, a 22-year-old sociology student claimed while sitting in CCD. She explained that going to a café was an "elite thing". But the elite was diverse. "Some people would never go to CCD while others find it totally *cool*." There was an elite which is "very rich and very *conservative*". These young people would not go to CCD. While others – including some of her friends – would save all their money to go to CCD as often as possible since they thought it was *cool*. Kiya used the moralising judgement *conservative* to describe a segment of the society that was rich and did not want to partake in the café culture. The café culture on the other hand was *cool*. *Conservative* thus meant – through the eyes of the café culture – considering visiting cafés as an inappropriate activity. Note how both Leela and Kiya identified themselves as *middle class* by entering these spaces and by at the same time differentiating themselves from the elite. Their statements further confirm that some people aspire to be part of the café culture who might not have the money to go regularly. The café culture was regarded as *cool.* It provided the space in which to hang out and engage in certain activities. The café culture crowd was considered to be educated, liberal and *modern*. Hanging out in these spaces could be interpreted as cultural capital (participating in consumption for upward mobility).

Young people entered the various locations of the café culture as individuals, no matter where they got the money. Markers of this individuality were, for example, clothing (cf. Chapter Two) and friendship (cf. Chapter Four). However, if they did not earn money themselves, the young adults had to justify before their parents what they used it for. Arun, for example, did not get pocket money. His mother would always inquire what he wanted money for. He used to say that it was for dining out and the like. There was a time when different people gave him money, like his brother who was already working. Having money at their disposal was another facilitator to get away from their parents and enjoy some freedom in the company of friends. Yet for those who did not work, participation in the freedom of the café culture ironically depended on their parents. Many young adults said: "Money is always a problem." They felt guilty for spending their parents' money who rarely spent it on themselves. Economic independence was aspired since it promised self-determination. Participation in

the café culture offered freedom from parental control and from the parents' *traditional* world.

To sum up, the café culture showed traces of "conspicuously wasteful expenditure of time and substance" (Veblen 1994:82). It celebrated a 'right to leisure' (cf. 'right to pleasure' Favero 2005, Mazzarella 2003) and to spend money thus distinguishing itself from their parents' generation who idealised saving and frugal spending. Clearly, this was also a distinction from the poor. However, the café culture also differentiated itself from a *conservative middle class* and from an *elite*. *Conservative* was almost synonymous with old-fashioned (cf. Chapter Two). The café culture provided avenues for traditional social norms to be relaxed. Contrary to the elite's "lavish spending", the middle class promoted "moderate" spending. *Middle class* meant literally the middle between *rich* and *poor*. That middle was certainly very diverse and flexible.

However, consumption was not only a marker of 'being *middle class*'. Rofel argues that the young generation in China considered wealth and consumption to make a "better cosmopolitan person" (Rofel 2007:116). This reflected a transition from a socialist world to a post-socialist world where prestige rested on the wealth one achieved. Retrospectively the young generation in China imagined their parents' world to have been determined by sacrifice and constraints. Consumption thus promised freedom from all constraints. It was a "postsocialist technology of the self" to "transcend the specificities of place and identity and be part of the 'world'" (ibid.:118). Food, sex, fashion and language were some of the everyday practices that young Chinese adults engaged in to embody a desiring, consuming and transnational self who could live without constraints and thus remake the body and the self (ibid.:120). In a similar fashion, the young generation in Pune in 2008 retrospectively imagined the past in their parents' lives to be determined by hard work, austerity and constraints. They furthermore characterised their parents world as *traditional* and *conservative*. Note how Pravin in one of the opening vignettes to this chapter promoted the celebration of wealth rather than poverty. He implied that spending and wealth would foster personal happiness and the progress of the nation. Spending money was good for everybody. "To buy is Indian" (Srivastava

69

2007:34). Consumption promised freedom to achieve, to individual choice and to fulfilment. It became the individual's opportunity and burden to succeed or fail. Thus consumption augured a departure from the state-regulated past and a presence of India in the new order of the post-Cold war world. The spaces of the café culture were at the same time transcending the local and domesticating the global. Consumption for the café culture thus not only marked 'middle-classness' but was also considered to make a better, up-to-date, globally connected and savvy *Indian* person.

Friendship: Sharing, Caring and Teasing

This section will further illuminate the café culture habitus which rests in the young adults' practices and in how they wanted and felt they ought to be. Comparable to middle class youth cultures elsewhere (Cowan 1991, Rofel 2007, Spronk 2009) the café culture in Pune was characterised by the desire to relax and have fun, meet friends, partners or fiancés, demonstrate independence and enjoy some freedom from parents. By contrast unemployed educated young men of the lower middle class in North Indian associated their timepass with boredom, disengagement, waiting and "feeling 'left behind'" (Jeffrey 2010:79). The contrast could not be starker. Young adults in Pune conceived the café culture as where things were happening and they participate to not be left behind. In these spaces they spent the most time, after home, college or work. Young adults from poorer families hung around public outdoor places (Favero 2005, Jeffrey 2010) or in cybercafés (Nisbett 2009), which were considered inappropriate for young women. The five star hotels of the elite were not affordable to, and presented as not desirable by, the *middle class* (cf. Saldanha 2002). The cafés offered just the right space for the young urban *middle class*: exclusive (from the poor strata of society) but not too expensive, and leaving a mark on the city-scape to present the *middle class* lifestyle as the norm, i.e. as what "common men" do. As such members of the *middle class* in Pune understood themselves (cf. Baviskar/Ray 2011). What the young *middle class* considered "proper" or "good" was very visible.

The most common reasons for young Puneites to frequent cafés were to hang

out with friends and to meet a sweetheart. Couples exchanging affection were no rare sight. Further, people whose parents were vegetarians would indulge in 'non-veg' dishes, a practice well established amongst men of the previous generation. Moreover cigarettes, hookahs, and alcohol were appreciated by both young men and women. Hence the young Puneites seemed to have treated these social spaces as public yet private places. Spending time together and engaging in challenging and illicit activities together fortified friendships and the habitus of the café culture. A favourite *timepass* amongst friends was what Puneites called *gossip*. *Gossip* could mean talking about people: who was dating whom or had broken up with whom, what happened at the last party, who found a job or had failed an exam, and the latest episode of trouble at home. Gossip was a form of caring, social awareness and control: everybody should talk to and know about everyone (cf. Chapter Three and Four). Friends cared for each other intensely: from making sure everybody got home safely, to helping each other out with college work and through exams, to giving advice and emotional support. Friends were chosen care- and advice-givers who have taken over that role to some extent from the family (cf. Chapter Four). *Gossip* could also refer to talking about life in general, about a news item, politics, TV shows, movies, music, computers, fashion, motorbikes or other common interests. Arun and his college friends shared a fascination for American TV shows such as Prison Break, Lost, House, or How I Met Your Mother. They spent much time talking about it and sometimes even watching it together. Rofel (2007:21) argues that the 'desiring self' amongst Chinese young adults was largely created through the engagement with "public culture" such as soap operas, museums, window displays, restaurants, bars, clubs, TV shows, etc.

Similarly in the café culture in Pune, certain knowledge was exchanged, setting the tone for what was accepted and what not, for what was possible and what not. A shared moral narrative was created, maintained and transformed. Values learned from parents and other elders were reinforced and challenged. Friendships were not only a marker of individuality: peers were perceived to be better equipped than parents to care for, advise and support each other in their rapidly changing world. Often the young adults did not want their parents to know what they were up to and what worried them. Many felt misunderstood by

their parents. In this process, people changed simultaneously what it meant to be Indian and to be a citizen of the world (cf. Rofel 2007).

Apart from time, space and gossip, the young Puneites of the café culture also shared money, possessions and food (cf. Chapter Four). When going out, friends treated each other to cigarettes and coffee or drinks. Hookahs were shared. Food was shared without fail. Especially when alcohol was involved, the bill was split equally. This implies an "assumption of material equality" (Nisbett 2009:85). Contrary to the Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2009) I did not observe forceful sharing. However, young Puneites readily shared music, movies and TV shows, homework solutions, magazines, books, etc. or swapped accessories such as watches. They willingly lend each other their two-wheelers or phones when in need. Friends would use each others' phones and computers without asking.

It has been argued that a "group egalitarian spirit" (Jeffrey 2010:94), of sharing possessions, food and drinks and of treating, established and fortified male friendships (Nisbett 2009, Osella/Osella 1998, Loizos/Papataxiarchis 1991). I wish to include women in this observation. The practices of sharing created and maintained egalitarian friendships amongst and between young men and women. They thus challenged societal norms of hierarchy and gender, even if only temporarily, within limits and in an idealised way (Osella/Osella 1998:202, Nisbett 2009:86). The rejection of hierarchical principles is particularly significant in the Indian context (Nisbett 2007:941). Caste practices used to forbid commensality and sharing due to the belief that polluting substances would be passed on. Hence the public coming-together of and sharing between friends from different castes and communities challenged these conventions. However, amongst the young adults of the café culture in Pune, only two were from a lower caste background. Hence equality seemed to have been restricted to the *middle class* which was dominated by high castes (cf. Chapter Four).

Physical contact was another practice which denied social distance (Osella/Osella 1998, Nisbett 2007). Once again, I wish to include women. Greeting rituals included hand shakes and hugging. Joke fighting occurred

across gender boundaries. Good friends of the opposite gender might dance together (cf. Chapter Four).

Along similar lines, teasing served to negotiate hierarchy amongst friends rather than simply reinforcing it (Osella/Osella 1998:197, Nisbett 2009:87). Young Puneites teased each other with stereotypes about their *family background,* e.g. caste, religion, region or community (cf. Chapter Four). However, the café culture was proud to be a diverse group. Arun and two of his friends told me with delight that one night they were out in a big group on motorbikes when the "cops" stopped them. The policemen asked for their names. Recounting the story to me they mentioned someone's last name and then the caste or region associated with it in order to explain to me how diverse the group was: Brahmin, Maratha, Gujarati, Christian, Muslim and others. As usual the policemen made fun of Arun for not having a last name, a practice distinguishing the South.

Hence the cafés offered a space for these diverse groups to get together and to establish and maintain their friendships by sharing time, *gossip*, food, drinks, possessions and intimacy, and by making fun of stereotypes. Thus they challenged societal norms.

Dating and Public Display of Affection (PDA)

The cafés were popular meeting places for young couples in love, engaged or married. There was always a couple around holding hands, snuggling and sometimes even exchanging a light kiss. Entertaining premarital relationships and displaying affection in public were further practices which the café culture claimed distinguished them from previous generations and other segments of the society. This is not to say that they did not exist before. Rather they served as a marker of generational distinction and, arguably, they had spread more, have become more visible and more widely accepted in the urban Indian *middle class*. Furthermore many of my young friends hoped that their love relationships would lead to marriage. Some of them did indeed. Chapter Six will show in detail how the café culture's embrace and display of courtship reveal continuities and changes in ideas and practices of love, sex, marriage, gender

relations, conjugality and cohabitation as well as in the conceptions of personhood.

According to the Indian Penal Code, which was compiled in 1860 under British colonial rule, the public display of affection is unacceptable and may be penalised (cf. Chapter Six). The question of PDA (public display of affection) is an ongoing public discussion carried out in newspapers, magazines, on TV and in internet forums. Proponents of a ban of PDA argued that India still had *culture*. In 2002 the vice chancellor of the University of Pune banned PDA from the campus arguing that it was a "threat to our social values and reputation" (Kashyap 2002). Hence PDA is viewed to not be *Indian*. Opponents of a ban stated that India should at last shed its crust of *tradition* and move on. Thus they in turn see PDA as a sign of being progressive and contemporary. A mother of two café culture participants told me, "it is no taboo anymore for a boy and a girl to go out alone". Young Puneites further said that holding hands was accepted in public. In the *cosmopolitan* areas of Pune and in cafés they would also exchange brief kisses. My young informants perceived being in favour of premarital relationships and PDA as *modern,* educated, not *backward* and not *conservative*. Being in love promised freedom from the past, from parents and to individual choice. Hence 'love' served as a marker of 'middle-classness' and of being a young, up-to-date, world-encountered Indian.

Premarital relationships were usually kept a secret. Many parents knew though. It was one thing for their parents to know and another to tell them how far it went or to display it in their presence. The young Puneites were lacking a personal space to live their relationships because most lived at their parents house, many with mothers who were housewives and always at home. The cafés offered such a space in the form of secluded sections or by being secluded altogether. The dim light in the evenings provided even more privacy. The young Puneites could be sure that no parents or other elders would show up. Nightclubs provided a space where even more physical contact was widely accepted. Close dancing, kissing and snuggling couples were a common sight. Nightclubs were the more sexualised spaces of the night, the time of adventure, risk and deliciously dangerous excitement (cf. Chapter Two). The 'normality' of

the day was even further transgressed than in the daytime café interactions.

Illicit Activities: Smoking and Alcohol

Smoking cigarettes and hookahs and drinking alcohol were 'forbidden fruits' in which young Puneites indulged when going out. Most cafés and restaurants and all bars and clubs either had a smoking area or allowed smoking everywhere. The hookah had celebrated a sweeping reception by the middle class all over the world and was very popular in Pune at the time. Even some people who frowned upon cigarettes, smoked hookahs occasionally. It was a common sight to see groups of (male, female or mixed) friends sharing a hookah in a café where they were offered. It was also common to see groups of (male, female or mixed) friends sitting together, some or all of them smoking cigarettes. It was indeed a smoking woman that would occasionally be sitting on her own in a café to have a cigarette or a hookah before mounting her scooter again. It was much more typical to see mixed groups or at least two women sitting in a café and indulging in a smoke. Smoking was for some people the reason to frequent a café. Before meeting friends in a café or going out at night, my young friends would call each other and arrange for someone to get cigarettes or for all to get cigarettes individually. Young women often asked young men to get cigarettes for them, but they also bought them themselves.

Smoking was condemned by parents and wider society. Thus young adults kept it a secret. It was generally considered a male activity and a moral vice associated with the poor and *the West*. Mira, a twenty-nine-year-old fine arts student, explained:

> "Here in India people think you're a bad girl if you smoke and drink and wear a lot of make-up. I used to think that way. But then... My own aunt in England used to smoke. She quit now. She's not a bad woman. Just because she smokes. Just because she slept with her boyfriend before she got married."

Hence smoking, drinking, make up and premarital sex were perceived to be stigmatised activities associated with a morally bad lifestyle and 'un-Indian'. The young generation criticised this attitude as *conservative*. Mira often invited us over to her parents' house where she had a cosy balcony on which to hang out, mostly undisturbed by her parents. The guys would bring alcohol and cigarettes. She also enjoyed the occasional night out in a club. Her parents were so

"lenient" or "liberal" that her male friends' girlfriends often told their parents that they were spending the night at her house when partying with their boyfriends.

Not all café culture indulgers smoked. Some of my young friends were vocal objectors. In general it was more men than women who smoked and drank. For both men and women, smoking represented freedom and independence, an image successfully supported by tobacco advertisement from the 1930s to 1950s in the US and Europe, and further developed through movies. International and national movies and TV have spread the idea of smoking as something forbidden and wrong but *cool* in India. Peer pressure probably stimulated this illicit activity, through which young adults asserted their independence from their elders.

Much the same can be said about consuming alcohol. Alcohol seemed even an more secretive activity than smoking. It was mostly restricted to evenings and nights. Going to a nightclub, a bar or a party at someone's house alcohol was usually involved for both young men and women. Groups of (male, female or mixed) friends sometimes got together relatively spontaneously to drink at someone's house. In such cases either the parents were not at home or they lived alone.

Drinking alcohol was associated with the bad morals of the poor on the one hand and with the excesses of the elite on the other (cf. Nisbett 2009:78), but also with the army. Alcohol was considered a must at parties hosted by an army member, in continuation with a British tradition. Forty-two-year-old Nikki was appalled that his own brother, a member of the Indian army, on several occasions attempted to force him to drink alcohol. Members of the CKP caste (Citraswati Kayasth Prabhu) said that they were warriors and hence needed meat and alcohol to be strong and fight. Brahmins on the other hand stated that meat and alcohol were not allowed in their diet or their houses. In general alcohol and drunkenness were identified with the poor and the immoral. Stories of poor men drinking away the family's money and beating their wives circulated in the *middle class* and the media. Alcohol is perceived to be frequently accompanied by crime, prostitution and violent behaviour. During my stay in

Pune, the nightclub Mauve's was demolished by a group of young Shiv Sena men. The official justification was that the club had no license for a wall in its garden. But the Shiv Sena also claimed to be protecting the *Indian youth* from evil *western* vices. Later in 2008 young Shiv Sena men attacked women in bars in several cities in southern Maharashtra and in Bangalore. Hence drinking alcohol and smoking were considered bad *western* influences by many.

The café culture crowd, however, largely promoted drinking a good beer, foreign whiskey, cocktails and long drinks as increasingly normal. Young *middle class* Puneites looking for intoxication was no new or post-liberalisation phenomenon. Dhondy (2008:123) recounts his college years in the 1960s in Pune:

> "Ajit's independent room became our base. We drank country liquor there, getting thoroughly sick on the foul-smelling snake-juice and smoked little black balls of charas[17] made up in cigarettes."

However, what did seem to be new – similar to the cafés themselves – was the wider practice of smoking and drinking among young Puneites, the increase in prices and the higher visibility. Instead of country liquor, the young Puneites in 2008 drank international brand drinks, such as Smirnoff vodka, Bacardi rum, Old Monk, Becks, etc. A steadily growing number of cafés, bars, restaurants and nightclubs offered a colourful array of alcoholic beverages. They were a safe, secluded and accessible alternative to waiting for one's parents to leave or to depending on a friend with his/her own place. By drinking neither cheap liquor nor indulging in expensive drinks constantly, the café culture again positioned itself between the poor and the elite. However, the distinction from the elite became blurred when going to nightclubs and expensive bars. Then my young *middle class* friends would say something like Mira:

> "But it's not like I'm doing it every day or even every week. And you don't go for the other parties, those big page three[18] parties and all. I personally don't feel comfortable amongst those people. First of all you have to start with what you gonna <u>wear</u>. Okay? That means if you <u>don't</u> have something to wear you have to go and buy something. That all burns a hole in your pocket. And at the end of the day I've been safe, na!? Protected from that lot. Tomorrow if I am with this page three lot I'd be out. One boyfriend every month, or maybe every week. Smoking, drinking heavily. Gone beyond, you know. You know what I mean. No limits to anything. Driving rash. Too spoilt. Want everything."

Hereby the distinction from the elite was maintained and insisted on.

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[17] Cannabis resin
[18] "Page Three" refers to the page number in the newspaper where gossip about the famous and the rich was circulated.

Boasting and teasing about the latest party and who drank the most was a popular topic amongst friends, women and men alike. Young men showed off with stories about how much they drank, how hard the liquor was and how they could hardly stand up but still be funny. Friends teased each other if one had thrown up, passed out or behaved inappropriately. It was always a story to brag about if they had managed to organise liquor prior to a "dry day". On all major public holidays the selling of alcohol is prohibited in India. Drinking on a dry day was conceived as particularly *cool*. A group of young men would sometimes go on trips together with the purpose of drinking a lot (cf. Nisbett 2009). Goa was a popular destination. Increasingly groups of young women indulged in similar trips often with the ostensible purpose of going shopping. It also became easier for mixed groups to go on these trips. College trips were a handy excuse. Nisbett (2009:84) is right when he observes that the three young men from the Hindi movie *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) and their trip in a sports car from Bombay to Goa, as well as mixed groups in newer movies such as *Jaane tu…ya jaane na* (2008), served as models for these kind of trips. These movies were explicitly mentioned as role models by young Puneites.

Largely the same held true for young women and the consumption of alcohol, except that they boasted about drinking and being drunk in a slightly different manner. They would state they were not drunk while giggling and staggering: "Are you mad?! I'm not drunk! Are you?" "No! Are you mad!? You are drunk." For young women the stigma of getting drunk was much worse than for young men. While young men encouraged mild drinking in women, they would be appalled if a woman actually got visibly drunk. During a Christmas party a young man approached me and expressed his disgust with everybody being drunk. He said it was due to "*western* influence". Perviously it was not common to go to parties and get drunk.

Nisbett (2009:80) argues that the simultaneous boasting and teasing with regard to alcohol consumption amongst his Bangalore informants was a "dual discourse". On the one hand, amongst like-minded young people, they showed off their illicit activities, knowing it would be considered *cool*. On the other hand, even amongst themselves, they also reproduced the wider social opinion that

their behaviour was immoral. Breaking certain social norms gained a person prestige as long as it was kept within the arena of friendship within the café culture.

Getting drunk was sometimes an excuse to get very emotional, especially for young men. While it was generally assumed that women were emotional, men were said to not be bothered with emotional things. Drunk young men would pour out their hearts about past and present girlfriends, sometimes starting to cry or rage (cf. Nisbett 2009). I remember a drunk young man at a party repeating: "It's her fault that I drink. She broke my heart." Young women would also sometimes use their drunken state to unburden themselves. A drunk girl in a nightclub told me that her ex-boyfriend was a gynaecologist except that he did not cure, but rather passed on, sexual diseases. Sharing intimate details strengthens friendships and the sense of a sworn-in community. This holds true not only for male friendships, as Nisbett observed, but also for female and mixed friendships.

When asked why they drank alcohol young men and women either said "I just like to get *high*[19] sometimes" or "It's good to let loose sometimes". "Getting high" and "letting loose" were activities generally shared with friends. It was in their presence that one relaxed and perhaps acted outside common norms. Jointly participating in these illicit activities, young *middle class* adults fortified their friendships, asserted their independence from their elders, fostered a sense of community and reinforced a class habitus. Jeffrey (2010:95) consults Herzfeld's (2005) notion of "intimate culture" which refers to aspects of social life that were regarded embarrassing in front of outsiders but viewed as a basis for establishing community spirit and building trust within the group.

Conclusions

This chapter intended to contour the café culture in terms of a habitus, i.e. practices, conviviality and moral aesthetic standards. From Bourdieu I borrow

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[19]   "Being high" was used by my informants to mean "being drunk".

the idea that, through practical mimesis and engagement with other Leibs in a structured social world, the Leib learns how to perceive, act, and feel with culturally specific dispositions. 'Leib' is a useful term from my own language. In German it is possible to differentiate between 'body' and 'Leib' (Ots 1994). The term 'Leib' (same etymological root as 'life') originally refers to the self or the person, i.e. the bodily self. It is defined by its potential to live the world, body and mind being inseparable. Every human being *is* a 'Leib', in contrast to *having* a body (cf. Platz 2006, 2011). In interaction with others and the world the Leib-self learns how to perceive, act, and feel as a person in a specific social setting. The self is the self-aware Leib, i.e. the "I", which becomes self-aware through the filter of what a person is supposed to be in a certain society, the "we" distinguished from the "other" (Alvi 2001:47-48). The self has a shared or collective aspect, which incorporates the similarities in experiences that different selves have within a social world. It is of interest when people tend to act in the same way in similar situations. Bourdieu (1979:86) wrote: "each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all other group or class habitus". The person, on the other hand, comprises the socio-cultural ideas of a culture, i.e. who people want and feel they ought to be in terms of gender, religion, caste, class, love, friendships, etc. Or put differently: it comprises what people think is appropriate or "good" to do.

Hence while self and person may be analytically distinguished, they are inextricably interconnected (Alvi 2001, Carrithers 1985, Carro-Ripalda Forthcoming) in the habitus. The self is universal in the sense that everyone conceives of himself as an "I", a self-aware Leib that acts, talks, thinks, feels and is. However, both the understanding of person and self depend on the worldview in a particular culture or society.

Contrary to Bourdieu I contend that the habitus is not beyond consciousness or subconscious so that only the social scientist can grasp it from a detached perspective (cf. Rabinow 1996). People do not just embody a particular socio-cultural idea. They "[are], feel, experience and engage with others from that particular existential self position" (Carro-Ripalda Forthcoming). The habitus is in the practices of the Leib and thus subject to constant change engineered by

us "culture creating and changing beings" (Carrithers 2005:577, 1992). It is negotiated interactively, in relation to and in dialogue with other people. For example, the definition of the Indian *middle class* was constantly negotiated between people. It stood between people in their interactions and communications. We are aware of our habitus both in terms of individual experiences as well as in terms of socio-cultural ideas, and we constantly negotiate, reinforce and change it.

Hence I wish to combine the habitus with Carrither's rhetoric of personhood. Michael Carrithers (2005, 2010) suggested thinking of cultural competence as acquiring cultural resources or tools that a person then uses flexibly to make things happen for herself and to move others. Thus in embodied form we hold the tools with which we try to make things happen for ourselves and to change other people's behaviour, and with which we effectively "make and remake [ourselves] as the persons [we] want and feel [we] ought to be" (cf. Carro-Ripalda Forthcoming). The socio-cultural tools comprise moral aesthetic standards, i.e. a sense of what "proper" and "good" people of a particular social group do and with which people praise and critique one another and themselves.

Returning to the café culture in Pune I have shown that space plays a crucial role in the creation, performance and transformation of the café culture habitus. Even in times of globalisation the Leib has to be in a certain locality which determines a person's habitus. It is part of the cultural tools. Doreen Massey (1994) eloquently advanced the understanding of the role of space and place in the articulation of the person. She recognises space as a process, not a fixed entity. Thus the context matters for a space to unfold its potential as a certain place which comes into being through the interaction of certain people in a particular space. Every activity has its space and time. The time was 'youth' in 2008, namely the transition from childhood to adulthood. The activities form and are formed by the space (cf. Nisbett 2009). In the context of the café culture the presence of elders could have radically changed how young Puneites acted, spoke, felt and appeared in those spaces. They might not have cuddled, smoked and drank alcohol. They might not have hung out in these places at all.

Young women would not have frequented cafés if they were considered male spaces or if it had involved lingering in the street. Cafés were the spaces for a young *middle class* crowd. This was also visible in the distinction between daytime cafés and nighttime restaurants, bars and clubs. The 'normality' of the day was even further transgressed. The spaces of the café culture simultaneously represented a transcending of the local and a domesticating of the global. Being part of a consumer culture they promised the embodiment of freedom from the partly undesired past of parents, freedom of choice, of self-expression and of being part of the world. Furthermore the cafés were located in particular places of the city associated with a *cosmopolitan*, *middle class* and *elite*, English-educated lifestyle. However, Pune is in India which gave the underlying flavour to these places in terms of food and drink, entertainment and clientele. 'Being *Indian*' was presented as *cool*. Being in India also determined the meaning, e.g. how provocative or not, the activities of the café culture were.

The shared moralising about *timepass*, consumption, friendships, teasing, sharing, caring, dating, public display of affection and illicit activities such as smoking or drinking alcohol fabricated a café culture habitus. In the café culture what "proper" and "good", or rather *cool*, people did differed from what their parents thought "proper" and "good" people should do.   Lingering, conspicuously consuming, breaking down social distance and hierarchy through sharing, caring and teasing, dating, smoking and drinking alcohol were cultural tools that the young generation employed to make things happen for themselves and challenge their parents' and wider society's values. And from this position young adults came into conflict with their parents and wider society but also engaged with their peers, e.g. bragging about a party, lamenting problems with parents or sharing intimacies of a date. By confining these activities to the social spaces of cafés young adults acknowledged the distinction from their world at home. As part of consumer culture, the café culture domesticated the global while transcending the local. To believe in the promises of consumption as freedom and to be part of the world, the imagined distinction from the parents' *traditional* world was vital.

The café culture offered the young adults in Pune different tools to make and

remake themselves as the persons they wanted and felt they should be. The persons of the café culture considered themselves to be *modern*, educated, *middle class*, and *liberal*, and not *conservative* or *backward*. These were more or less the same labels their parents used to understand and position themselves in their world. But the young generation has redefined to a certain extent what these judgements meant. For the café culture crowd being *modern*, educated, *middle class* and *liberal* meant hanging out in cafés and embracing the appertaining activities. For example, it meant to be open to premarital relationships and drinking alcohol, activities their parents frowned upon and regarded as morally reprehensible. It was in the café culture that the young Puneites acquired, generated, performed and transformed these tools and value judgements. By visiting cafés a young adult invited the association with certain activities but also associated herself with at least some of them. She appreciated the pleasure and independence of hanging out with her friends, smoking and having a boyfriend. She tried to be fashionable and be up to date with movies and music. Just by going to cafés young adults communicated to their parents that they wanted different things for themselves and that they wanted to be and thought they should be different persons. In the process the young adults redefined simultaneously what it meant to be Indian and to be a citizen of the world.

In the next chapter clothing will be explored to further illuminate how the young Puneites understood and positioned themselves in their world through their dressed bodies. The café culture's clothing practices differed markedly from their parents' and the rest of society's.

2 Clothing

"Basically, speaking English also went along with this whole culture of wearing jeans. Of wearing t-shirts as opposed to wearing salwar kurtas[20]. Which I guess just made you more obvious in the eye of society. [...] My sister was like a rather pretty little thing. And you know it, the problems... Not the problems as in the <u>attention</u> got focused on her. Ki that here is a girl who's really good looking. Who's not only good looking. But she refuses to hide herself behind the doors of her house. Refuses to wear the salwar kurta and hide herself with the dupatta[21] or with the burka. And I guess that just kind of incited that sort of semi hatred, semi fascination. And she started getting teased. She started getting followed to college. Which became very difficult for her to handle. [...] And then you know like we became people who were the koli[22] dwellers. But behaved like the rich people. The educated lot as it were. [...] My family always encouraged it. They never wanted us to be those backward little girls who like you know like just stayed indoors. And did nothing. [...] And like plus we were the common school-going girls. Which we were you know you wore the dress and this short little thing. The uniform was knee-length. And not too many people did that. Like even like the kids wore like pyjamas and everything. So I guess it's just like a jealousy of why these people get to be modern."

Nisha, 22 years old (30 Jan 2009)

The above vignette illustrates several points regarding the clothing practices of the café culture in Pune. Firstly, Nisha associated wearing jeans and t-shirts with speaking English, being educated, rich and *modern*. Secondly, she contrasted jeans and t-shirt with the *salwar kamiz*. Nisha claimed that the *salwar kamiz* was considered appropriate for a young woman, jeans and t-shirt were not. Hence she suggested that donning jeans and t-shirt in public might attract negative attention from those who disapproved. Nisha further asserted

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[20] *Salwar kurta* or *salwar kamiz* is a three piece attire consisting of trousers (*salwar* or *churidar*), a tunic (*kurta* or *kamiz*) and a scarf (*dupatta*).

[21] The *dupatta* is the long shawl that is part of the *salwar kamiz*. It covers the upper body and may be used to cover the head too.

[22] *Koli* means 'room' in Marathi. Nisha refers to a single room house which she inhabited with her parents and older sister when she was growing up. They would sleep, cook, eat, etc. in that one room.

that jeans and t-shirt challenged South Asian gender roles which confined women to the house and expected them to veil in public. Nisha herself regarded this gender role as *backward*, i.e. old-fashioned and outdated. Furthermore, Nisha's account suggests that young women in jeans were a relatively new phenomenon in Pune that cannot be taken for granted. Though jeans were not uncommon in urban India in 2008, they seemed to serve as a charged symbol to express the perception of a momentous change, and to distinguish the present young generation and the past. Finally, the narrative illustrates the analytical potential of clothing practices. It shows that through their dressed bodies, young Puneites understood their world and positioned themselves in it.

However, these statements also raise the issue of clothing's place in anthropological interpretation. This chapter shows that clothing as a bodily practice helps to understand how the young adults of Pune's *middle class* understood the world around them and positioned themselves in it through their dressed bodies. By means of clothing practices central distinctions such as male/female, old/young generation, class, *Indian/Western*, *traditional/modern* are being explored. However, clothing practices have more potential than marking social and cultural differences. They also create these distinctions and help the young generation to appropriate spaces. Furthermore it is argued that 'identity' has merely come to replace 'culture', not advancing anthropological interpretations. An alternative approach is explored. Ultimately different clothing practices might reveal different ideas of what it means to 'be modern'.

Clothing in Social Anthropology

Clothing is not an independently marked sub-discipline of anthropology, nor should it be. Clothing is one of many aspects of being human. Its fate, as an object of study, however, is bound to intellectual currents in anthropological thinking. Since it is worn on the body, approaches to clothing and body adornment are intricately linked to how the body is conceptualised in anthropology. Since the 1980s scholarly research dealing explicitly with clothing is growing, with a new emphasis on the body surface (cf. Hansen 2004). This is

due to a paradigmatic shift in anthropological theorising. The foundational concept of 'culture' as a coherent, impersonal, cognitive, bound, local entity gave way to an appreciation of 'culture' as a process generated by agency, practice and performance. This reconsideration of 'culture' was triggered by a general shift in socio-cultural anthropology and other social sciences (e.g. MacCormack/ M. Strathern 1980).

Previous anthropological approaches have reduced clothing to symbolising something that seemed more real (Miller 2005: 2),"making clothes an accessory in structural, symbolic and semiotic explanations" (Hansen 2004: 369-70)[23]. But is the social order more real than the dressed body? Understanding 'cultures' as impersonal, coercive, bound, cognitive systems which pervasively determine both action and consciousness bears the fundamental problem that it negates the importance of experience and the consideration of alternatives. It leaves no room for what Carrithers calls the human "character as culture-creating and -changing beings" (Carrithers 2005:577, cf. 1992).

The late 1980s brought about a new understanding of culture. Firstly, the conceptual dichotomies related to the Cartesian dualism of body and mind were challenged, i.e. nature and culture, object and subject, individual and society, etc. This led to an altered basic understanding of the physical body, no longer a raw fact of nature but a variable that changes with culture and history (Foucault 2002 [1966]). Secondly, the 'Writing-Culture-Debate' created awareness that the coherence and boundedness of cultures were constructed by the anthropologist. Furthermore conventional understandings of place and space have been challenged by politico-economic processes which have raised scholarly interest in the processes of globalisation linking national settings (Gupta/ Ferguson 1997).

Anthropologists were now seeking to explain the human being, not as a receiver and amplifier of representations, but as a corporeal agent entangled in practices, acting in and on the (social) world. The focus shifted from impersonal social systems to personal practices. Bourdieu (1972, 1980) is one of the most

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[23] Cf. Eicher 2000 for an elaborate chronological bibliography.

famous proponents of this line of thought. He ascribes the body an active role in generating culture. Bourdieu asserts that the body is knowledge. Through practical mimesis and engagement with other bodies in a structured social world, the body learns how to perceive, act, and feel with culturally specific dispositions. Bourdieu stresses that the habitus, which he also called socially informed body or practical sense (Bourdieu 1990:57), does not fully determine behaviour or its outcomes. He calls it "regulated improvisation" (ibid.:57). It is flexible. But in his own writing he requires habitus to be unconsciously determining, such that class differentiation or distinction continually reproduces itself: "a system of structured, structuring dispositions" (ibid.: 52). It has to do so in order for Bourdieu to be the sort of social critic he is. Furthermore Bourdieu assumed that practices have aspects of which people are not aware because they were socialised in a way precluding conscious recognition. However, I argue that practices are being judged according to moral aesthetic standards (Carrithers 1992, 2005). Otherwise there would be no change and no history since we would repeat the same practices over and over. Moral aesthetic standards often become the topic of explicit commentary and argument, as shown by Nisha's introductory remark. Thus they become negotiable and a potential area of change.

In any case, however he may be criticised, Bourdieu's major contribution lies in pointing out that (cultural) knowledge is not buried in the unconscious but is implicit in practices, in the body. In conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, his approach was developed into the "paradigm of embodiment" (Csordas 1990). Merleau-Ponty (1962 [1945]) introduces into philosophical inquiry the lived body, which I refer to as the Leib (Platz 2006, 2011), and embodied experience as the very means and medium through which the world comes into being and is experienced. They presuppose each other: the Leib can only objectify, i.e. perceive anything as outside itself when it is aware of itself, and it can only be aware of itself when it perceives the (social) world outside itself. The self becomes aware of itself as a perceiving, acting, thinking, and feeling Leib in relation to other Leibs and the social world.

The new understanding of culture led anthropologists to consider clothing

consumption practices "as a form of bodily praxis that tells us something about 'being-in-the-world'" on the terms of the people studied (Hansen 2000:32). Recent scholarship has restored the study of clothing as material culture with a new edge. It argues that objects have a social life (Appadurai 1986) and agency (Miller/ Küchler 2005). Miller and his colleagues claim that clothing is often seen to matter little due to

> "a very specific Western idea of being, in which the real person, myself, is somehow deep inside me, while my surface is literally superficial" (Miller 2005:3).

This idea is related to the Cartesian dualism which not only separates but even favours mind over body. In this view culture and person are opposed to materiality. Strathern (1979) and Miller (1994) however have shown that in Mount Hagen and Trinidad respectively aspects of the person are considered to be on the surface. The dressed body is not a disguise but a display of the self.

Woodward (2005:22) additionally draws on Gell's theory of extended personhood. Gell (1998) argued that the person externalises himself through material objects and thus influences others. Woodward however goes on to show that matters are even more complex. Far from the postmodern claim that the self expresses itself freely through clothing, several constraints have to be considered (Woodward 2005:35). First, the question has to be answered whether the assembled outfit is an adequate representation of the self, the 'I'. Secondly, cultural competence is necessary to meet the expectations of the occasion. Thirdly, the display of the self through clothing makes the wearer vulnerable to the judgement by others which thus is internalised too. The wearer's intentions might fail (Woodward 2005:25). Hence Woodward has not only demonstrated that a focus on personal aesthetics does not mean a move from social anthropology to individual psychology but also:

> "As material culture, clothing is not seen as simply reflecting given aspects of the self but, through its particular material propensities, is co-constitutive of facets such as identity, sexuality and social role." (Woodward 2005:21)

Woodward exemplarily emphasises clothing as a bodily practice of the self considering individual choices as well as social constraints. However, her notion of the self remains abstract. It highlights the problem with the new agenda in anthropology, i.e. to show what everyday bodily practices 'produce'. 'Social relations' and 'objective social orders' have somewhat gone out of fashion.

Hence 'identity' is readily employed. Woodward's main concern with self is a good attempt but she also falls back on the word 'identity' leaving self, identity, sexuality, social role as well as their relation to each other unexplained. Referring to 'identity' always seems to be an explanation in itself.

Hansen (2000) also analyses clothing as bodily practice but with a different focus. By exploring clothing consumption practices of young people in Zambia she shows how young people in Zambia understand social distinctions through their bodies and realise that their own position in social relations is based on that knowledge. Class, gender and age form part of the local cultural presuppositions which inform clothing choices. These presuppositions are both contested and reworked. They hence leave room for social actors to make a choice and they depend on the actor's biography and the social context. The choice of what to wear – informed but not determined by social parameters – helps to construct a Zambian youth "identity". Hansen consistently speaks of 'identity' as what is constructed through bodily practices but leaves 'identity' itself equally nebulous.

Thus clothing practices are "used to define, to present, to deceive, to enjoy, to communicate, to judge, to reveal and to conceal" (Mookherjee 2001). Choosing between various styles, a person may "emphasise or deemphasise" certain aspects of his self: from ethnicity, nationality and politics to class, religion, gender, age, region and caste (Tarlo 2010:75, Mookherjee 2001, Osella/Osella 2007, Tarlo/Moors 2007). Dressing practices are shaped both by local and global forces as well as by issues of personal aesthetics, ethics, fashion, self-identification and faith (Tarlo 2010:2).

To summarise, along with anthropological thinking in general, clothing has advanced from being one aspect of human life through which society presents and exerts itself to being one factor in creating society. Earlier clothing was one of the shreds and patches that constitute 'a culture', now clothing is one of the shreds and patches that constitute a person's identity. Or is identity one of the shreds and patches of 'the self'? Woodward (2005) seemed to have understood identity as part of the self along with sexuality and social role. Others speak of

"cultural identity" (Favero 2005) which begs the question whether there are also social, economic, religious, public and other identities to differentiate. Though the focus shifted from society as a system to the individual person as an agent both 'culture' and 'identity' are suspiciously abstract and cognitive. Bodily practices seem to produce abstract cognitive knowledge. But is all knowledge cognitive representations?

Many anthropologists intend to capture an essence or better a typicality. Prior to the paradigmatic shift the typicality was referred to as culture. Now this typicality is meant to be captured in the concept of 'identity'. 'Identity' is used to show that the social scientist is not drawn into people's essentialism about themselves. Note also that it is always assumed that an 'identity' is in some sense 'constructed', so that the ethnographer refuses to accept such essentialism. "[...] 'identity' is something one *does* (performance or construction) rather than something one *has* (essence or attributes)" (Hastings/Manning 2004). It serves to define that which the social scientist is showing to be made up of palpable, visible constituents and processes. The body is a taken-for-granted vessel on whose surface identity is projected or that which performs identity. Other than that, there is no unity to whatever identity is being explored and thus the concept of identity has no real grip in the world. In this view clothing and other bodily practices are again reduced to pointing to something more real, i.e. 'identity'. Instead of abstract 'culture' the physical body is now understood to create an abstract 'identity', an illusion.

The turn towards the body, practice and 'identity' bears the risk of developing a tunnel vision for the individual and the self, i.e. the body expresses or performs some self. Hastings and Manning (2004:293) highlight that this approach blocks out the fact that "identity is always constructed in relation to alterity". Identity seems to be just another chimera, a merely theoretical entity, and an "omnivorous" one:

> "After all, identity is, at the end of the day, simply another name for the principle of individuation itself, a general term for infinite particularity. What could it possibly not include?" (ibid.:296)

The problem itself remains. So long as I assume that my readership is not

Indian and unfamiliar with India but seeks some comparative description about India, I am implicitly or explicitly writing about 'typical Indianness'. As Carrithers (2010:253) commented:

> "It has long been one dominant style of work in anthropology to squeeze the juice from a wide variety of messy individual cases to find a single essence which runs through them."

The task is to find a viewpoint to deal with a timeless and impersonal social structure on the one hand and the acute personal time-bound eventfulness on the other, at the same time accounting for a typicality and for an active role of the person as agent.

Hence the idea of the habitus as a set of embodied cultural tools that people use flexibly 1) to make and remake themselves as the persons they want and feel they ought to be and 2) to persuade, praise and censure one another and themselves in terms of moral aesthetic standards. The standards are aesthetic in the sense that there are no rules, no predetermined acts. Rather cultural practices are bodily skills expressed that "fall recognizably into the genre and leave room for an aesthetically appropriate variation and innovation" (Carrithers 2005b:438). The moralising happens on top of that: expectations are applied and judgements made regarding what is appropriate to a person or various types of person in a specific situation. It amounts to a "sophisticated [moral] aesthetic judgement of what constitutes a good [and appropriate] performance" (Carrithers 1992:63, in squared brackets my additions). This way both ideas are being retained: people are agents and they are agents in respect of other agents and others' presumed judgements.

Applied to clothing practices, this perspective means that people choose their clothes according to who they want and feel they should be while at the same time praising and censuring one another and themselves according to moral aesthetic standards. Clothing practices hence indicate a complex set of moral aesthetic statements about selves in class, gender, age, etc. In the following, clothing practices and moral aesthetic standards amongst the *middle class* in Pune will be illuminated.

91

Clothing in Pune: Generational Change

The most obvious feature of clothing habits in Pune in 2008 were the differences between what women and men wore and between the appearance of the café culture and the rest of the population. Over the last two centuries men's appearance has become rather standardised, dominated by *western*-style clothes generally consisting of trousers and collared shirt (cf. Tarlo 1996:166, Banerjee/Miller 2008:235). Though women's clothing choices diversified, the vast majority was donning *Indian*-style attire. As Banerjee and Miller (ibid.) noted, this might be interpreted as a power imbalance which involved men in global processes while women were destined to preserve 'tradition'. Hence it was all the more noticeable that the café culture crowd in Pune, with their focus on transcending the local and domesticating the global, wore jeans, irrespective of sex.

The young generation in Pune at the time of my research had a much wider range of clothing options than previous generations. Tarlo (1996:337) notes that fashion has accelerated since economic liberalisation in India. Srivastava (2007) observes that middle class fashion in India is tied into global trends. The increased variety of styles is most visible in, but not restricted to, women's clothing practices. A young *middle class* woman's wardrobe in Pune in 2008 typically consisted of a variety of styles. If she participated in the café culture her most worn items were jeans and a t-shirt-like top, an outfit considered *casual*. For an official occasion like a wedding she would wear what she termed *Indian formal*, such as a *salwar kamiz*, a *sari* or a *ghagra choli*[24]. For work she could have worn *Indian* or *Western formal*. To do a sportive activity she would don sporting clothes. To go to a nightclub she would wear a miniskirt and strapless top. Her grandmother by contrast exclusively draped herself in *saris*, simple ones on a daily basis and expensive ones for weddings, rituals, etc. The young woman's mother wore *salwar kamiz* daily and *saris* for special occasions such as weddings, rituals and family get-togethers. They considered the *sari* to be *traditional Indian* wear, *salwar kamiz* to be *modern Indian* and jeans to be *modern*. This 'intermediate' generation perceived itself to be the "in-between" or

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[24] The *ghagra choli* is a three piece garment consisting of a long skirt (*ghagra*), a short top (*choli*) which usually left the belly button exposed and a scarf.

"sandwich generation", as Nilima called it. She explained that she was brought up in the "old world" by her parents who lived "the old lifestyle", while her children lived in the "new changed world". She wanted to adapt to changes to understand her children because her parents did not want to change and she herself thus felt that she could not talk to them. Nilima called this the "generation gap". Donner (2009:181) concludes that the *middle class* mothers she worked with in Calcutta were indeed translators and mediators between their families and an imagined global world.

Apart from sketching changing clothing practices in Pune's *middle class*, this chapter also illustrates the changing moral aesthetic standards regarding clothing. Obviously these generations thought differently about who they wanted and perceived they should be, and they tried to get different messages across.

Aaji (Marathi: maternal grandmother) started wearing *saris* with puberty. Banerjee and Miller (2008) confirm that customarily in India a girl would don a *sari* for the first time when she was presented as a potential bride to a boy's parents. Hence the *sari* was associated with sexuality and marriage. "The sari was the marked garment for the female sexualised body" (Banerjee/ Miller 2008:238). For that generation it used to be common for women to get married between eleven and seventeen years of age. Born into a *middle class* family of lawyers in a small town in northern Maharashtra, Aaji went to school comparatively long until she was seventeen, finishing what is today the eleventh standard, when her marriage was arranged. She spoke basic English. Girls were treated very differently than boys, she explained. Apart from going to school, a girl had to learn how to run a household. Aaji worked in the house and took care of her younger siblings. Her only free time was an hour or two to play in the afternoon. She had to be home by 7pm. Aaji got married relatively late at the age of twenty in 1948. Still she said she never wore anything but *saris*. Thus she associated her adult life with wearing *saris*. Aaji remembered that money started coming into the country only in the 1960s. Her husband was lucky to get a job. "After Independence people still wore torn clothes." Aaji's main occupation used to be cooking for the family. She said about herself: "I was only housewife. I was nothing," she laughed. "You have to accept life." Aaji remarked

about her granddaughter-in-law, who mostly wore jeans, worked as a teacher, traveled on her own and moved inside and outside the house of her own accord: "She is free like a bird and independent."

Aaji's eldest daughter, Nilima who was sixty at the time, said she was made to wear *saris* for college at the age of sixteen. She wanted to wear skirts as she was used to. Once she went to college in skirt and got scolded by her mother: "nothing doing!". Aaji insisted on her daughters doing sports in school and getting a full education. But she also taught her daughters how to cook at the tender age of ten. They had to be home at seven p.m. when outside playing. After junior college Nilima left her hometown to study Botany in Pune and lived in an all-girls dormitory on campus. This was when she started wearing *salwar kamiz*. She completed an MSc. Her marriage was arranged in 1974 when she was twenty-six.

The need for a desexualising but adult garment grew when women started to marry at a later age, especially in cities (Banerjee/Miller 2008:238-40). Although originally associated with the Punjab and then Muslims in general after it became the national dress of Pakistan, the *salwar kamiz* was chosen to fulfil the prerequisite to cover the sexually mature body. In the 1980s it was adopted as the school uniform for girls older then twelve in many cities. Many women continued wearing it in colleges and universities arguing that it was more modest than the *sari* and more functional for a dynamic urban life.

Nilima's husband insisted on her learning how to drive a car so that she would be more independent. She raised two sons who now live in the UK. When her sons had grown she started helping her husband in his practice in the afternoons. Though still frowned upon, evermore women took up work outside the house. Most professional women of that generation I met wore *salwar kamizes* on a daily basis and for work. Some wore both *salwar kamiz* and *sari* for work.

Nikhita, born in 1987 just before the economic liberalisation, was always clad in skinny jeans and tight tops, alternating t-shirts, halter, tank and strapless tops.

She drove a motorbike and had a boyfriend. In her English medium school *salwar kamiz* was the uniform for girls. Entering junior college at the age of sixteen she started wearing jeans. Many young adults remembered their initiation to junior college with anxiety. In school everybody wore school uniforms. But in junior college, "You're judged by your clothes, your phone, your bike, your English. People were wearing fancy clothes like Levi's, Adidas or Nike," said Arun, a fourth year engineering student. He was intimidated. The peer pressure was so high that he thought about stealing the clothes before his parents grudgingly gave in to his wishes. Liechty (2003:213-14) similarly observes that for the middle class in Nepal, schools were spaces where young people were encouraged to imagine themselves in terms of economic class. The materialistic peer pressure was powerful. In Pune many young adults perceived entrance to college as a broadening of their horizons. For the first time they were exposed to a different world than the "*conventional* or *traditional* stuff that you know from home," as Arun put it. They all felt that this was the moment their views started to diverge from their parents'.

The café culture crowd in Pune in 2008 preferred jeans as the attire to distinguish themselves and to express who they wanted and felt they ought to be. In general jeans were worn by comparatively few people in India, rather than by many as in other parts of the world (Wilkinson-Weber 2011, Miller 2011, Miller/Woodward 2011). Bollywood (the movie industry in Bombay) is nationally and internationally the best known Indian film industry and famous for its lavish displays of costumes. According to Wilkinson-Weber, male actors started sporting denim jeans and jackets in the early to mid-1970s, female movie actresses followed by the late 1970s. Jeans remained scarce though and were not yet accepted by the *middle class* as appropriate attire. The jeans wearing actors impersonated action heroes in a new movie genre on subaltern issues and the pursuit of justice. Jeans subverted "conventional sartorial distinctions of elite versus subaltern" (ibid.:54). While jeans represented an expansion of a Western-style wardrobe for men, they were a clear divergence from *Indian* styles for women. Actresses wearing jeans initially played provocative roles that challenged the established idea of the 'proper' movie heroine. The archetypical heroine continued to wear *Indian* attire. With the influx of ready-made clothes

after economic liberalisation in 1991 jeans appeared more regularly on screen and soon advanced to everyday wear in Bollywood movies. Actors and actresses donned expensive brand jeans to distinguish themselves. The economic change also made western fashion more available to the *middle class*. In the 1990s women of the urban Indian elite started incorporating more and more western-style clothes into their wardrobe and thus jeans could not equal loose morals and dubious virtues anymore in movies (Banerjee/ Miller 2008:223).

Thus in post-liberalisation, urban India wearing jeans was not uncommon. The café culture in Pune in 2008 donned a particular style of jeans wearing to distinguish themselves from other jeans-wearers and to position themselves. Their style resembled the latest Bollywood fashion: tight for young women, rather loose for young men. Wilkinson-Weber (2011) concludes that in 2008 the jeans on a film actress communicated autonomy and desirability as well as flexible youth and decency, thus allowing for variety in depicting heroines.

> "However, it is on male stars that the potential of jeans to communicate assertiveness and sexuality is most developed, in arguably proportional terms to the degree that women's jeans have been 'domesticated'." (ibid.:55)

This culminated in 2008 in the large advertisement campaign for Levi's jeans with the slogan "Live Unbuttoned" in which a famous actor captures the onlooker while a woman unbuttons his jeans from behind. The campaign was perceived as a lifestyle message: 'live life unbuttoned' was understood to mean 'liberate yourself'. Hence jeans stood for assertiveness both sexually and more generally in life, having shifted their meaning from subversive non-conformist provocation to a sign of *modernity*. As a retired professor exclaimed: "Even if the jeans are cheap and locally made this guy counts as modern." However, a certain type of jeans and style of wearing dominated the café culture: foreign brand jeans in a fashionable style paired with fashionable accessories.

The café culture crowd grew up with jeans as everyday wear in movies. Liberalisation also expanded the availability of TV channels which brought the jeans wearing stars into *middle class*' living rooms. Furthermore they had the money (from their parents) and the opportunity (wide availability in stores) to buy brand jeans and emulate the stars.

Shifting Meanings

Note how the meaning of the different clothing items has changed. Due to its capacity to display distinctions, clothes became a powerful medium for debate during colonial times, the fight for freedom, after Independence and continues to date (Banerjee/Miller 2008, Bayly 1986, Bean 1989, Cohn 1989, Tarlo 1996). Accounts have shown that its potential to provoke stems from its centrality to the 'project of modernity', especially to new notions of appropriateness, wealth, and progress (cf. also Hansen 2000 for Africa, Wilson 1987 for the USA).

The *Modern Sari*

For the women of Aaji's generation the *sari* was the taken-for-granted answer to the "problem of what to wear" (Tarlo 1996). It was simply what an *Indian* woman wore. However, the continuity with the past this garment suggests is deceitful. Just like men's appearance it has undergone a significant change.

Clothing used to be a distinguishing marker in India identifying regional, religious and caste differences. Both men and women used to wear clothing items, colours or patterns that identified them with a certain group. Hence, according to Tarlo (1996) at the beginning of the British Raj the question of what to wear for Indians revolved around the dilemma of how much foreignness to allow in one's attire at the risk of changing one's group affiliation and lifestyle. By the late nineteenth century tailored European-style clothes were regarded as superior, advanced and sophisticated compared to Indian-style clothes. The male educated Indian elite sought to differentiate itself from the rest and to identify with the British. Clothes became a sign of the success and progress of the wearer. Women clothing practices changed more slowly due to notions of modesty[25] and the men's desire to shield their women from Western influence. There are many different ways of draping the *sari*, many of them associated with a specific region[26]. The style prevalent today, especially in urban areas, is called Nivi style. It consists of a six-yard *sari,* petticoat and blouse. This style

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[25] The South Asian custom of *purdah* (segregation) "defines women's and men's spheres literally in terms of 'inside' and 'outside' the home" (Donner 2008:14).
[26] In Maharahstra a nine-yard *sari* is pulled between the legs making it appear like trousers. This style is still worn in rural areas by poor and older women.

was developed in the late nineteenth century by an elite Bengali woman who accompanied her husband on an assignment to Bombay, much to the distress of their elders (Banerjee/Miller 2008:fn6). She faced the dilemma of what to wear since the *sari* used to be worn inside the house without a blouse. After various experiments she developed the Nivi style in 1864 in Bombay. She adopted blouse and petticoat from Parsi women and draped the *sari* bringing it to the front and throwing it over the left shoulder. As women became more active in public life they adopted this style over the next few decades.

At the beginning of the 20th century women in the nationalist movement wore the Nivi style. During this time the sartorial climate changed even for men as Gandhi utilised clothing for his freedom fight elevating *Indian* clothes to a national symbol (Bayly 1986, Tarlo 1996). Wearing *western* styles was stamped weak and immoral, and associated with *westernisation* which was condemned. This continued after Independence. After Independence the uniform style of draping the *sari* helped "to bind together in a newly formed nation the vast mix of regions, languages and cultures" (Banerjee/Miller 2008: 236). It cut across the countless differences of class, caste, wealth, education, religion and region. It resulted in a consciousness that woman was wearing *the sari*, the emblem of the new nation, and she had to live up to it (ibid.:221).

The *sari* was not an obvious choice for the *middle class* due to its association with rural and poor India (ibid.:238). Indeed, men soon reverted to wearing Western-style clothes after Independence in order to appear progressive. The urban style was stamped by the urban Indian elite which followed in the footsteps of the British (Tarlo 1996:200). In a perpetual effort to distinguish themselves from the rural and the *poor*, *middle class* and *elite* women continued to adapt new materials and patterns (ibid.:323-29). When the former adopted synthetics, the latter invented 'ethnic style' in the 1980s collecting *saris* from different regions in India. In the 1990s, after liberalisation, international styling methods entered the Indian market and changed the conception of desirable looks. Mass-produced synthetic *saris* saw a comeback as high fashion. They were now presented as internationally fashionable dresses rather than a regional attire (Banerjee/Miller 2008:203).

Hence for the urban Indian *middle class*, the problem of what to wear revolved around the question how to look *modern* but not *western*, and how to look *Indian* but not *backward* (cf. Tarlo 1996, cf. Liechty 2003 for Nepal). These were some of the terms in which people in Pune described who they wanted and thought they should be, and in which they admired and criticised one another and themselves. Clothing was one aspect that was judged in these terms. What practices exactly these terms were characterising depended greatly on who was talking and who was being talked about, and when and where.

For the women of Aaji's generation, a *modern* version of the regional dress for women, *the sari,* was the answer. For the following generation, born just after Independence in the spirit of progress, the answer became more complex; at least for women, since men[27] left it to them to uphold 'tradition'. The *sari* was morally aesthetically used and judged depending on the persons involved and the situation. If worn on a daily basis the wearer was considered *backward*, *old-fashioned*, or *conservative*. I joined a group of women mostly in their sixties for an all-day picnic. Eight (29%) of the twenty-eight women were dressed in *Western* clothes, i.e. trousers and sleeveless tops. Three of those eight in turn wore jeans and were the youngest, at about forty years of age. The rest (64%) came in *salwar kamiz*. Only two women (7%) wore *saris*, Aaji and Priti. The latter, a fifty-year-old housewife remarked later: "Did you see that in the picnic I was the only one in *sari*? The others think I am *backward*." She took it for granted that Aaji wore a *sari.* And while she thought her age-mates were betraying their *Indian* heritage, she felt the pressure. She made the same comment with regard to the "drinking parties" that the army officers' wives apparently regularly had and which she refused to attend. She condemned both the "going out at night" and the drinking alike. She held open resentment, which might explain why she used a negatively connoted term, *backward*. Apart from the oldest generation it was predominantly poorer – and thus almost by

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[27] Outside urban areas the sartorial pressure was the same for men. On March 9, 2008 the *Times of India* titled "The discovery of other India – Their address is obscure but their calling card is talent. Meet the rising stars of New India: Small-towners who are taking centrestage, not just in cricket but also in IITs and IIMs. Sunday Times tracks their roadmap to success." The accompanying drawing shows a young man flying out of the roof of a village house in a superman posture. He holds a trophy in his left hand while stretching the right to the sky. He wears a suit leaving his rural clothes (turban, shirt, *dhoti* and sandals) behind.

definition regarded as *backward* – women, such as housemaids, who were clad in cheap synthetic *saris* on a daily basis, or women of the traditional elite who wore expensive *saris* daily. For example, the women of the Dhole Patil family always wore *saris*. The Dhole Patils once owned the entire neighbourhood I lived in. The main street was named after them. They ran a hotel and several restaurants in the neighbourhood. One of the men used to be mayor of Pune. The entire extended family (several brothers and their wives, their sons and wives and children) lived under one roof in an apartment building on Dhole Patil Road. Hence the donning of exclusive *saris* on a daily basis was a marker of a particular *conservative* sort of highclassness. Priti, on the other hand, was not rich, but not poor either, so her choice of *sari* meant that she was perceived by herself and others as *backward*.

The women in the picnic considered themselves to be "*forward* and *cosmopolitan*", as one of them said. Dressing their bodies according to the situation indicated and generated their progressiveness, education and mobility. Until recently only the urban elite indulged in this practice (Tarlo 1996: 198). The picnic was an *informal* occasion. For most of these women the *salwar kamiz* was the ideal *Indian* yet "functional everyday form of modern dress" (Banerjee/Miller 2008:252). They wore *saris* for *formal* occasions such as work[28], weddings or other religious functions. For them the *sari* has become *traditional Indian* attire, a "ceremonial dress" (ibid.:251) reduced to "formalised representation of ceremonial nationhood" (ibid.:249). However, Nilima still owned a huge collection of *saris*. Owning *saris* from different regions, of different materials, styles and patterns was considered *modern* (ibid.:245).

Tarlo (1996:317) described this trend as follows:

> "The process by which we categorise things as 'traditional' and 'old-fashioned' is the process by which the 'stuff of the past' is divided into the categories of relevant and irrelevant. The 'traditional' is the stuff of the past (real or imagined) that we consider relevant to our present and our future while the 'old-fashioned' is that stuff of the past which we dismiss as irrelevant to our contemporary life."

My experience in Pune taught me that *traditional* described what was considered to be good in India, as Tarlo suggests. Of course, what was 'good'

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[28] Only one of the women was employed. Women who worked outside the house were still frowned upon in this generation.

depended on who was talking. For what people did not like about or want from India there were several terms, again depending on who was talking and who was talked about. *Old-fashioned* would have been used by most of my *middle class* informants in a benevolent way to judge Aaji. With a mixture of resentment and envy, *conservative* designated the rich, who were perceived as educated, hence knew what they were doing and decided to keep the 'old stuff' as *traditions.* And *backward* – pityingly and patronisingly – denoted the poor who were understood to be uneducated and thus in a way did not know any better.

According to Tarlo (ibid.:332-5) owning a variety of Indian and foreign styles allowed a multifaceted answer to the question of how to be *modern* but *Indian* but not 'old-fashioned'. Depending on the situation *Indian-* or *Western-*style clothes may be worn, hence leaving a permanent identification open. However, most of the women of the generation of the fifty and sixty-year-olds in Pune in 2008 exclusively donned *Indian* attire. It was the generation of the forty-year-olds, who were about twenty years old at the time of liberalisation, who sported the diversity that Tarlo referred to.

The *Modern Salwar-Kamiz*

It was Nilima's generation, born around or just after Independence, that chose the *salwar kamiz* to be the daily answer to the question of what to wear for educated, urban *middle class* women. When they were young it fulfilled the expectation to be *modern*. Increasingly accepted in schools and institutions of higher education, it became associated with "the modern ethos of the 'college girl', an ethos very different from traditional assumptions concerning the role and control of women" (Banerjee/Miller 2008:240). It had advanced to the attire of young unmarried women whose lives did not centre around the hearth.

Nilima often mentioned how much more practical and modest the *salwar kamiz* was for her city life than a *sari* (cf. ibid.). Her *salwar kamizes* were rather shapeless and made out of comparatively expensive cloth, e.g. fine cotton,

embroidered cotton, silk, fine printed material, brasso[29], etc. Though already changed to more of a fashion item the *dupatta* still served to cover the chest area. Nilima used to pin hers to her shoulders with safety pins in order to hold it in place without having to constantly fiddle with it. For women of her generation the *salwar kamiz* was the *modern Indian* dress.

Women in their forties wore *salwar kamizes* daily amongst other attires such as Western-style work and leisure clothes. They owned *salwar kamizes* of all colours and styles: tailored and off-the-rack, fine printed material or fine Indian cotton, embroidered and plain, and of many different designs. The *kamiz* or *kurta* (top) could be tailored in any conceivable style. "Mandarin collars" were as much in fashion as "Indian necklines". The *kurtas* were generally figure-hugging, the *dupatta* a fashion item. In fact, the entire outfit was a fashion item. In this generation it was also popular to combine trousers or even jeans with a short *Indian* top (*kurti*). For this generation the *salwar kamiz* was *modern* – amongst other styles – if fashionably designed. Being fashionable and convenient was most important. This generation also started to show more skin. Short sleeves or no sleeves, deep necklines and the tighter version of the trousers (*churidar*) were much sought after. My landlord's daughter, who was in her thirties, once rang my doorbell in white *churidar* with an openwork pattern through which the brown skin of her legs shone. Her light pink *kurta* left no room for imagination. She had her own tailoring shop and prided herself in always being up to date with the latest fashion. Equally the way they wore their *saris* was more eroticising. The blouses had short or no sleeves and deep cleavages. The material might be translucent. And the *sari* would be tucked into the petticoat below the bellybutton.

The Café Culture in Dress

In cafés a young woman in a *salwar kamiz* was an extremely rare sight. When I did observe it one day, I asked my friends for their thoughts. They said it was either her first time in a café or she was from a "*conservative* family". Hence she

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[29] Brasso: also referred to as burned-out fabric. The basic fabric can vary from chiffon to cotton. Brasso fabric is made using a high-tech acid etch process in which the layers are burned to form the design.

either was not familiar with the 'dress code', or she did not want, or thought she should not, comply with it. However, there were certain occasions when my young female friends would wear a *salwar kamiz* themselves*, such as weddings, *pujas* (Hindu ritual) and religious festivals. Nikhita said:

> "Occasions like *pujas* and stuff I will attend in a *salwar kamiz*. But not casually."

The *kurta* or *kamiz* has to be figure-hugging and the whole outfit would follow the latest fashion in material and design. I asked Nikhita what she would wear for a wedding.

> "Something *Indian* definitely. Mostly ya... *sari* or *ghagra choli*[30]. For the smaller ceremonies, a *salwar kamiz*. And engagement and cocktails, maybe *western*."

Like the *salwar kamizes* the *saris* will be exclusively designed, in this case by Nikhita herself. I wondered why Nikhita wore *Indian* for a wedding.

> "Because it's an *Indian* ceremony. A Christian wedding, maybe *western*. But I wanted to wear a *sari* for my graduation [in Glasgow, UK] too cause it looks super elegant. Sometimes even more so than a gown. It is *Indian formal* after all. It just has to be the correct material and type. Not the gaudy everyday stuff that people wear. Here [in Pune] even the maids wear *saris* everyday. But they're just flowery and plain basically. Very typical. And they just look normal not elegant. A *sari* looks really elegant when it's got good embroidery or made with expensive materials like silk and brasso and stuff. They're meant to be worn to formal affairs. Like my grandma used to have everyday *saris* to wear at home and all and then 'good' *saris* to wear for occasions. Cause many people wear *saris* everyday like I would wear jeans. They're a thin material with any flowery or random print. Just small small flowers."

Hence for this young generation both *sari* and *salwar kamiz,* or for that matter any *Indian* attire, have become *Indian formal*, ceremonial dresses representing *Indian-ness*, if made out of the right material and in a fashionable design. Otherwise, and if worn on a daily basis, inexpensive *saris* and *salwar kamizes* were considered *traditional*, *old-fashioned, conservative* or even *backward*. For this generation denim jeans have replaced the *salwar kamiz* as the mundane garb. However, the *sari* is still associated with an ideal of beauty that no other garment can compete with, not even a *Western* one. Nikhita admitted though that like all young women she needs her mother's help to drape the *sari* (cf. Banerjee/Miller 2008). She has designed several *sari*-like dresses herself that are not draped and hence do not bear the danger of exposing oneself involuntarily.

Thus women's clothing practices have become more and more eroticised with

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[30] *Ghagra* = skirt, *choli* = blouse

time. This trend was visible both in the designs of fashionable *saris* and *salwar kamizes* as well as in the adoption of figure hugging jeans and tight t-shirts or even a sleeveless top displayed by the café culture crowd. Hence it is possible to argue that *modern*, as presently understood, was equated with eroticisation. However, recall how the association of jeans with sexual assertiveness stood for assertiveness in general as illustrated in the Levi's campaign 'Live Unbuttoned'. This slogan was interpreted as 'liberate yourself', as being about freedom. For the café culture crowd this meant liberating themselves from the past and from the expectations and judgements of their elders. Choosing different styles according to the context, the young Puneites highlighted or understated different aspects of their selves "negotiating contemporary global and pan-Indian fashions" (Osella/Osella 2007:249). On a daily basis they donned foreign brand clothes highlighting that they were global consumers. For markedly *Indian* events they donned *Indian* clothes thus highlighting their *Indian-ness*. Clothing was another bodily practice through which young Puneites wished to transcend the local and bring the global home – similar to young adults in China (Rofel 2007:123).

The young generation felt that jeans and t-shirt offered freedom in a very physical sense. Wearing a *sari* was a complicated venture that required skill and practice. First, six yards of cloth have to be tamed and draped properly. Second, there is always the danger of it unraveling. Third, parts of the belly and the back are exposed which has to be kept under control with the *pallu*[31] that constantly moves (Banerjee/Miller 2008:41). The *salwar kamiz* was more practical in that it could not come loose. However, the long *kurta* covering the bottom had to be controlled so that it would not move up or get trapped. The biggest hassle however was the *dupatta* which had an affinity for gravity. A young mother told me that she wore jeans when she travelled because it was too much to handle her three-year old, a suitcase and the *dupatta*. Apart from the danger of slipping the *dupatta* bore the danger of getting caught in a motorbike wheel or the like. Jeans and t-shirt on the other hand are hands-off clothes.

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[31] The *pallu* is the end of the *sari* that falls loosely over one shoulder. It is often richly ornamented.

The predominant reason given for wearing jeans by young adults of the café culture was: "Because they're comfy." Arun elaborated in this way:

> "It's chilled out and relaxed. With trousers you have to iron them and stuff. But it's not only that. In formals you would stick out. Everyone wears Adidas, Nike and Levi's. In formals you wouldn't be *cool* enough."

Arun associates jeans with leisure, practicality, foreign consumer brands and with being *cool.* Nikhita highlighted another aspect:

> "Because they're comfy. And because they suit me. I kinda choose clothes that suit my personality like Nike and Adidas and Puma. I'm more sporty casual. Don't really care about wearing capris if they're in fashion. I'll wear stuff that suits me. They're not always in fashion. The fit of the jeans in fashion keeps changing. But I buy jeans once a year or so and wear them no matter what."

Note that Nikhita named similar foreign brands. She alleged that consumption offered her the freedom of choice and to express herself. Both comments show that young adults used clothing practices to emphasise and deemphasise certain aspects of their selves. For this generation, jeans were default clothes that make them feel comfortable both physically and socially in the sense of 'not sticking out'. Nisha added another dimension to that when she remarked that since women wear jeans they were not "only beautiful showcases" anymore. Jeans were not only in fashion, they were very flexible. They can be dressed up or down. They can be tight or loose. They can be combined with a 'decent' *Indian* top or a 'provocative' tank top. They were unisex clothes, but the different styles could be used for eroticisation. Wearing a certain style and combining it with accessories they could be fashionable or neutral. Miller and Woodward (2011) argue that this flexibility is the reason for denim's global ubiquity. While clearly a fashion trend, jeans and the accompanying styles seemed to promise the freedom of choice and of self-expression for this generation of young Puneites in 2008.

The rest of this chapter is concerned with how the café culture crowd understands and locates themselves in their world through their dressed bodies.

The Café Culture's Sartorial Message: Gender and Space-Making

Denim jeans were the consistent trademark of the café culture, worn by young

men and women alike. Jeans in particular and their clothing practices in general markedly distinguished them from the rest of Pune's population. Though jeans wearing was not uncommon in urban India generally, in Pune there was only one other group discernible that wore jeans: young men from the *lower middle class* and *lower classes*. Jeans were also remarkable because the overall appearance of the Indian population clearly distinguished between the two sexes while jeans were unisex. However, jeans were neither new nor uncommon in urban India. Yet in Pune the current fashion of sexy outfits, of which jeans were an important part, served young and old to create a generational opposition. For the young generation, jeans had the versatile potential to communicate autonomy, desirability, youth, decency, sexuality, assertiveness and freedom. Jeans and the appertaining fashionable tops visually distinguished the café culture from the rest of the population. Jeans wearing had a time and a place, namely the café culture. Young adults often started wearing *formals* when entering the world of salaried work. They changed into jeans when hitting the spaces of the café culture after work. In their clothing practices young adults distinguished themselves from the past and their parents. They transcended the local and domesticated the global.

Gender Expectations

In the opening vignette Nisha pointed to the relation between clothing practices and gender expectations. When leaving the house women used to veil, manipulating either the *pallu* (end of *sari* that falls loosely over shoulder) or the *dupatta* (shawl matching *salwar kamiz*) in order to practice modesty (Tarlo 1996:166). Though many poor and rural women were still practicing it at the time of my research, this practice was uncommon amongst urban *middle class* women. Nisha was imagining the past as a time of constraint to emphasise current change, similar to young adults in China (Rofel 2007). Jeans and t-shirt offered no option to veil. However, many young women tightly wrapped their heads and faces in scarfs when travelling on a scooter or motorbike. They named protection against pollution and the sun as reasons. It also gave protection from being recognised. Many young women, however, went to no such trouble even when tightly holding on to their male motorbike driver.

Not only were the young café-going women not staying at home, they were drawing attention to their bodies. They chose their own clothes and boyfriends thus exerting control over their bodies and sexuality, regardless of whether they had an arranged marriage or married through romance. Wearing tight outfits they were challenging existing South Asian gender expectations and asserting their independence from their elders' expectations and judgements.

Though jeans were becoming more common, especially in urban India, and the trend towards eroticisation was not new, many parents still had very different ideas. Sixty-year-old Nilima linked clothing practices and appropriate behaviour for women more than once:

> "In India a woman is different. They are more natural. They serve their husband and this is right. Now an Indian woman wants equality. She says 'I'm bold. I go out on my own. I'm like a man.' She dresses provocatively. She goes out at night. Then she's treated badly. If she wants equality she has to defend herself too. But then women depend on their husband to defend them. Where is that equality then? Why is it bad to depend on my husband? I like it. I still feel independent. It doesn't mean that we are not independent."

Nilima expressed a view that Shilpi Phadke (2007a, b) has explored academically: when in public an Indian woman has to prove herself worthy of protection by fabricating purpose and respectability. Dressing appropriately, i.e. decently, is one means to legitimise women's presence in public. Dressing in revealing clothes, going out alone and at night were all considered to render an *Indian* woman disreputable, not worthy of protection and almost non-*Indian* in this view. Nilima also invoked her notion of a woman's role. She saw it as naturally given that a woman became a wife, served her husband and depended on him for protection but would still feel independent. She made no secret of disapproving of tank tops, even for her six-year-old granddaughter who lived in England. One evening she told me how she and her husband had searched for a suitable wife for their other son. She complained several times that "all these young women were so disgustingly independent. They even gave their e-mail addresses and had pictures in jeans on the website." In contrast twenty-two-year-old Nisha commented:

> "It worries me that people don't question these things. Even if it's an urban woman. This whole working career woman. She still has to go back home to the same discrimination. Which says that she has to get men along to be safer. It worries me! And it irritates me more than anything."

Nisha always wore jeans and rode her scooter around on her own, even at night. The parents' generation however regarded the appearance and the attitude as non-*Indian*. As a retired professor exclaimed in an interview: "Girls wear *American* dress and think they are American. Who says Americans are great? Exhibitionism was not part of *Indian* culture. Maybe a long time ago." When he said '*Indian*' he meant to say 'decent', rather than indecent. Especially wearing jeans was disapprovingly interpreted by parents as "aping *the West*".

Since jeans were no uncommon sight in urban India, the generational difference was linked to the current fashion rather than jeans as such. Jeans stood pars pro toto for the perception of a momentous change since liberalisation. Jeans and appertaining accessories served the young adults to assert their freedom from the past and their parents, challenging gender norms, transcending the local and domesticating the global. As one young lady said:

> "These tags are superficial. We all wear foreign brands and jeans. That's not westernisation. Not everything Indian is good. There's been the caste system and abuse of women, for instance. And not everything western is bad. There are areas where we haven't been able to do half as well as they have."

Parents on the other hand feared that the current trend was non-*Indian*. Hence the parents assumed that outwardly behaviour reflected a departure from Indian-ness. The young generation on the other hand chose not to emphasise their Indian-ness in their daily wear. Yet to them, the de-emphasising did not mean a renunciation of being Indian; rather they wished to transcend the local while bringing the global home.

A Limited Space of Display and Reception

The café culture crowd is a very small proportion of the Indian population. They represent a small portion of the young, urban, comparatively affluent segment of society. Nikhita acknowledged this when I asked her whether she never felt uncomfortable in her skinny jeans and strapless tops. Did people stare? Did she like to provoke?

> "I don't like to provoke but I am not bothered either. But one thing is, if I know I'm going to a cheaper area of the city I will cover up. The thing is here everyone stares. Trust me. Some girls stare at me more than guys. If I go to Inox[32], I

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[32] Inox is a multiplex cinema in Camp, a *cosmopolitan* area of Pune.

wouldn't mind wearing a halter. But not on Laxmi Road[33] for sure. At least I'll pull on a scarf onto my shoulders or a jacket when in that area."

Hence the revealing top was the problem not the jeans. Though jeans were common in urban Indian and young people in jeans could be seen all over Pune riding their motorbikes and scooters, the density was highest around colleges and cafés. In Pune in 2008 there was only one other discernible group that donned jeans: poor young men such as vegetable vendors, rickshaw drivers and the like. Theirs were cheap locally made jeans while the young *middle class* wore foreign brand jeans. Hence, to enter a café young Puneites did not only need the money to consume in the café but also to afford the right kind of clothes. The right kind of clothes identified the right kind of crowd.

Furthermore the café culture's clothing habitus created a spatiality. Sporting their sexy outfits the young Puneites felt most comfortable in certain areas and even in certain establishments such as colleges, cafés, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, malls and multiplex cinemas. In their predominantly denim jeans appearance they also appropriated these spaces. Here they knew they were amongst the like-minded. Here they wanted to impress and fit in. The pressure to acknowledge spatiality was higher for young women. Men in trousers aroused no objections and jeans were just another kind of trousers. There was more pressure on women to acknowledge the specificities of an event and place, and to dress accordingly, as mentioned above, with regard to weddings, for example. Even in college a young woman has to be conscious of what kind of top she wears with jeans or she will receive malicious comments from professors and students alike, as many young women told me.

However, the café culture carried its worldview in the form of its jeans out of the limited spaces of the cafés. On motorbikes and scooters, jeans were seen throughout the city. But even for formal events, young Puneites pushed the envelope. Looking at Nilima's son's wedding pictures I was surprised to see two young women in jeans and t-shirt. Nilima said: "For a wedding you should dress up. But if someone comes in jeans and t-shirt you cannot say anything." She

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[33] Laxmi Road is the shopping street in the old part of Pune inhabited by the old Pune elite (orthodox Brahmins) and *lower middle classes.*

made a similar remark when we attended a *Satyanarayan puja*[34] at her cousin's house in Koregaon Park. Most women wore *saris*, but the host and two other ladies wore fancy *salwar kamizes* in fashionable design and material. Only three men were present. The *puja* recipient wore a *kurta pyjama* from Kerala. This was repeatedly noticed since none of those present had ever seen him in "an *Indian*". The two other men were young and clearly belonged to the café culture. The younger one had shoulder-length hair and was wearing jeans with fashionable tears. Aaji was even more distressed than Nilima. She remarked:

> "Look at his hair and his jeans. They are torn. He looks like a poor man. And his hair is too long. It doesn't look good. He looks like a woman."

When I told her that he paid money to buy the jeans as they were, with the tears, she reacted incredulous.

These two examples, being in jeans at a wedding and in torn jeans at a *puja*, illustrate how the message may be misunderstood, owing to diverging moral aesthetic standards. In these contexts the jeans were not considered *cool* or *modern* or sexy, rather they were 'out of place' in the eyes of sixty-year-old Nilima and eighty-year-old Aaji. Hence while the young people considered jeans as appropriate in these situations, Nilima and Aaji perceived them as inappropriate. Nilima thought jeans were inappropriate at a wedding because one should dress up, a criteria the jeans did not fulfil for her. The *puja* was a less *formal* event. Aaji did not seem to think that jeans per se were inappropriate for a *puja*, since there was another young man in denim that she did not comment on. Rather she considered torn jeans in general as inappropriate since they looked shabby, and long hair as something reserved for women. Hence his personalised style (alterity within conformity), which his peers would have appreciated as *cool*, offended Aaji with her age-related diverging moral aesthetic standards. Fashion had changed with regard to what men and women should look like.

The Special Space of Nightclubs

The limited spatiality was even more accentuated in nightclubs. The pressure

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[34] This ritual can be performed on any day for any occasion, I was told. In this case it was for the host's brother who now lived in the USA and was visiting his family in Pune.

also seemed higher for both young men and women: the pressure to "display one's ability to maneuver in such a space" (Rofel 2007:121). The expectation was to look *cool* and *sexy*. Outfits were attentively picked. About half the women dressed in figure-hugging jeans and tops of all sorts. The other half sported cocktail dresses, tight jersey mini dresses, baby doll dresses or mini skirts and tops. Young men usually formed the majority in a nightclub. They were all dressed up in one way or another: most in jeans and collared shirt, some in trousers.

The constant checking and adjusting of clothing items told of insecurity. The insecurity had three sources, all related to the more sexualised atmosphere of the nightclubs. Most young women were not used to wearing such revealing clothes as strapless tops or cocktail dresses. They did not trust the garments and hence constantly made sure they were still in place. The insecurity suggested inexperience. Secondly, in nightclubs the clothing practices have become not so much inappropriate as transgressive with respect to circumambient judgements that could be made. Thirdly, the display of sexuality among a crowd can bring with it unaccountable risk. Though in this tightly constrained space it may be more the unaccountability, the unknown, rather than the risk itself which disconcerts people.

During the night young Puneites were not only challenging gender expectations, they seemed to be glamorously celebrating their 'right to leisure and pleasure' and a desire to control their own bodies and sexuality. The glamorous appearance stood in continuity with the South Asian practice of following 'big men' (Mines 1994, Carrithers 2010) or 'big women'. By copying the "bling" (Gupta 2008) of stars (mostly Bollywood and Hollywood actors and actresses) young adults hoped the fame and wealth would rub off on them. Or at least they could show their aspiration to an affluent lifestyle. Through western clothes, discotheques etc., the Indian elite and *middle class* were "reasserting snobbery with more contemporary artefacts" (Gupta 2000:24). The association of going to parties with being rich was furthered by two comments: Leela, who was eighteen years old and had just finished junior college, remarked during a party at Mauve's, said to be the hippest club in town at the time: "Most of the girls

here are from a very rich strata of society. That's why there are so few. The guys are from all classes. They are mostly call centre employees." Arun once explained what he used to think: "The shorter the skirt, the richer the girl." These comments reflect the *middle class*' distinction from the elite's perceived immoderateness, e.g. parties and short skirts.

The eroticisation of evening wear stood in continuity with the increased eroticisation of current fashion styles. Note though that my young friends made it explicitly known that for a night out they only considered *Western*-style clothes. When going out to a nightclub both young men and women paid great attention to their appearance. It usually involved serious dressing up in either a *formal* or a *casual* manner. Though women's clothes were more varied, style was no less important to young men. Kamil was twenty-one years old when I met him. He had just finished his BA in management. He was slightly heavy set with a friendly round face. He had a quiet and thoughtful nature. His circle of friends was large and included men and women. A Muslim himself, his best friend since early school days was a Hindu. One evening before a night out to Mauve's Kamil called me saying he would not join us because he did not know what to wear: "I can't find my favourite *formal* shirt and *formal* shoes". Kamil noted that it was good to dress up sometimes. He ended up going out, explaining that his mother had mercy with him. She found and ironed a shirt. He wore his white long-sleeve shirt with light blue stripes tucked into jeans and with the top buttons open.

Though the sexualisation was more noticed in women's fashion, it was also observable in men's. They left the top two or three buttons of their shirts open. Some additionally adorned their chest with pendants. "Too damn *sexy*!" a friend once commented on Arun's pendant. *Sexy*, like *cool*, was both an aesthetic as well as a moral judgement, i.e. it expressed both a liking and an approval of appropriateness.

At another instance at Gaia, where DJ Pearl, apparently the most famous Djane (female disc jockey or DJ) in India was playing that night, a guy and his female entourage made their appearance. The guy, in a dark suit and purple shirt,

paced ahead followed by three young women. He held the first one by the hand. She was wearing a simple short black dress and high heels. Her hair fell open over her shoulders. The second young woman was sporting a short black dress made of raw silk. Under her right arm she carried a huge black clutch purse. Her proud head was framed by a pageboy hairstyle. Her appearance was like a fashion show. The last woman broke the picture wearing a green skirt and purple top.

Here is a typical answer from a young guy when I remarked that I found the way some of the girls were dressed… "Scandalous?", Arun completed my sentence. I explained that I would not use that word since I was used to this kind of outfit but here it did surprise me. I wondered whether Arun found it scandalous. Originally he had found it scandalous how some of the girls dressed. "Now I got used to it." This implies that there was also an element of pushing the envelope, of derring-do, a frequent heightening of the risk.

The people who participated in it considered the nighttime café culture as even *cooler* than the daytime one, while wider society disapproved of it more. This was due to the more complicated access and greater risk, i.e. one needed the money, permission or ignorance of the parents and the guts to do something that the majority of the people frowned upon because of the alleged involvement of smoking, alcohol, drugs and sex.

Young women were very aware of these circumambient judgements. At the night out at Mauve's, Leela was attired in a white miniskirt, which barely covered her buttocks, and in a golden Dolce&Gabanna spaghetti top, which she was constantly pulling up. Leela acknowledged that her parents disapproved of her way of dressing. Her mother told her to cover up so that the neighbours would not see her revealing dresses. "There are still very *conservative* people," Leela remarked. So out on the street she wore a jacket and leggings. She changed in a friend's car before entering the club. All my young female friends changed in a friend's car before entering a club or met at a friend's house where the parents were out.

The evening attire and attitudes were a good deal more marked and transgressive than the daytime jeans outfits. The night is the time for adventure, risk, deliciously dangerous excitement, while the day is the time for a cup of coffee. The crowd that met in nightclubs was part of the café culture but a part on the edge, not in the everyday normal. This was visible in the choices of outfits: *formal* and dressed up. More effort was not only necessary with regard to one's clothing choice but also with regard to convincing or lying to one's parents. Money was needed to buy appropriate clothes, to get into a club and to buy drinks. It was a much more secretive activity than going for a coffee. This was also evident in the practice of young women covering their revealing outfits from parents and the public on the streets. At nighttime even a daytime café or restaurant might be transformed, in the sense that people turned up more formally or more revealingly dressed and the light was dimmed. It all happened behind closed doors not behind huge window fronts. It was at night, and especially in nightclubs, that the moral aesthetic standards of the café culture were most distinct from the values of the elders. The clothing practices – and the nighttime activities as such – were not merely inappropriate but transgressive in the light of circumambient judgements.

Denim Jeans and Contemporary Practices (or Indian Modernity?)

> "Surprisingly, perhaps, I argue that some of the deepest philosophy of the modern world is to be found in blue jeans, and it is in our jeans (rather than in our genes) that we can find evidence that accounts for crucial aspects of contemporary behavior." (Miller 2010: 420)

Miller argues in a programmatic article about an "Anthropology in Blue Jeans" that anthropology has long assumed normativity, i.e. actions are morally judged as right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, on the basis of norms. He suggests an alternative: "the ordinary", developed in the theory of practice and material culture studies, and which he holds is increasingly important in some populations (ibid.:415). The ordinary, as opposed to the normative, dispenses with moral judgement. It is based on the feeling of comfort, a physical, as well

as social, feeling. Feeling comfortable in society means "a sense of having achieved the inconspicuous, unobtrusive, and unremarkable that attracts no unwanted gaze when a person just becomes one of a crowd" (ibid.:424).

My ethnography has shown that, for the young generation, jeans in India can function as 'comfortable ordinary' or 'normal' in some spaces, such as a café near a college at midday. But in other circumstances, such as a wedding reception, they might be considered out of place. In either case there is a moral aesthetic judgement involved. In one case it is 'I fit in with the *modern global*' and in the other it is 'I challenge the *conservative*'. Hence for Pune – and perhaps India in general – Miller's statement needs to be relativised. I argue that in Pune jeans and other forms of dress were sometimes 'the normal' and sometimes a challenge, sometimes *traditional* or *conservative* or *modern*, depending on the situation and the historical context.

Aaji felt most comfortable in a *sari*. Her daughter Nilima felt most comfortable in a *salwar kamiz* and Nikhita in her skinny jeans. Hence these three attires constituted 'the ordinary' for these three generations respectively. Banerjee and Miller (2008:252) opined that *sari* and *salwar kamiz* together would prevent jeans and t-shirt from becoming the most effective "embodiments of the ordinary", because the *salwar kamiz* was considered the "functional everyday form of modern dress" as opposed to the *sari*. This might be true for the Indian population as a whole. But among the café culture crowd in Pune in 2008 jeans embodied 'the ordinary' and were considered the functional everyday *modern* attire.

So if it was not the ordinary in India, what did the young generation refer to? Clothing, like any aspect of human social life, has an interactive character. Rather than simply expressing the self, clothing creates the self. Initially very few and very remote people wore jeans, such as film stars. They were associated with a rebellious character. With economic liberalisation, more actors wore brand jeans and now the elite and *middle class* also had access to them. Jeans became acceptable amongst a young urban *middle class* crowd. More people of that group wore jeans, which in turn made them more accepted. Though jeans have become common in urban India, they were charged with

115

meaning. For the parents' generation they stood for a fashion trend that they perceived as too sexualised, too *westernised*, too independent. The young adults, through their dressed bodies, distinguished themselves from and challenged their parents and the past. Jeans and other current fashion trends distinguished them from their elders and the rest of society and identified them with like-minded people. The pressure to belong was high as Arun remarked several times, recounting how intimidated he was by the fancy clothes his college mates wore when he first started going to college. The café culture is an extension of the school, college and work crowd. The young people felt the pressure to demonstrate that they were neither poor, *backward, conservative* nor *old-fashioned*. Rather they wanted and thought they should be *modern* and *progressive*, which meant 1) embracing consumption and a leisure culture; 2) more equality regarding gender expectations and caste, regional and religious differences; 3) more independence from elders and their *traditional* values; 4) premarital relationships and sex; 5) liberating oneself and being who one wants to be. This was one intention within their own society.

Miller (2010:421) further argues that the omnipresence of jeans, their personalised distressing marks (fading and tearing) and their default character when people are unsure what to wear, show that denim jeans express people's intentions to deal with the tensions between the universal and the personal. Since the café culture crowd is uniformly dressed in jeans there are no distinctions discernible between them. Once distinguished from the wider society, jeans reveal nothing about the wearer. As the next step from the *salwar kamiz* they have lost their identification with India. Rather the café culture sported clothing with visible foreign brand names. The young adults were proudly *Indian* but they did not have to wear it on their sleeves. The young Puneites, through their jeans-clad bodies, understood their world and positioned themselves in it. Jeans embodied who they wanted and felt they ought to be: citizens of the world, at the same time transcending the local and domesticating the global.

Jeans did not have a pre-given meaning and were just put on *Indian* bodies. The Indian bodies created their meaning and their meaning created the *Indian*

body. In the Indian context jeans were given a specific meaning in relation to other clothing practices and values and in relation to practices of the wider society. Likewise, the current fashion of jeans in India was not universal. By wearing jeans, the café culture crowd expressed its intention to be free from social restrictions in India and to be one with the globalised world as they imagined it to be. They wished to not be judged by their 'Indian-ness' but by their personal achievements. They wanted a piece of the cake of the global capital and lifestyle. Wearing jeans, they showed that they had made it. They were part of it, even if the rest of the world did not see it yet. Many times they have told me that they wish I would tell the world what India was really like: not poor, dirty and *backward*, but part of the *modern* world. In their jeans they want to deliver the same message: normality before an imagined global audience.

The next chapter will illuminate the domestic Indian conviviality which the café culture perceived as the *traditional*, *conventional* domain and from which they wished to break free when they went out to meet their friends at a café.

3 Morality of Indian Conviviality I: The Old Way

> *"Don't get the ill feelings of anybody"* was one of the *"lessons of life"* that Nilesh learned from his grandmother, his father's mother. He added that it meant that you should not do or say anything that would offend another person since it might come back to you. One evening after dinner, Nilesh was in one of his talkative moods: *"My grandmother had the greatest influence on me. Especially regarding food. My mother also did but she was a very quiet, understanding, loving person. And she died young. She never spoke out loud but kept things to herself. But my grandmother was a very tempered person. When these people were angry, they were angry and they showed it. We were all scared of her. [He laughed.] But she was also a loving person. She had a big influence on me and my sisters. We used to sleep with her. We had two bedrooms. Our parents stayed in one and the other was for her. We slept with her."*
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> *Nilesh, 72 years old (27 May 2008)*

Nilesh's narrative illustrates the importance and influence of the extended family in India, describes the intimate, spatially confined living conditions and communicates the need for harmonious conviviality. I follow Overing and Passes (2000:xii-xiii) in understanding 'conviviality' as a "mode of sociality" or a "sense of community" which has a "political and a moral meaning as well as an aesthetics of action". It goes far beyond the "particular English sense of simply having a good (and, it is implicit, slightly inebriated) time in the company of others". Rather conviviality hitches the original Latin root (convivere) meaning 'to live together', 'to share the same life' or 'a joint/shared life'. It is an attempt to engage with the "moral virtues and the aesthetics of interpersonal relations" rather than with "structure" (ibid.:7). Conviviality refers to a sense of personal belonging which is reminiscent of an earlier notion of society as "amiable, intimate sets of relationships" (ibid.:14).

When I set out to do fieldwork in Pune the question that most intrigued me was: Is the Indian notion of conviviality and of the person changing? We can delve deeper with this line of questions: Is the way people relate to each other and the

way they see themselves in these relations changing due to transformations in the underlying conditions? Could the changes be a direct or indirect result of economic liberalisation and the new global consumer culture of India? Could it be due to changes in living conditions, family structures, mobility, etc.?

The 'cultural dominant' or 'ideology' of India, i.e. the general guiding ideas, values and directions of society, has been described as "holism" (Dumont 1986), "socio-centrism" or "collectivism". Contrary to western 'individualism', the main value in a holistic society is the society as a whole and not the individual person. Entities, be it human beings or any social units, are primarily defined by their relationship with each other and with the social whole. Generally these relationships are hierarchical in nature[35]. Thus the social whole, be it society or any social unit, subordinates the human beings, who are not valued in themselves but represent in their relations and actions other social values. This view is illustrated by the concept of the caste, which western ideology has trouble understanding, according to Dumont (ibid.:11): "our culture is permeated with nominalism, which grants real existence only to individuals and not to relations, to elements and not to sets of elements". Thus the Indian person is primarily defined by his social context and as contributing to the social order. Giving primary importance to relationships translates into social norms of generational reciprocity and interdependence within the family, mutual involvement and caring, and establishes social hierarchies. These hierarchies include those of age (principle of seniority), gender, caste and class. Hence in a 'typical' Indian family the transition from childhood to adulthood is guided by the ideal of permanent interdependence which goes hand in hand with the expectation of life-long co-residence of younger with elder and of living life on the elders' terms and not ones' own.

These conditions of living differ considerably from those in 'western' countries which value the individual the highest. Here a human being or social unit is first and foremost defined in relation to itself and only secondarily in its relations and interactions with other such units. I hasten to emphasise that these are cultural

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[35] This is said to apply to South Asia in general, except for some foraging societies (Alvi 2001:46, fn4).

dominants and there are bound to be alternative and even conflicting values in every society. Thus the individual or individuality are also recognised in India, and there are social hierarchies and mutual dependencies in the West.

In the West, the individual as the primary value is said to be the condition and the outcome of modernity (Bauman 2000:14). The Age of Enlightenment and Industrialisation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries broke with custom, tradition, religion, traditional loyalties, customary rights and obligations. The human being was conceived of as a rational being with a 'free will' independent of the will of others and of the "weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)" (Mahmood 2005:8). The underlying assumption was that all humans are physically equal and free prior to any cultural imprinting. To paraphrase Bauman (2000), with God out of the way it became the humans' task to create order and themselves. The new order was primarily defined in economic terms and in terms of "rational calculations of effects" (ibid.:4). Traditional obligations and territorially rooted tight networks were an obstacle to the free movement of capital, goods, people and ideas. Self-realisation was linked to individual autonomy, namely defined as the ability to realise one's 'true will' rather than tradition, custom, transcendental will or social coercion (Mahmood 2005:11). Society no longer provided its members with roles, concepts, ideals, dreams, etc. as guidelines to live the lives that are passed down to them. Who to be, what to do and how to act were not longer a given. It became the individual's task to determine and take responsibility for these roles, decisions and their consequences. The individual strategically defines social actions, which are no longer oriented by social norms, and defends her cultural and psychological specificity. This development is reflected by the emphasis on human rights which are meant to protect the "right of individuals to stay different and to pick and choose at will their own models of happiness and fitting life-styles". In today's postmodernity or "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2000) individualisation is about the freedom to become anybody. In a consumer society, everything is a matter of choice, except the compulsion to choose (ibid.:73). For every life decision there should be a choice. Shopping has become the archetype for the search for guidelines and role models. Consumption practices promise self-expression and autonomy, namely the

freedom to become anybody and be different. The underlying assumption is that our happiness depends on our own – the individual's alone – competence but we are not competent enough and should thus try harder (ibid.:74). Thus the ideal of the human being as an autonomous individual with a 'free will' is rooted in the specificities of northern European/ American histories. This ideal might not only be an illusion but places all the burden for decisions, actions, failures and successes on the individual to a degree that is almost pathological. Within western cultures, based on the individual as prime value, granting the monopoly of reason to the individual sustains the feeling of superiority. It leads to a perversion of individualism: a human being is defined as equal to all others and free on a physical base.

> "Thus, people who seem to lack this common physical base, and even societies where individuals are subordinated and defined with respect to other values, are effectively excluded from the common human base." (Alvi 2001:47)

Following Dumont (1986:207-13), I propose to regard individualism, western culture and society as one particular form of humanity, rather than as the only valid way of describing conditions of life.

When introduced in India free market economy fell on different grounds, namely that the social whole was the prime value not the individual. In the wake of colonialism, India has long engaged with European modernity. It has implemented the nation-state, democracy, industrialisation, modern technologies, etc. Individual rights are anchored in its constitution. India has embraced aspects of the modern western self: the public/private distinction in debates on domesticity; the idea of "individual property"; and "natural rights" of women (Chakrabarty 2000:229), as reflected in women's education, the ban on child marriage and *sati*, and the propagation of widows rights and remarriage. However, European-style individualism has not become a dominant value in India (ibid.:215-16). Relationships continued to be the prime value, and they were regarded as a "natural[36] solidarity" rather than as a voluntary contractual one (ibid.:218). Similar to Mahmood's (2005) apt description of women in the mosque movement in Egypt, a person's agency and self-realisation in India were not conceptualised as independent from the will of others, tradition,

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[36] I assume that Chakrabarty understands 'natural' in the sense of 'taken-for-granted' or 'self-evident', rather than as the opposite of cultural, i.e. primitive. I most certainly use it in the former sense here.

religion and custom but in accordance with them. A person could realise herself and feel free by fulfilling norms, namely by the way she performed, inhabited, experienced, aspired to and reached for social norms and expectations.

But what happened when economic liberalisation introduced a consumer culture in India? Consumer culture operates on the imperative of choice. The café culture became suggestive of freedom: "the freedom 'to achieve', to individual choice, to be part of the 'real' world, and, finally to fulfilment" (Srivastava 2007:15). As seen in the previous chapters, the young adults were expressing themselves through fashion and asserting their independence from their parents through their activities and use of space. This chapter first illuminates interpersonal relationships or how human beings in Pune in 2008 related to each other and the underlying cultural dominant. In the second part family life will be explored, especially what the expectation of permanent dependency meant for young adults and their aspiration for freedom. While their quest for freedom from parental control challenged hierarchies within the family, they did not question the value of long-term mutual dependency. And though they longed for more autonomy, they continued to value caring and mutual involvement.

My account was inspired by Riesman's (1988 [1974]:2) notion of "disciplined introspection": I compare my feelings and reactions in particular situations with what I can infer of Puneites' feelings in those or similar situations. This admittedly potentially dangerous comparison serves to highlight the differences in the rhetoric of personhood between 'us' and 'them', namely how a person wanted and felt she ought to be. My intention to highlight the differences between these two societies is not to show that one has a right over the other or to claim the monopoly of reason for one. Instead, the differences should be carved out in such a way that each society's specific ideas, values and its understandings of a person are recognised in their own reason. The two different rhetorics of personhood represent two different versions of being human in our contemporary world.

Relating: Formal and Informal

The way people treated one another in my social environment in Pune was described in terms of being *formal* or *informal*, reminiscent of the way clothing was classified. Many people perceived the polite, respectful comportment that was drilled into me at home in Germany as *formal*. After only three days in Pune my host, Nilima, told me: "Don't be so *formal* with us. Just feel at home." She elaborated by telling me how her two sons used to regularly bring friends home after school. They would just look into the fridge and state "Aunty, I'm hungry," and she would cook something for them. However, it took many more similar incidents until I realised that I could just ask Nilima to cook something for me.

While I did not take her up on it, I considered Nilima's offer a voluntary act of free will. Nilima on the other hand saw it as fulfilling her role. She often told me that the values of a good woman were to be a good cook, a good wife, a good mother, and a good housekeeper, to always be industrious and never to complain. She judged other women in this way. About her neighbour she said: "She suffers a lot from her in-laws. But she never complains. She is a very good woman." Nilima herself complained about how things were changing and how important it was for a woman to be able to cook and care for her family, even though education and job were also important. Selflessly caring for loved ones was a moral virtue to her. It was how she wanted and thought she should be. It was also the existential position from which she experienced her world and moved others. Repeatedly she told me how she had sacrificed a lot to take care of her dying father-in-law and to raise her children. And now her sons lived in the UK and she was alone with Nilesh. These statements were meant to evoke praise and compassion. She saw it as her role and duty to cook and care for others, not as a demand on her. And she had taken me in as a daughter. Her husband, Nilesh, and my uncle were friends since 1968. Nilesh looked up to my uncle who he thought of as having worldwide renown in their profession. On this basis Nilesh and Nilima had agreed to host me. They have hosted other people over the years, children of friends who had come to study in Pune. So while I was afraid to be a burden, they always vehemently rejected this notion. It has widely been noted that this kind of hospitality is part of the family obligations

Indians take for granted (e.g. Kakar 2007:12).

In the beginning, Nilima sometimes seemed downright offended that I was being "so *formal*" and did not make use of her cooking abilities. Food plays a central role in South Asia, e.g. in caste restrictions and inter-caste relations, in ritual offerings and in hospitality. The same may be said about India that Schieffelin (1976:47) reports for the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea: "[...] food is important because it is a vehicle of social relationship." While visiting someone's house I was always offered food, or at least tea and biscuits. When I went to a café or the like with friends, we often ate something. I was permanently asked: "Did you have your food?" Conversations often started that way. Nilesh said: "Food is god." People repeatedly told me how important food was to them. They would always offer food to guests because they believed that a person with a full stomach could not be unhappy. I also learned that as my senior Nilima should always give me more food than herself. When once she helped herself to more *mango raaz*[37] than I had eaten, she felt terribly guilty. She felt by telling me she could make up for what she felt was wrong. Similarly to the way Schieffelin argues about the Kaluli (ibid.:47-8), I argue that in India the giving and sharing of food expressed sentiments of social relatedness such as affection, familiarity and good will. Offering and sharing food was considered good manners. Not sharing and giving food communicated the opposite and played a crucial role in inter-caste relations.

By offering food Nilima stressed our relationship and demonstrated Indian values of caring, generosity and selflessness. She wanted to make me happy by caring for me. On the other hand, I wanted to keep her happy by not having her do extra work. I would have considered such a demand as intruding on her autonomy, while she had no such association. She saw it as her responsibility to care for me, while I considered it my own responsibility.

However, it was not only with regard to food that people perceived my behaviour as *formal*. One day I asked Kamil for a ride in a text message: "Would it be requesting much if I asked for a lift?" To which he replied "Oh y du

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[37] Mango puree

124

gals always ave 2 b so frmal n shivelrous….it's da guys who have 2 b frmal[38]". When I asked him about it later he laughed and said: "You could have just asked me. It's no problem. Just ask me." Here again, while I did not want to be demanding and disposing of his time, it went without saying for Kamil. Like Nilima, he stressed our relationship and a moral aesthetic standard of caring. Thus *formal* seemed to mean treating someone like a stranger, with a detached attitude of not being involved and not having a mutual relationship. A *formal* relationship was less desirable than an *informal* familiar relationship.

What people in Pune described as *informal*, I often perceived to be impolite. Nilima insisted repeatedly that they were *informal* when having friends over and wondered whether I was as *informal* with my friends. By this she meant that when friends visited, everybody did what they wanted. Some would watch television, someone would use the computer, another person would pace up and down their bedroom talking on the phone, etc. It was a way of being together without necessarily dedicating one's full attention to the others by, for instance, engaging in a conversation. For Nilima to miss her daily routine of TV soaps, it had to be a special event, e.g. her husband's birthday, a religious festival, or a visit of long-term friends who lived abroad. Note also that the bedroom was not considered a private space. Regularly guests moved freely in the apartment.

Inspired by Alès (2000:141-2), who wrote about the Yanomami, I argue that this practice of conviviality, of just sitting together without necessarily dedicating one's attention to the guests or the hosts, expressed, affirmed and created a particularly close relationship. This kind of familiarity presupposed regular and frequent visits. It is not quite like living together but comparable. The 'we' is being stressed over the 'I' by not paying particular attention to any individual, thus emphasising conviviality which literally means 'live with'.

Sometimes I felt that people were bossing me around. I had a traumatic rickshaw ride with a young lady in a bulgy *salwar kamiz*. After dropping a friend,

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[38] "Oh, why do you girls always have to be so formal and chivalrous...it's the guys who have to be formal"

she insisted on taking me to my destination even though she was not sure where it was. I knew where I was going. When I told the rickshaw driver to stop and wanted to hop out, she grabbed my arm and pulled me back into the rickshaw. She made the driver go around the block and when she decided that I had reached my destination she literally pushed me out of the rickshaw. This was an extreme case but it happened regularly that women (rarely men) would push me aside or to the place where they wanted me to go. A man would not have touched me.

Women were the caregivers and guardians of the nation. Nilima once told a group of young students, who were trying to impose traffic rule on the population of Pune, to wear hats against the sun. Her sister told two young men not to smoke on the road. Arun commented on these stories:

> "Housewives have a tendency to gossip and give unwanted advice. Maybe because of a lack of better things to do. It's patronising and can be annoying. But otherwise it's free", he joked.

In this case Arun also found this kind of behaviour patronising. He and I felt it was none of their business, while they made it their business. To me it seemed like an intrusion of these young men's autonomy, namely to do what they wanted. However, the comments were an expression of caring, again, which implies that everybody should know about and care for everybody. Nilima and her sister acted like mothers of these young men. They did not expect them to be independent and to know what was best for them.

When people wanted something I often perceived the way they asked as demanding. To me they seemed like orders: "Give me your phone." "Come, come!" "Sit." "Pass the rice." My Marathi teacher told me that in Marathi, as in other Indian languages, the phrases 'thank you', 'please' and 'sorry' were rarely used. She was a very learned lady who had lived in Germany for ten years. She was in her early sixties, tall and lean, with delicate facial features. She wore *salwar kamizes* and a *bindi*[39], and her greying hair was done in the customary braid. She explained that 'sorry' (*māf karā*) would be appropriate when accidentally touching someone else with one's foot. This was considered an

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[39] Red dot between eyebrows traditional worn by married women. Like so many other things it has become a fashion item, too. Women who were fifty and older wore it traditionally.

insult since feet were regarded to be very dirty. In my experience, however, people did not apologise verbally but instead with a gesture that indicated touching their feet with the right hand and then one's own heart. This was a very formalised apology, just like touching an elder's feet was a ritualised way of showing respect. Generally, my teacher continued, 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'please' were hardly ever verbalised in Marathi since they were considered to be very *formal*. Feelings were much more important. They were conveyed by facial expressions and one's tone of voice. So in Marathi, as in many Indian languages, politeness is expressed through linguistic registers, such as one's tone of voice, rather than through words. The same seemed to be true for the Indian English. Though I could tell that people had learned that one ought to say 'please' and 'thank you' in everyday English, Indian habits of use were applied. Often it seemed that people felt obliged to say 'thank you' to me. My young friends repeatedly told me that I said 'thank you' way too often. They would say: "There is no thank you, sorry or please in friendship."

Once again, this *informality* emphasised the familiarity of the relationship. No 'phrase of civility' was required; one expressed one's feelings through the tone of voice. It might be no coincidence that the English equivalent of the German word '*Höflichkeitsfloskel*' (literally 'empty phrase of courtesy') contains the word 'civility'. Norbert Elias traced "the civilizing process" (1978 [1939]) as a change, following the Middle Ages into "modern times", in European moral aesthetic standards regarding table manners, forms of speech, bodily functions, sexual conduct and violence. He argued that the "thresholds of embarrassment and shame raised" (ibid.:70). Sensibilities became more complex and people expected more reserve from one another. They started to control each other and themselves increasingly. A lot of cultural work was necessary to move to an internalised 'self-restraint'. Foucault (1977[1975]) later traced the trajectory of 'self-disciplining' from a different angle. Back to Pune, I regularly felt bossed around, offended, and unconsidered and as if my autonomy and independence were being ignored. My friends on the other hand often felt that I was "detached and distant".

The way people asked for things often seemed to me to leave no room, or even

a question mark, to reply with 'no'. Indeed I was often told that in Pune no one would say 'no'. In fact, what I understood as a straightforward but negative answer or request was considered rude by people in Pune. Consider the following incident: one evening Nilima invited me for dinner. I went early to spend some time chatting with her. Aaji arrived a little later. Nilesh came home from work two hours later than usual. He told us that their sons' friend would visit in a little while with his wife, her mother and their little son. Nilima told me that she did not want to invite them for dinner since she did not have food for so many people. They arrived about an hour later. They stayed to chat. At 9.30 p.m. I was starving and wanted to leave. Nilima urged me to stay and said she was waiting for them to leave too. When they did I apologised to Nilima and Nilesh. Nilesh replied: "We were all impatient. We were all waiting for them to leave." I inquired whether he could not have asked them politely to leave. He instantly answered: "No! That would have been very rude!" I argued that their behaviour was very rude in my culture, i.e. showing up at dinner time and then staying for so long. Nilesh explained that the young woman's mother had come to visit. They were supposed to be at his clinic at five p.m. They were forty-five minutes late. The examination took another forty-five minutes. Afterwards they wanted to visit Nilima and Nilesh. But instead of going with Nilesh directly, they went somewhere else and only showed up after 8 p.m. He was obviously annoyed that he had to wait for so long. I repeated how rude this behaviour was in my culture. And if someone showed up around dinner time he or she would leave as soon as possible. Nilesh replied that his sons' friend was a very lovely person but that he had always been bad with time management. And since they came so often, "these kind of rules don't apply to them". Nilesh also gave a hint that the problem was that Nilima did not want to invite them for dinner. So in effect, Nilima was actioning a 'no' even if it was not said. There was a sacrifice for what remained unsaid: hunger and discomfort.

This story poignantly illustrates the relation between frequent visits, close relationships and *informal* mutual behaviour. Because these friends visited so frequently no rules applied to them. *Informal* was a moral aesthetic judgement which stressed the 'we' over the 'I', a stress on mutual caring and involvement. Because they were such close friends, Nilesh could not ask them to leave. To

maintain the relationship was more important than individual sensitivities such as annoyance and hunger. For the sake of the relationship we all had to suffer. However, there was another layer of complication. Nilima always offered food to these friends, except for this one time. She and Nilesh might have felt guilty for it while the guests were expecting to be fed. The situation was ambiguous for both parties. Perhaps not offering food and additionally asking to be left alone would have been a major offence and endangered the relationship.

Introducing someone or even oneself was also considered a *formality*. One afternoon I was sitting in my hosts' house when the door bell rang. A man in his early thirties was standing outside with a little boy in his arms. He said "Aunty and uncle are coming soon", reached through the iron bars, opened the latch and entered. Obviously I was the stranger but I was still perplexed that he entered the house without any explanation. So I introduced myself. Still nothing. So I finally asked him who he was. He was the best friend of my hosts' sons, a regular guest and now since their sons lived in the UK, almost like a son. His wife came a little later and said nothing either until I introduced myself. These non-introductions happened many times at my hosts' house. While family members were usually introduced to me, many friends were not. I felt they knew who I was, but nobody told me who they were. I quizzed my Marathi teacher. In her eyes it was a "little mistake" that my hosts did not introduce me to people. She opined that "Indians should learn these *formalities* of introducing". My hosts should have known that I was a foreigner and came to meet people. She said if I were ever to go to any of the yoga ladies they would probably not introduce me. They did not consider it necessary. Most of them were "quite *traditional*". But she herself was more *western* influenced and had even adapted some of the German ways of life. She suggested that I introduce myself. She explained that she usually asked people whether they lived very far away. "They will say they live five kilometres away. And you? Then I say seven kilometres. Then a conversation starts and people can ask for the name." She furthermore pointed out that the yoga ladies never greeted each other verbally. They did it with a smile. Indeed only four of the ladies, tellingly all in *western* sportive clothes and with experiences abroad, introduced themselves to me in the beginning with "Hi, I'm ..."

My Marathi teacher implied that introducing two people allowed them to get to know each other. Not introducing people precluded that possibility. My Marathi teacher suggested that by striking up a conversation first, some relation was established which then facilitated the introduction. Perhaps women in particular were not accustomed to or suppose to meet real strangers, i.e. people one knew nothing about and had no way of finding out about. Not finding it necessary to introduce a stranger might have implied an understanding that the (would-be) introducing person already knew everybody. My Marathi teacher, who was more used to meeting new people, had found new means of dealing with the problem by introducing herself. I believe that introducing people has something to do with the dignity of the individual. Not finding it necessary to introduce strangers indicates that the individual was not that important. An alternative interpretation is that the community was so tight-knit or that the individual was already known by other means. This is reminiscent of Mines' relational individuality or big men (1994). Not introducing someone could also be a way of not wishing to treat someone like a stranger or, on the other end of the spectrum, of making clear that that person will always be a stranger. This strategy might be played either way depending on the situation and thus allowing women to stay within cultural norms in situations that might be beyond the norm. Greeting each other with a smile conveyed familiarity and affection. It also implied some sense of equality: no one was bowing in a 'namaste' before anyone else.

Time was also a factor that people treated in an *informal* way. I wanted to arrange a meeting with a woman I had met once before through Nilima. Nilima was out of town for three months and the lady was supposed to leave two days after Nilima returned. I felt this to be a very uncomfortable situation. I needed to ask Nilima to call someone for me the day after she returned from a three-month trip to the UK and ask the lady to meet me on short notice just before she left. I asked *Mavshi* (Marathi for mother's sister), Nilima's sister, for advice. She laughed and shrugged it off: "Don't worry. We're not so *formal* here." It was not a problem to meet someone at short notice. Indeed, it turned out to not be a problem at all.

However, the "*informality*" was a two-edged sword. People used it in an authoritative way to demand things for themselves. A newspaper was the protagonist of one of my most embarrassing moments in Pune. I had attended the opening ceremony of an exhibition of Indian handicrafts in a hotel. Famous artisans from all over the country presented and sold their crafts and many were awarded with prizes. A couple of days later Nilima and I went back together. One of the artisans remembered me and showed me a newspaper with my picture in it that he had borrowed from another artisan. I asked whether it would be possible to get another newspaper. Both the artisans thought so but Nilima replied that it was impossible since it was from the previous day. So she took the newspaper and said that we were going to keep it since I was in it. She stated: "We can keep this, right." Without waiting for an answer she tucked the newspaper in her handbag and took off. I told her that she could not do this. She said she could because "I requested it." I went back and apologised to the two artisans. They shrugged and said "No problem". I could not help feeling that they were annoyed but also used to it. The original owner of the newspaper organised another copy of the newspaper from one of the hotel employees. I told him to keep that one since Nilima had kept his. When I later told Nilima about it she said that I should have kept that newspaper as well. She explained that she had 'requested' the newspaper. Even though the man had not answered, that was enough to keep it. I was appalled and could not help thinking that her actions had something to do with the caste system, i.e. she was a Brahmin while artisans tended to be from lower castes.

It must be obvious by now that I found it difficult to adjust to the 'Indian way' of relating interpersonally. I often perceived it as an infringement on my person and my personal space, or on others, as I noted in the last ethnographic snippet. My family and friends in Pune, on the other hand, felt that I often behaved in a distant and detached manner. They had a different sense of themselves and of their relationships with people[40]. It was my impression that I

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[40] Kakar notes that the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) research project, which surveyed middle managers in sixty-two countries, revealed that South Asia had the most "*humane orientation*, that is, the degree to which people are caring, altruistic, generous and kind" (Kakar 2007:21). In Germanic Europe, on the other hand, people were found to be most assertive, confrontational and aggressive – the opposite of humane.

was guided by abstract, logical, rational moral aesthetic standards such as honesty, equality and justice. These standards are independent of individual people and relationships but are supposed to apply neutrally to everyone alike. My social environment in Pune on the other hand applied moral aesthetic standards of caring. They wanted to maintain, create or fortify a relationship. *Informal* behaviour and a reluctance to say 'no' were intended to not offend and to make someone feel comfortable and happy. People wanted to be and thought they should be caring, helpful and generous and never wanted to refuse a favour openly. While I took myself as an individual with dignity and rights very seriously, they stressed our relationship. *Informal* behaviour to me meant not considering others' feelings, while to them it affirmed amity. *Formal* behaviour seemed detached and cold to them, while I felt I was showing consideration.

However, I sensed that my young friends' sense of self was slowly changing. Contrary to wearing jeans, this kind of change takes much longer. There was as much continuity as there was change. Young adults shared their elders' distinction of *formal* and *informal* behaviour. Yet they used 'thank you', 'sorry' and 'please' much more frequently, especially with strangers. They also took it more for granted to introduce people to each other. Though also placing great value on *informal* behaviour within friendships, they dedicated their attention to each other when getting together. They were more concerned about their personal space and wanted to be left alone more. They seemed to show more respect for one another as individuals inhabiting a common space. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

Physical Closeness in Joint Family as Source of Collective Values

It is in the family that we, culture-creating human beings, become aware of ourselves and the world and learn how to relate to people (Kakar/ Kakar 2007, Riesman 1998). This process is a physical necessity. The *joint family* is the ideal of the Indian family. The hierarchically structured, close-knit, patrilocal, three-generation family is the blueprint for all relationships that an Indian person

forms. South Asianists have noted that the 'joint family' has perhaps always been an ideal, i.e. at no time in history was it a universal norm (Parry 1974). While some saw evidence for the decline in joint families due to industrialisation and urbanisation (Epstein 1962, Bailey 1957), others suggested that the joint family was on the rise despite, or even due to, processes of modernisation (Uberoi 1994). However, in spite of the desire amongst many *middle class* couples in urban areas to reside as a nuclear family, the joint family remains the social framework in which Indian children grow up: "most Indians spend the formative years of their life in family settings that approximate to the joint family rather than the nuclear type" (Kakar/ Kakar 2007:10).

In the ideal joint family, the sons stay with their parents, bring their wives into the parental household and look after their parents in old age. Sometimes other family members, such as a widowed sister or aunt, or a distant uncle, are permanently or intermittently part of the ideal joint family. In practice the brothers and their families often have separate kitchens, live in neighbouring houses or live in different apartments in the same building, like the Dhole Patil family which I mentioned in Chapter Two. Even where families appear nuclear, they maintain very close ties with the extended families. They celebrate festivals and birthdays together and visit each other frequently and often for longer periods. A constant effort is made to maintain as close ties as possible at all times. Nilima and Nilesh talked to their sons and their wives in the UK daily. Even their young grandchildren were held in front of the Skype cameras regularly and asked to talk to their grandparents. Every year Nilima and Nilesh visited their sons for three months. It was taken for granted that they would stay with their sons who lived close to each other.

In Pune members of the *middle class* told me that the oldest son should stay with the parents. In reality some sons would stay as long as their children were young and then move to a separate flat, sometimes in the same building. The parents would move in with one of their children – daughters also took care of their parents – or rotate between their children's families. Many people lamented that the young people did not want their parents anymore, or they could not take care of them because they had gone abroad. Nilima was often

heartbroken because she could not be with her children and grandchildren, and she was anxious about the future wondering who would take care of her and Nilesh. Two of her nieces resided in a nuclear family with their husbands and two children each. But all four children regularly lived with their grandparents for longer periods when the parents were busy or the children had exams. Especially when both parents were working they often relied heavily on the grandparents to take care of their children.

While in a 'western-style' nuclear family parents and siblings typically cast the longest shadow on a child, an Indian child grows within a network of grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins (Kakar/Kakar 2007:10-11). The joint family offers multiple caregivers who make sure to meet an infant's every demand during his first years (Kakar 1989, Seymore 1983). These caregivers are also authoritative figures. They teach the child the "standards of absolute obedience and conformity to familial and social standards" (Kakar 1989:126-7). Parents of the fifty plus generations in Pune frequently highlighted the importance of absolute obedience from the child. Early on, the child learns his or her relative position in the hierarchy of the family which involves obligations to seniors and juniors. "Indians must learn to adapt to the personalities and moods of many authoritative figures besides their parents quite early in life" (Kakar/Kakar 2007:14). Twenty-one-year-old Nikhita, outspoken and intrepid, riding her motorbike in skinny jeans, grew up in a nuclear family with her parents and an older brother. Repeatedly she told me about contentions in her paternal extended family. Each time she felt her nuclear family under attack from relatives. Her narratives always ended in the same way:

"And I couldn't say anything because I'm the youngest in the family."

Her position in the hierarchy of seniority within the family did not allow her to speak up. Though she criticised it as an obstacle to her autonomy, she did not act against it.

Kakar argues further that the demands of the elders are so strict, that Indians come to rely on them for guidance. "Instead of having one internal sentinel an Indian relies on many external 'watchmen' to patrol his activities" (Kakar

1989:135). He concludes that "extensive physical closeness, positive affect, and the prolonged dependence" (Derne 2003:95) in the joint family forms a sociocentric personhood. It creates a "sense of interdependence in a society that does not value independence and where one is never expected to go off and live on one's own" (Seymore 1993:59).

> "Since young people in Indian families generally receive a good deal of attention and nurturance from the older generation and maintenance of family integrity is valued higher than an unfolding of individual capacities, a young Indian neither seeks a radical demarcation from the generation of his parents nor feels compelled to overthrow their authority in order to 'live life on my own terms'." (Kakar/Kakar 2007:15)

Thus many Indians realise themselves by working around and with the mutual dependencies within the family. A non-autonomous, highly socially connected self is not burdened with the responsibilities of deciding, acting and failing on her own where life-decisions are taken by others or in a group.

Derné (2003:95) adds that Roland (1988) argued that "constant physical closeness fosters an intense concern for others". A person becomes highly perceptive of the moods and emotions of others. Thinking more as a 'we', the limits of the self are "much more permeable to constant affective exchanges and emotional connectedness with others" (Roland 1988: 233). Trawick (1990) in her elaborate ethnographic account of the Indian person as 'dividual' makes a similar point arguing that children learn through interactions among various family members to become aware of themselves and the world as incomplete and ambiguous. Apart from making these psychological arguments, Derné (2003:98) points out that cultural aspects create a tendency to seek out elders' advice. It is highlighted in religious texts, common sense understandings and popular movies. My Marathi teacher once said: "Our elders might not be educated but they have the wisdom of life experience." Touching an elder person's feet, I was told, is a gesture to show respect but also to get their blessings before an exam, a job interview, etc. When the Leib bows all the way down to someone's feet it subjugates itself to that person. Nilima's sons called their parents before a job interview to get their blessings verbally. Furthermore parenthood and caring are highly valued (ibid., cf. Donner 2008). Nilima's sister once complained that in the West babies slept on their own and their rooms were decorated with Mickey Mouse. "A child wants to see its parents not Mickey

Mouse. Nothing is more important than the mother and the father and their love." Most of the people I talked with in Pune had slept in their parents bed at the beginning of their lives and/or had their children do the same. The nature of the child in India is perceived and accepted as demanding attention twenty-four-seven (ibid.).

The Kakars (2007:11-19) point out several consequences for interpersonal relationships that the primacy of family and of preserving relationships have. Some of these implications were illustrated in the preceding segment of this chapter. First, it leads to "divisiveness, a lack of commitment to anyone or anything outside one's immediate family" (ibid:11). Béteille (1994) argues that the family has replaced caste as the preserving mechanism of inequality in India. Secondly, guilt is only felt when impinging on "the principle of primacy of relationships, not when 'foreign', different ethical standards of honesty, equity and justice are breached" (Kakar/Kakar 2007:16). Interestingly, Nilima felt constantly guilty for not offering food to people or for very rarely not being there to give Nilesh food (when he was at a meeting where food was offered). Or she felt guilty for not being with her children or her mother. But she did not feel guilty when she cut through flowing traffic, forcing a motorbike to come to a screeching halt. The driver looked infuriated at her. She shrugged and said: "But he saw me coming." Thirdly, an idealisation of the superior is fostered. Indeed, everybody I talked to tended to defend their parents saying that parents only wanted the best for their children. And last but not least, if the priority is to preserve relationships then it is extremely difficult to give or receive negative feedback. By the end of my fieldwork I had learned that 'no' can mean 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'. It depended on the tone of voice and what followed. "Yes, ma'am, no problem." and "Yes, I'll call you." were the sentences I heard most in Pune as an answer to requests, such as to fix the internet connection or for an interview. A reluctance to arrange a meeting was a safe indicator that 'yes' had meant 'no'.

I wish to stress the spatial aspect here. Many people living physically close together not only nurtures but also requires that preserving relationships is the primary principle. In India these relationships are hierarchically structured by

seniority. Seniors were expected to nurture and care for juniors, while juniors had to obey seniors. Solidarity amongst siblings was encouraged. Individual desires were negotiated for the benefit of the greater good of the family. These are the Indian means for as well as the outcome of preserving relationships in order to guarantee family harmony. Thus in a typical Indian family, children grow up in an "autocratic (but not authoritarian)", "strict, demanding but also caring and nurturing" (Kakar/Kakar 2007:18), environment. Growing up in a situation where many people live intimately close together and interpersonal relationships are guided by practices of seniority creates a sense of self that is accustomed to always having others around and to decisions being made as an aspect of caring by seniors and for juniors. What sense of personal space does one develop?

Indian family life is predicated on the joint family, in which the transition from childhood to adulthood has a very different character from that in the North-Atlantic world of my experience. The ideal is reciprocity and interdependence between the generations. The assumption is that one lives in permanent dependency on one's parents, which goes hand in hand with a life-long co-residence of younger with elder. I, on the other hand, was prepared to fly the nest after secondary schooling, and in any case to develop full individual autonomy by that time. This is probably true for 'western' middle classes in general, but apparently this pattern is very strongly marked among highly educated Germans (Carrithers, personal communication). This comparison again is meant to point out the differences in moral aesthetic standards, that is how people wanted and felt they ought to be, between my social environment in Pune and me. It shows that the differences in the rhetoric of personhood between 'India' and 'the West' are not a flight of fancy of anthropologists. By no means does it imply that any of these two versions of the *conditio humana* is superior to the other.

The following section illustrates the implications of the ideal of generational reciprocity and of a permanent dependency on one's parents. It describes the atmosphere in which young Puneites grow up and live from their own and their parents' perspective, as well as from mine.

Being Young and Dependent

As outlined above, an Indian person learns from his earliest years that the essence of every social relationship is "emotional affinity", i.e. "caring and mutual involvement" (Kakar/Kakar 2007:20). Caring involves a broad array of practices, from preparing food to gossip. Living as a young unmarried woman with a couple in Pune that had sons of my age, I got a good taste of being cared for the 'Indian way'. Again, this is not to imply that my subject position is the normative benchmark by which to judge others. Rather my impressions serve as a point of comparison to grasp differences and similarities.

When I met them, Nilima was sixty years old and Nilesh seventy-one. They were both Maharashtrians. Nilesh grew up and lived all his life in Pune, in the same area of the city, except when he went to work in Chicago for three years in the late 1960s, where he met my uncle. Nilesh came back to Pune to take care of his sick father. He regretted that his whole life. He used to say that my uncle and another friend "have done really well in life" – they had won international fame in their field. He could have had a big house with a swimming pool in the States. The last remark surprised me. Nilesh was a very humble and thoughtful man, usually quiet with an occasional urge to philosophise about the world. He cared deeply for his family and did not seem to care for worldly goods, except for his violin on which he regularly played Maharahstrian love tunes from his youth. His work was his passion, apart from an economic necessity. It worried him that he did not have enough money to retire yet. The annual trips to the UK for the past five years to visit their sons exhausted their budget. Nilesh was a chest physician who worked in a hospital in the morning and in his private clinic in the afternoons. Nilima helped him in his clinic in the afternoon and was a homemaker for the rest of the time. They married late by Indian standards. He was thirty-seven and she was twenty-six. Nilima grew up in Gujarat where her father had moved for work before she was born. To earn her BA and MA in Botany, Nilima came to Pune. Right after getting married, she started taking care of her dying father-in-law. Nilima and Nilesh had two sons. They lived in a two-bedroom apartment. The sons shared a room. Her sons were thirty-five and twenty-nine at the time of my research and both lived in the

UK. Nilima was a very lovely, caring and usually cheerful person. Sometimes great sadness overcame her because her sons were so far away and she felt so lonely.

Of course, Nilima's and Nilesh's first act of caring was to host me as long as I wanted in the beginning of my research. As mentioned before, the hospitality was granted on the basis of Nilesh's and my uncle's friendship. Despite the initial misunderstanding that they thought I was only there for two weeks, I stayed for four months and they refused any money and did not consider me a burden. They eventually needed the space to host Nilima's mother. The unpleasant task of asking me to move out fell to Nilesh. It was obviously an embarrassing situation for him in which he repeatedly stated that it was merely a physical separation. The focus on caring, maintaining relationships and family ties in their relationship with me made it difficult for him even though the familial obligations to his mother-in-law took precedence. The next aspect of caring was granted to me as soon as I arrived in Pune: food. As illustrated earlier, the giving and sharing of food is important in establishing and maintaining relationships in India. Food is an essential part of caring.

It did not take long for me to also experience the controlling aspect of Indian parental love. I had difficulties believing how much Nilesh and, most of all, Nilima wanted and thought they should get involved in my life. It all started with a concern about my research and the attempt to help me. The day after I arrived in Pune, Nilima had arranged for me to meet a cultural anthropology professor from the University of Pune at his house. The professor was the son of a very good friend of Nilesh. Nilima drove me in her little light blue Maruti minivan. Muddled from the travel and the shock of being in Pune, I stumbled through the conversation. The professor told me to quantitatively measure the Indian *middle class* which was far from my interests. A few days later a heated argument arose – at least that was how it felt to me. Nilima and I had gone to an exhibition where craftsmen from all over India exhibited their decorative art, from handbags to envelopes. I tried to learn from Nilima how much clothes cost. I had not gotten far when she seemed to get really angry at me. In what seemed to me an accusing tone of voice she stated that two sets of clothes were

enough for me. I did not need to spend any money. Why had I not brought more clothes? Why had I not asked her what to bring? My suitcase was too small. Why was I so poorly organised for my research? At their house the conversation continued with Nilesh. He had talked to the anthropology professor and was concerned that I had no idea what I was doing. He tried to tell me what to do and how. Both Nilima and Nilesh initially said I would not be able to learn Marathi or meet people the way I intended for my research. They said they wanted to understand what I was doing so that they could help me. They wanted to know my budget, organise the people that I could interview and teach me Marathi. I could not just go out on my own. A woman had been raped by a rickshaw driver. When I finally got a chance to defend myself, Nilima discarded it saying: "You are here to learn about our culture, so you have to understand us. You have to adapt. There is no culture shock. Pune is very western and modern."

I was flabbergasted. I could not handle the intimacy this scolding entailed. They did not expect me to be independent or even capable of being so since they criticised all of my decisions, e.g. regarding clothing, preparations for my fieldwork and the research itself. Nilima and Nilesh wanted to get involved in every aspect of my life in Pune, from how much clothing and money I needed, to how to learn Marathi and whom to interview. Initially I did not understand that they felt all this to be their duty and role. While to me it felt like an attack on my autonomy and independence, they considered it their responsibility and an act of caring. They thought they should make all these decisions for me. As they did not expect their children to be independent, they could not believe that I, as a foreigner and a young woman, could be independent in Pune. They made this clear with their reference to my safety when moving around on my own. I felt they put me under a lot of pressure and, most of all, control. To them it was part of their role as elders: caring and mutual involvement where seniors make decisions for juniors. Not only were they elder, they were also indigenous and hence thought they knew what was best for me.

The above vignette touches on several issues that I and my young Pune friends struggled with: a) being told what to do, b) someone else making decisions

about one's own life, c) being accountable for everything to someone, d) feeling that one is being controlled all the time, e) constantly having to meet expectations. However, the freedom the young adults were striving for was different from the freedom I took for granted in my own culture. They accepted to work around and meet many of their parents' expectations. They strived for independence only to a certain extent and appreciated where the dependence meant less of a burden on the single person.

The young adults and I had in common a desire to spend time alone, another difference over which I clashed with Nilima. A couple of times she told me that she sometimes felt offended because I wanted to be alone. "You expect things from people and they also expect things from you," was what she repeated several times during this conversation. She had looked forward to having someone in the house to talk to: to ask what did you do, where did you go, how was yoga, what did you do, whom did you meet, what did you buy, how much did it cost, did you get it cheaper, etc. "All gossip. But not bad gossip. Girl's talk," Nilima explained. "I'm not snooping. I just want to talk. It is something new. Here it is just [Nilesh] and me." But I would only answer with one or two words. She did not know who my friends were and where I was going. "And that's ok. We respect your privacy. We know that this is your nature. I have been to places: your country, UK, US. You are all very detached. You stay on your own even though your parents live in the same city. I am not saying that it's good or bad. I am not judging. But here in India it is different. People just come and I don't mind. I let you live your life. You let me live mine." I was surprised and replied that I did not mean to be impolite but thought this was part of the *informality*, i.e. she herself used to get up before we finished eating, run around being busy, watch TV and talk on the phone. Nilima explicitly explained our diverging expectations with what she called "your nature". While she expected me to sit with her and thus share time, life and amity, she felt it was in my "nature" to expect my "privacy" to be respected, to be left alone.

Like her, I initially ascribed this clash to cultural differences. We 'westerners' are used and amenable to being alone, while Indians are accustomed and amenable being surrounded by people constantly. But I soon stood corrected.

The café culture crowd had a similar desire for freedom from their elders and the cafés offered the spaces to live it.

Not long after one of these incidents, I met my friend Leela for coffee. Leela was eighteen years old and had just finished junior college. She was an open-minded, sweet, self-confident young woman with some attitude that I ascribed to her modelling ambitions. She was always fashionably dressed: in jeans and fancy top during the day, in miniskirt and strapless shirt for going out to nightclubs. She was an only child and lived with her parents in Kothrud where the old Pune elite had moved after the flood in 1961. She was a very sociable person with a huge circle of friends, girls and boys alike. She had her own scooter with which to get around. Over a coffee at East Street Café, she told me that she had had a fight with her parents. Her mother did not understand why Leela had to go out so much and so late, and why she had so many friends. The night before she had gone to a nightclub with friends and had spent the night with one of her male friends until 6.30 a.m. "My father gave me a really hard time about it." Allegedly he had asked her whether she only lived with them because she could not afford to live on her own. She bluffed back: "Telepathy, huh dad?" In the end she settled things with her father. She would meet some of their expectations. "I will only go out once a week, and they don't want me to talk on the phone when I am with them," Leela replied. By going out a lot, late at night and spending the night with a man Leela asserted her independence from her parents and challenged gender roles. After all, young women used to not be allowed to go out alone, much less at night. This also indicates that her parents were relatively lenient by letting her go in the first place and not forbidding it completely after the fight. Rhetorically Leela stressed her wish for freedom and independence to the point of moving out of her parents' *house*. In practice, however, she accepted to meet her parents' expectations after the fight. Yet another twist was added by Leela telling her parents – after the fight and her giving in to their expectations – that she was spending the night with a female friend and then partying until the wee hours of the morning. Leela wanted freedom to come and go as she pleased and with whomever she wanted. The development of the café culture gave Leela the spaces and the opportunities to spend much time away from home and parents and more time with her friends.

The dispute with her parents shows that family life in India to some extent has been affected by the imperative of choice, namely the idea that it is a voluntary love relationship. It did not seem like her parents had much leverage except the fact that Leela still lived with them and received money from them. Leela, however, was happy to comply with their demands knowing they were not set in stone. Like Nilima, Leela's parents had also complained that she did not spend enough time with them and when she did, she detached herself by speaking on the phone.

I was surprised that I could actually contribute something and told her about my fight with Nilima. Leela remarked that it was already difficult for her, and "I was born in India and am younger. It must be very irritating for you." She went on that her parents were both working so "they left me alone a lot. But some mothers are housewives. They are at home all the time." Leela thus confirmed the problem of permanent control by parents. But she also highlighted her appreciation of freedom. Due to both of her parents working and her being an only child, Leela was more used to and also wanted to be "left alone". Like mosts young adults of the café culture in Pune she strived for freedom from the control of her parents and hoped it would increase with age.

Leela continued that her parents and especially her mother did not understand her. Her parents also watched Marathi serials on TV from 8.30pm onwards. Leela confirmed that when there was a group of people they expected you to sit with them. "Even if you are just sitting around dull," she commented. She found them boring. And then her mother would only talk to her during the ad breaks. Furthermore this was the time when she liked to be online since all her friends were also online at that time. Leela's parents expected her to just sit with them stressing their close relationship. Watching TV can be enjoyed together. Mankekar (1999) impressively illustrates how important watching daily Indian TV shows was for middle class women in Delhi in the 1990s. Addressing issues such as womanhood, family, community, nationhood, constructions of historical memory, development, etc., it reflected and shaped the way they wanted and thought they should be, feel, experience and engage with others. Watching Indian TV shows alone or with others, they were a common topic amongst forty

plus women in Pune. Leela on the other hand was bored, and felt she had better things to do. She preferred watching American TV shows, such as *Friends*, or chatting with her friends online. She distanced herself from her parents in two ways. Physically she sat in a different room when on the computer. And her parents "[didn't] understand" what she talked to her friends about or knew the foreign TV shows. TV and computer were individualising activities in that sense. Chatting with friends is no fun with a parent peeking over one's shoulder. Leela preferred to 'sit' alone, chatting with her friends, rather than with her parents.

Moreover, she and her mother often started talking but then got into a fight, Leela said. There was an interesting twist to the difficulties in their mutual understanding. Leela told me that her mother's English was not that good and likewise neither was her own Marathi. She felt this language obstavle often led to misunderstandings. Leela went to a Convent School where she spent eight hours a day and exclusively spoke English. When she went home she would speak English with her parents too. "So my Marathi is more simple." Leela's feeling that her parents did not understand her – a sense that they lived in different worlds – was aggravated by a perceived or actual language barrier.

Somewhat conclusively, Leela exclaimed that she wanted her parents to discuss things with her and not just tell her what to do. "It's so irritating! And patronising!" Leela thus lamented the parents' expectation of absolute obedience. She wanted a say, her own voice, a certain degree of autonomy to make her own decisions.

It could be argued that Leela was trying to show off in front of me, a westerner, about rebelling against her parents and not speaking Marathi properly. But these stories came up too often and from too many people to ascribe it only to showmanship. My young friends genuinely felt their personal freedom was limited to a degree their parents could not understand.

Hand in hand with caring went worrying, another form of caring and mutual involvement. I had to always inform Nilima where I was going, whom I was

meeting and when I would be back. So I did when I went to the university for the first time to meet a sociology professor. Nilima called in the middle of the meeting. The professor told me that I had to make clear to my hosts to not bother me during interviews. Hours before my first family history interview, Nilima told me that I could not go there on my own unless I could tell her exactly how long the interview would take. "How can the interview take more than one hour?" she asked. I was flabbergasted again. Finally we reached a compromise. I could go on my own but then had to spend the night at her sister's house who happened to live in the same society. Another interview in the middle of the day apparently took too long for Nilima and she kept calling me. When I called her back she expressed her unhappiness. It was hard for me to understand. I had told her where I was going and when I would be back. The first time I went out in the evening for dinner with friends, Nilesh called me after one hour wondering whether I was okay. I understood their worries and that they felt responsible for me since I stayed with them and was a foreigner and a woman. But it just seemed too much sometimes. Leela and her friends confirmed that. "We all have the same problems. When we get constant phone calls and get up saying 'Sorry, guys, I have to take this' the others will just ask 'Mother?'. You remember how I left to get a phone call from my mother when we first met." She and her friends were convinced this would never change, unless they themselves became parents. They would be more relaxed with their children. "We are the twenty-first century kids. We grow up with all this freedom," Leela remarked. Here she referred to the freedom of going out and meeting friends, of mobility and leisure. She implies that members of her generation have more freedom to do what they want than their parents had, both in terms of economic affluence and more lenient expectations from the parents.

Parents constantly checked on their children, even though they were all adults. They seemed to feel obliged to permanently get involved in their children's lives. Not only did they have to know where their children went but called constantly when they were not at home. The prolific cell phone facilitated letting children go out but also served as a tether. The young adults seemed both used to but also annoyed by it. It happened to everyone and did not seem a source of embarrassment. The shared annoyance bound friends together while distancing

them from their parents. Arun once remarked:

> "Now you know why so many young people go abroad. Not to get away from their parents but to get out of reach of the constant check and control."

They have no desire to break the bond of mutual dependency but they would like to be able to do what they want without being controlled and checked all the time. Leela spoke explicitly of 'freedom' assuming that her generation had more freedom than any generation before. Apart from parents granting more freedom, the café culture played a crucial role in offering spaces to experience that freedom out of the reach of parental control.

The caring and worrying had a very controlling aspect. As Leela mentioned earlier, she had some freedom because both her parents worked, whereas some mothers were housewives and always at home. Nilima used to cook for her sons and their friends every day.

> "They would come to my house and study here so they would at least be under my eyes. After college young people go everywhere. They go where all the women are and look at them. They smoke, drink and take drugs. You cannot control your children. You can only be strict and trust them. Trust is important. Too much control will make them rebel. But you can control their friends. You can inquire whether they come from good families and all."

Nilima always asked about the people I met. On a regular basis she used to be shocked that I did not know people's last names or where they had gone to school. In Nilima's narrative, worrying and control take the first place, though she somewhat softened this narrative by referring to trust. If you cannot control your children, you can at least control their choice of friends. Parents' extended control to their children's choice of friends in an attempt to not only control when and where their children went out but also with whom.

Discussing this with Leela, she explained that her mother would start a thorough inquiry about who her friends were. She would ask their names, what they did, what school they had gone to, which college they went to, what their parents did and so on. "It's like a complete life check," Leela moaned. Arun told me that his parents did not know about one group of his friends. So whenever he met this group he told his parents he was meeting a group of friends they knew. This was not only an aspect of caring but confirmed how important the family was in the Indian society. Family name and school seemed to matter more than the

person's qualities per se. Family background and school were read as indicators of a person's character, i.e. caste, educational and financial background could be deduced in order to judge whether someone is from a 'good' family, suitable to be friends with one's child.

Gossip is a form of caring which speaks of social awareness and also exerts control. *Gossip* was not understood to be malevolent. The moral seemed to be that everybody should talk to and know about everyone else in one's social vicinity: family, friends, neighbours, maids, shop owners etc. For a week I had not been able to go to yoga because I was sick and very busy with interviews. The following Monday my yoga teacher asked me what happened. My Marathi teacher was also present. She knew I had been sick and said to the yoga teacher that she thought she had told her. The yoga teacher then told me that she had asked my landlady and neighbour. The latter told her that I had come home late every evening last week and she had thus thought I had been very busy. My yoga teacher further inquired whether Nilima knew that I had been sick. She had met her on the road and Nilima did not know that I had not been to yoga for a week. Caring and control were not only exercised by parents but by the entire social environment.

My young friends often told me that they were anxious that a neighbour would hear or see them come home late at night or bring a boy or a girl home. Arun told me how his neighbours used to ask his parents if he was not supposed to study for his exams instead of cruising around on his motorbike. *Gossip* seemed to be an integral part of social interactions. Even young men said they loved to *gossip* with their friends. *Gossip* seemed to include almost anything: who was dating whom or broke up with whom, friends, cars, clothes, work, a news item, movies, music, school, parents and parties.

Bunny said young people were afraid to tell their parents what they were doing because parents told other parents only good things about other children. The parents did not hear about parties, girl- and boyfriends and nightclubs. Thus the kids did not dare to talk about these forbidden fruits. The other side of gossip was that parents were "secret keepers". Certain news – especially concerning

something unacceptable such as a girlfriend, a night out with friends or an unwanted pregnancy – might not be kept secret from one's own parents but from neighbours. It shows how unacceptable just going out with friends could still be. The social pressure was so high that children lied to their parents even about who their friends were, and parents were scared that the neighbours could find out. Everyone should talk to and know about everyone. To many of the parents, an anonymous society where everybody minded their own business without judging others seemed unimaginable. The young generation on the other hand wanted to be 'left alone' to do what they wanted.

Decision-making was another aspect of caring, as we learned from the description of the joint family practices. It was the elders who made life decisions for the younger ones, such as what career to pursue and whom to marry (see Chapter Five and Six). Here everyday decision-making will discussed. I had to always tell Nilima where I was going when, for how long and with whom. But they never told me about plans that involved me. A couple of times we clashed because she told me last minute about an invitation. When I reminded her that I already had plans, she expected me to find a way to attend her event. Once she said "I already made chapattis for you". How does one not feel guilty? When we went somewhere I was never filled in with details about time and place. Once we went on a trip to the south of Maharashtra. No one thought it necessary to tell me the hotel's address, when and where we would meet and eat and go, etc. They just commanded me, as it felt to me. Whenever we went out for dinner to a restaurant with Nilesh, Nilima and family or friends, it was Nilima who picked the items from the menu but Nilesh had the final say and ordered. During a students project in Pune all participants went for breakfast. The professor ordered food for everyone. The protests of some students who did not like *idli* were ignored. They were apparently annoyed. Time and again I was astonished how my and other young people's time was disposed of without being asked or even informed. We were not even allowed to choose our own food or at least have a say in it. Elders decided for juniors, even a professor for her students.

Things were changing though. Nilima repeatedly complained that she could not instruct her daughters-in-law about anything anymore.

> "They would not like it. They would not like me. I want to be loved. Everybody wants to be loved."

In the ideal joint family the daughter-in-law owed absolute obedience to her mother-in-law. But Nilima's daughters-in-law lived in the UK and were economically independent. Nilima felt she had to grant them their autonomy to not lose touch with her sons' families. 'Natural obligations' became voluntary love relationships. Nilima felt it was on her to adjust.

The above experiences are intended to illustrate that the local youth felt it was not only I as a perhaps sometimes perceived cold-hearted, detached and rebellious German who sometimes felt overwhelmed by caring parents and social control in India. My young friends of the café culture shared much of the same annoyance. Their expectations of conviviality were changing. They wanted to be taken seriously, as a 'real' person with opinions, needs, wishes and personal space. This, however, did not mean that individualism was becoming a prime value in Pune. Rather the freedom young adults were striving for was subordinated to the ideal of mutual dependency. Through their activities and use of space they were asserting their independence and challenging hierarchies within the family. But this seemed to be restricted to making certain decisions over one's own life, e.g. when to go where, with whom and for how long and to not be controlled and checked all the time. The dominant value of long-term generational dependency and obligations to parents was not questioned.

Conclusion

I picked the above experiences for two reasons. Above all, these instances highlight major issues for young Puneites. And how better to understand the differences and similarities between 'us' and 'them' – in how to relate to others and in how they wanted and felt they ought to be – than through the irritations and confusions which we experienced with each other?

To begin with, this chapter intended to illuminate Indian conviviality, the moral aesthetic standards of interpersonal relationships or how human beings relate to each other. It showed that members of the *middle class* in Pune emphasised the value of relationships over individual sensitivities. Moral aesthetic standards centred around a "natural solidarity" (Chakrabarty 2000:218) expressed in caring and unconditionally nurturing relationships by sharing food, time and space, sometimes at the expense of one's own comfort. The level of familiarity determined the intensity of caring and was related to physical proximity. Family members lived together sharing the most time and caring. Familiarity in relationships was created and maintained by *informally* spending time together. People judged each other according to the taken-for-granted solidarities and corresponding obligations that various relationships entailed, e.g. as a mother, child, family friend, friend, etc. Especially family relations were considered to be self-evident solidarities rather than voluntary love relationships. Thus 'western' ideas of autonomous personhood or 'the individual', based in natural equality and freedom – understood as independence from others' wills, custom, tradition, religion, state, institutions etc. – were subordinated in Pune to this idea of 'natural solidarity'. The Indian person is a highly socially connected self.

Further, I suggested that Pune's *middle class*' sense of conviviality was predicated on the *Indian* joint family, in which the transition from childhood to adulthood was informed by the ideal of mutual reciprocity. This implies not only life-long co-residence of younger with elder but also life-long dependency on one's parents. In India, the ideal of living in harmony with others, of putting others' – especially elders' – interests first, and of conforming to the decisions of elders and superiors, prolongs and intensifies the feeling of dependence (Mines 1994:151). Most people I met in Pune seemed happy to meet expectations of the family or find compromises. It was argued by young and old that "elders know better". They did not feel they had to be independent of others or of custom, tradition and religion to realise themselves. After all, when life decisions are not made by a isolated individual the burden of decisions, actions, failures and successes is not on one person alone.

Finally, I proposed that the young adults of the café culture strived and

struggled for more individual autonomy and freedom from the constant control of Indian parental caring. Their parents had already been more lenient with them, as they acknowledged.

> "Things were very different for our parents," Leela once commented. "Compared to their parents our parents are already lenient. So they say, 'Our parents were so strict. We are giving you all this freedom. But still you are asking for more.' They just don't understand. I'm eighteen! Let go! Give me some space!"

Taking up the Kakars (2007:15), who argued that "a young Indian neither seeks a radical demarcation from the generation of his parents nor feels compelled to overthrow their authority in order to 'live life on my own terms'", I argue that this young *middle class* generation in Pune did rebel to a certain extent. They were striving for more freedom to live life on their own terms and cultivated the idea that their world was different from their parents'. The café culture members felt there was no more expressive way to demarcate oneself, challenge parents' authority and to make a point of living life on one's own terms, than by wearing a short denim skirt and a golden strapless top in a nightclub, drinking alcohol, having boyfriends, doing all the things that were frowned upon by parents and wider society.

However, the acts of rebellion were not intended to completely overthrow parents' authority or to disobey the ideal of generational reciprocity. The young generation of the café culture wanted more of a say in decisions regarding their life but not take all the decisions on their own. They wanted to determine themselves when, how often, how long, where and with whom to go out – that is the freedom to participate in the café culture. They even lied to their parents to achieve that. But most of the young adults still lived at home and got the money to go out from their parents. Falling in love and engaging in premarital relationships promised freedom in terms of individual choice and fulfilment. But most young adults sought their parents' approval of a love marriage or wanted their parents to arrange their marriage (cf. Chapter Six). Leela rhetorically sought independence to the point of wanting to move out. In fact she lived at home and had no income of her own. She planned to be a flight attended and move to the UK, thus being out of reach of her parents. Her parents wanted her to become a doctor. They reached a compromise in her doing a psychology degree in Pune.

Twenty-one-year-old Karim exemplifies this paradox between a rhetoric of freedom and factual dependency. He lived in his own flat, owned by his parents and on the same floor in the same building as their flat. He enjoyed the freedom and said living alone had taught him a lot. He knew how to take care of himself and be responsible without having to ask his parents for help all the time. He often had friends over "to party and hang out". He also had no income of his own. His mother cooked for him and did his laundry. He wanted to be a "self-made man", independent of his father's influence. When he and his father disagreed on his career path they reached a compromise, too. Karim wanted his parents to arrange his marriage. Twenty-two-year-old Mohan was conceived, after three daughters, with the purpose to run the family business. He had his own income from working in his father's business and was very generous with it when going out. He paid much intention to his outfit and stressed individuality by wearing the same brand t-shirts all the time. He had no objections to his family determining his career and arranging his marriage. These kinds of compromises differed from case to case in how much parents were involved but were typical amongst the café culture crowd. They will be explored in more detail in the following three chapters.

Thus individualism was not becoming a dominant value in Pune. Rather the freedom young adults were striving for was subordinated to the ideal of mutual dependency. Through their activities and use of space they were asserting their independence and challenging hierarchies, especially within the family. But their call for independence had limits, just like the challenging of hierarchies. The dominant value of mutual solidarity, generational dependency and obligations to parents was not questioned, and social hierarchies only to a certain extent. The young adults uniformly opined that *westernisation* meant to leave and to not care for one's parents, i.e. to reject the reciprocity between the generations. They understood *Indian* culture first and foremost to refer to the values of the *close-knit* families. Note that they usually said *close-knit* and not joint family. This might acknowledge the increased spatial distance while maintaining the idea of the 'natural solidarity', mutual dependence, caring and involvement.

In Pune there was a prevailing sense in the fifty plus generations that was

expressed in the Marathi exclamation "Kay karayize!?" (What to do!?), always accompanied by a real or imagined apologetic shrug. It is a rather passive attitude, accepting one's fate, one's position in family hierarchy, gender inequalities and opportunities. The young generation was mostly tired of it. They wanted to take (at least some) things into their own hands.

There were several logics at work, all related to space and to spatial proximity and distance, which amount to a shift between the café culture generation and their parents. One logic at work in Pune, as played out in my host and many other families, was mobility. In contrast to families living on the land (peasant or landowner), or to families passing on traditional craft skills or businesses from generation to generation, the trained professionals' families are more likely to be spatially dispersed. This is the consequence of professional employment in a national, or indeed international, labour market. But the fact of mobility does not in itself alter the expectations of relations between younger and elder. The daily 'sitting together' was replaced by Skype video chats. However, it created spatial distance which made parental control less incisive and allowed the younger generation to live life on their own terms.

Another logic at work was the development of something like a youth culture, the café culture in Pune. It offered the young adults a space away from home where they could hang out with their friends, out of reach of parental control. In the café culture individuality was pronounced. For example, one has an individual choice of clothing within the larger genres of *formal/informal*, *Indian/Western*, day/evening wear, and one marks one's individuality (within conformity) by one's outfit. Friendship is important here, as well, and is a marker of individual preference. It was also in these spaces that the café culture habitus was created, maintained and transformed. Here one could talk to one's friends about all the things that parents assumedly did not understand such as American TV shows, premarital relationships, music, sex, movies, the last big party and the next, or what happened at college. Furthermore one could indulge in all the forbidden fruits that parents and society frowned upon. Sharing space, time and these activities created firm bonds between friends.

153

Finally, there was the further logic of having one's own room. To invoke Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* as an expression of, or plea for, women's autonomy in the early 20th Century England is to highlight the importance of this kind of space. One of the major changes that took place between the generation of the parents and the Café culture crowd in Pune, as an effect of the economic liberalisation in India, was the increase in housing space. People could afford bigger houses and most members of the young generation had their own room. It allowed them to retreat, to have their own space, and to hide secrets. A spatial distance was generated from other members of the family. Individualising activities such as using the internet may be pursued undisturbed and uncontrolled. Furthermore it was not just the nostalgically lamented disappearance of the joint family, but also the fact that *middle class* families had fewer children and could afford bigger houses. Children, parents and grandparents could have their own rooms. If the physical proximity of many members in a joint family fosters a moral aesthetic standard of caring for relationships, then physical distance and fewer relatives – along with other much discussed changes, such as economic independence, education, democratisation and exposure to foreign media – might trigger a change towards individuation. Individuation, however, does not necessarily equal individualism, namely valuing the individual above everything else.

An incorporation of aspects of the 'western autonomous self' into the modern Indian self has been going on long before economic liberalisation, namely since colonial times, as shown by Chakrabarty (2000). Mines (1994) observed that in Chennai migration to and within urban centres has increased individual autonomy and freedom because it separated extended families and thus increased the distance from elders. The same must be true for Pune which witnessed constant migration to and within the city since colonial times and in waves since Independence, especially in the 1960s and 1980s. Many parents of the café culture generation were migrants to Pune and had only a very loose family network given the distance to their places of origin or due to the fact that their parents did not approve of their marriages. However, economic liberalisation has spurred further changes such as the development of the café culture which encouraged assertion of independence from parents, the

imperative of choice, self-expression through consumption and offered space to form strong friendships. Economic liberalisation also allowed an increase of what is considered appropriate living space which expanded spatial distance within the family.

The following chapter will enlarge upon these issues, namely the influence of economic change, the value of relationships vis-a-vis individualisation, freedom and autonomy. It will additionally look into relationships outside of the family, mainly friendship amongst the café culture crowd. It concludes with challenges to western liberal understandings of the autonomous individual and individual agency.

4 Morality of Conviviality II: Friendship and Personhood

When my dad grew up they were eight siblings. My grandfather was a headmaster. So he was very strict. My dad's siblings used to study in one room. And help each other out and, you know, like sleep in that same room. Like three or four people. And my dad used to scold us when we were kids. Me and [my brother] wouldn't get along. Because we were studying in the same room and [my brother] was purposely reading aloud so that I would get distracted. Or it was mostly <u>me</u> reading aloud so that <u>he</u> would get distracted. Being really kids [He laughed.] So instead of [my brother] helping me out he would be like getting really angry at me because I was not letting <u>him</u> study. So my dad would often scold us. And then tell us about how the eight of them studied in <u>one</u> room. And helped each other out without being a problem to anyone else. And so that was one thing which was very <u>fascinating</u> how the eight of them managed to study in one room. And sleep under the same roof. And yes, they did help each other out. [...] So they were brought up in a really conservative fashion. But today like when you see me and [my brother], our lifestyles are much more relaxed. One of the reasons being we have shifted out of Chennai. Under the influence of my grandfather being really strict and he, like my eldest cousin, she was not allowed to do her post-graduation because she wouldn't get a suitable match. For marriage. Because then, you know, the guy has to be higher qualified education-wise. So, I was glad that we shifted out of Chennai and out of the shadow and control of my grandfather. So that we could, you know, lead a more, not just a relaxed life, but more independent and free life. Like one of my cousins who <u>did</u> stay in Chennai, they're like uh just, I would say they're just nerds. They come first in their exams. They get all the good scholarships. [...] But he has never played a sport. No leisure activities. Leisure activities being solving puzzles and watching cartoons, all indoor activities. So never being athletic or never really getting into sports. No real life. Books, books, books. Which I was glad. Because when I came to Pune, my life was like whatever happens you religiously play for two hours in the

evening. That was my punishment. If I didn't do well in my test or I had been a bad boy they wouldn't let me go play. Because I really loved to play. Outdoor activities. [...] It was like, when we shifted to Poona it was like a blessing in disguise for us at least. Because we could, you know, have a broader perspective and higher chances of, you know, not being under the pressure of being watched and being dictated all the time as to what to do and, you know, getting into sporty activities. Which I'm sure I would have never got into had I stayed in that same house in Chennai. So I was fortunate enough that we did shift to Pune.

Arun, 21 years old (3 Feb 2009)

Arun put some major changes for his generation in a nutshell. Interestingly the above vignette is part of his answer to my question whether he considered himself to be a member of the *middle class*. He acknowledged the effects it had on his life and his person that a) he grew up in a nuclear family and not with his grandfather, b) he had fewer siblings and more housing space, and that c) his parents were economically better off. He expressed the effects it had on his person, on who he wanted and felt he ought to be. While his parents were brought up in a *conservative*, strict, controlled manner with a focus on education, he had a more *relaxed*, *free* and *independent* life than had they lived in a joint family. He felt that he was more selfish than his father's generation, namely not used to sharing, helping, adjusting and making do with available resources. He described himself as an athletic person who enjoyed to play outdoors and was into sports, as opposed to potentially having become an academically excelling book nerd. In the ideal of the sportive man, Arun emphasises this self as his choice, his true inner self, expressed in a 'momentary figuration of globalisation' of an ideal of man.

In the previous chapter I suggested that there was a trend towards individual autonomy, independence and freedom discernible in the café culture. Arun made a similar observation about his own life. Hence the individualism versus holism-debate with regard to Indian personhood will be elucidated first, followed by a closer look at Arun's life as an example of the café culture's move towards more personal autonomy, but not necessarily towards a 'western individualism'.

Anthropology of the Person in India: The Disputed Individual

Dumont (1986 [1983]), following his teacher Mauss, noted that when speaking of human beings as individuals two concepts are invoked. On the one hand the individual is a universal fact, i.e. an empirical thinking, acting and talking subject. On the other hand, the individual in 'modern western' societies is the central value, that is an independent, autonomous and essentially unsocial moral being. Dumont gained this insight by examining the historical development of configurations of ideas and values in the west, which he calls ideologies. Dumont differentiated two kinds of society: those whose ideology he called 'individualism' because the individual in the latter kind was the dominant value, such as is the case in western societies. The ideology of a society whose paramount value is the social whole he referred to as 'holism'. He gave India as an example of the latter type.

There are several problems with Dumont's position. As Alvi (2001) pointed out, the first problem is that Dumont's argument clashes with the notions formulated by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (2004 [1978]). Simply put, Said argued that western scientists used their knowledge as power to create a permanent other that will never catch up. By arguing that people in India understand themselves in a different way, one tends to run the risk of being accused of ethnocentrism. Secondly, as Carrithers et al. (1985) have argued, the idea of one society with one concept of the person is oversimplified. Even 'western societies' have different concepts of the person. Furthermore, individualism is an ideal, a moral aesthetic standard. It does not mean that everybody is indeed free, equal and independent. Thirdly, Dumont's argument understands 'cultures' as impersonal, coercive, bound, cognitive systems which pervasively determine both action and consciousness of a person. It bears the fundamental problem that it negates the importance of experience and the consideration of alternatives. It leaves no room for what Carrithers called the human "character as culture creating and changing beings" (Carrithers 2005: 577, cf. 1992). And last but not least, it raises the question of how to 'grasp' the other at all (Alvi 2001:46). How are we to treat each other respectfully while acknowledging our differences? Dumont suggested a principle he called universalism (1986:207-

13). He argued to understand 'individualism' as "one particular form of humanity, not as the only valid way of describing society" (Alvi 2001:47). Holism is another form, and others might be out there. Differences between societies or cultures should not be highlighted to show who has a right over the other or to claim the monopoly of reason for one. Rather differences should be carved out in such a way that each society's specific ideas, values and its understandings of a person are recognised in their own reason.

In the South Asian context, Dumont's idea has been criticised by many authors. I wish to concentrate on their contributions to an understanding of personhood in India rather than review Dumont's critics. According to Dumont the Indian person is a *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980 [1966]). Oriented towards the whole, an Indian person traditionally lives the hierarchy principle in different aspects of daily social life: caste, division of labour, marriage, sharing of food, etc. The person defines herself in relation to others who are of higher or lower status, temporarily or permanently. In contrast the western person primarily defines herself in relation to herself. Rather than claiming that Indians do not recognise self-interest as some authors suggest (Mines 1994), Dumont argues that the interests of the hierarchically structured group were valued higher. Marriott and Inden (1977) defined the Indian person as a "dividual", a composite of transferable substances. By giving and receiving, eating and touching an Indian person's substance is changed – sometimes beneficially, sometimes unfavourably, creating hierarchy according to the caste system. Trawick (1990) describes how notions of love, desire, life as art, poetics and mythology are passed on to children who become aware of themselves and the world as incomplete and ambiguous without others. Busby (1997) compared the Indian dividual to the Melanesian person for whose analysis the notion of the dividual was borrowed (Strathern 1988). She calls the Indian person a permeable person rather than a partible person as in the Melanesian case. The Indian person is a bodily whole with the skin as its boundaries. The exchange of substances between people creates relationships rather than, as in the Melanesian case, persons. Though also considered intimately connected to other persons, the Indian notion of personhood is essentially concerned with persons and their capabilities.

In his explorations of Tamil personhood, Mines (1994) rejects the assumption that a concern with individual autonomy has no place in the understanding of Indian personhood. He argues that the Tamil's sense of self and culture is "age-layered" (Mines 1994:152). He talks about a "process of individuation" (ibid.:187): over the course of his or her life a person gradually acquires and accepts more control over and responsibility for his or her life. Because the social environment in India is hierarchically structured according to seniority, younger people have less control over their own lives, as seen in the last chapter. Mines (1994:150) argues that "Tamil individuality" – contrary to 'western individuality' – is "defined in relationship to others", "of unequal worth" and "a variable thing". He argues that due to the ideal of living in harmony with others, of not putting oneself first and of abiding by elders' and superiors' wishes, a Tamil person's major struggle is to achieve control over his or her own life. In the course of a life a person will accomplish – to varying degrees – control over her own life. This is age-related since the more senior (and less subordinate) a person is, the more control she has over her own life and others. Mines (ibid.:193) also observed: "When Tamils live in separate households within the joint […] family, their struggle to achieve a sense of control in their lives is greatly reduced." Thus he recognises the importance of space for understanding the person. Having worked in Chennai during the 1970s and 80s, Mines observed that migration to and within urban areas was increasing individual autonomy and freedom. Mines concludes: "Tamils have a strong sense of individuality, but no abstract notion of the individual" (ibid:200). In India people do not understand all persons to be fundamentally the same. Rather, who 'I' am and knowing who another person is, will determine how one interacts with that person. Mines identified the following features which Tamils use to evaluate their own sense of self and others' individuality (ibid.:204-7): caste, regional origin, gender, age, balance between self-interest and need for others, power and control, and one's own sense as an agent.

Thus Mines confirms Dumont's argument that individuality is recognised in India but is subordinated to the value of the social whole. He aptly describes Tamil individuality. Aspects of the person such as caste, gender, age, balance between self-interest and need for others, etc. form a moral aesthetic standard

with which people praise and censure one another and themselves. He proves Dumont's original thesis that in India individuality, equality and freedom are neither considered physical, natural givens nor prime values. Rather they are context-sensitive and relational. Thus at a later stage in life and as 'big men' with socially valued virtues, some persons achieve more individual autonomy and freedom than others. However, Mines neglected to challenge western liberal understandings of individual agency. He traces the notion of the 'western' individual in India, which defines human agency as the decisions and acts of an autonomous individual, free of the will of others, tradition and custom. He does not consider that this notion of agency is anchored in western history. In India people realise themselves, and thus act as human beings, by fulfilling the expectations of others, their roles within the social whole (e.g. as son, mother, daughter-in-law, friend), tradition and custom. This is well described by Derné (1992).

Derné (1992) argues from a sociological-psychological standpoint and holds that the Indian person finds his "real self" first and foremost in being guided by social pressure. As seen in the previous chapter, Derné reasoned that the more time a person spent with others, as is the case in Indian joint families, the more they were guided by others and thus the more receptive they were to social pressure. Abstract principles of behaviour (e.g. equality, justice) were not seen as right per se or as a path to happiness. They were not internalised. The men Derné worked with recognised personal desires, interests and convictions but kept them to themselves. They thought it was dangerous to follow one's own desires. They felt helpless without the guidance of elders. No discomfort was felt if social pressure suppressed a person's individual interests. Instead, discomfort was felt when someone did not act according to social expectations. However, it was acceptable to break with social expectations as long as no elders were displeased or nobody saw it, denoting that the break would have been disappointing others' expectations. Derné suggests that family structure has a crucial effect on how people want and think they ought to be.

I consider Derné's choice of words rather infelicitous. We all bow to social pressure, regardless of culture. Social pressures are applied in the light of moral

aesthetic standards, or what is regarded as appropriate and inappropriate. We use these standards to praise and censure one another and ourselves. But in a western society, social pressure is applied towards independence, individual autonomy and self-fulfilment. For India Derné suggests that social pressure expects persons to bow to the decisions and judgements of others. Collective decisions are valued higher than individual ones. What Derné further suggests is that the social pressure in India is not so much internalised but literally and intentionally exerted by others, typically elders.

The above accounts confirm that individual autonomy is not a dominant value in India. In Pune, dominant values centred around relationships, caring, mutual involvement and around what others think about oneself. Individual autonomy was not encouraged. Persons realised themselves by performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to and reaching for social norms and roles within hierarchical relationships, as seen for example in Nilima and her roles as housewife, mother, wife, daughter, host, etc. People considered themselves to be highly socially connected selves that happily manoeuvred their way through the landscape of family, marriage and life decision-making that does not place all the burden on one person.

However, in the café culture generation there seemed to be a trend towards more individualisation, namely more autonomy or control over one's own life. A closer look at Arun's life will show how the transformation of circumstances, namely changes in space, in family arrangements, in leisure practices and in resources, enable the Leib to change its orientation and, to a degree, its moral aesthetic standards about itself and the world. The examination will also show that individual autonomy remained subordinated to the value of relationships. Arun was well aware of the effect that his parents' leaving Chennai had, namely to not grow up under the authority of his grandfather. He expressed that it had an effect on who he wanted and felt he ought to be. I wish to draw attention to the Leib again and argue that changing physical aspects – accelerated through economic change – lead to a change in how the Leib perceives itself. These changes built on transformations generated by previous generations as they engaged with European thought (Chakrabarty 2008), exampled in the last

162

chapter. Hand in hand with the changes in space and time, go transformations in how people moralise about the change and the aspects of life the changes effect. As the world around the Leib changes it perceives itself and the world differently. The process of individuation Mines (1994) observed amongst people in their thirties in Chennai in 1985-6 was now happening to the café culture crowd in Pune in 2008 at a much earlier age. The shift from a socialist to an economically liberalised country placed more emphasis on the individual. 'Being middle class' became the opportunity and burden of the individual whose status was measured by the wealth gained in the market through work and consumption.

Extended education and late marriage provided young adults with considerable free time, space away from home and pocket money. Youth cultures used to be predominantly male in India (Jeffrey 2010, Osella/Osella 1998, Nisbett 2009). The Osellas and Nisbett observe that young men in Kerala in the early 1990s and in Bangalore in 2002 respectively turned to their peers to experience the passage to manhood in absence of other mechanisms. Young men challenged hierarchies by "joking, sharing and making friends with each other in egalitarian modes" (Osella/Osella 1998:189). Competition was nevertheless part of these egalitarian friendships (Jeffrey 2010, Nisbett 2009). Contact with young women was restricted to attempts of flirting either in public, in the case of young men in Kerala (Osella/Osella 1998) and North India (Jeffrey 2010), or predominantly online, in the case of young men in Bangalore (Nisbett 2009). Young women were expected to help in the household, were relatively secluded and segregated from young men. In their interactions young men and women reinforced, challenged and transformed hierarchies (Osella/Osella 1998).

The sense of friendship amongst the café culture in Pune was very similar to what the Osellas, Jeffrey and Nisbett observed. Practices of teasing, sharing and caring fostered egalitarian relationships within the group. In contradistinction to these authors, however, young women and men alike participated in the café culture in Pune in 2008. The cafés offered spaces where young women could go safely. In addition the attitudes towards young women going out for pleasure and towards young men and women mingling freely in

public were different. Though young women were not quite as free as young men, they were granted the same freedom in respect to prolonged education and late marriage. Young women were neither confined to the house nor requested to do heavy time consuming household work. The inclusion of women characterised the café culture as an urban *middle class* project in contrast to the lower middle class men in rural North India (Jeffrey 2010), in Bangalore (Nisbett 2009) and to the youth in rural Kerala (Osella/Osella 1998).

Nisbett (2009) reports that young men in Bangalore indulged in illicit activities such as drinking alcohol and smoking. These activities fostered a strong sense of friendship and the young men asserted their independence from their parents. The same was true for groups of friends in Pune, both men and women. Thus I argue that the café culture friendships, important markers of individual preference and entangled with consumption, fostered individuation and a sense of autonomy. However, this neither meant a complete detachment from the parents, nor that the individual became the prime value. Relationships continued to be valued higher. Friendship was interpreted as a caring relationship involving a sense of intimate concern for the wellbeing of friends, similar to relationships within the family. So autonomy and freedom for individual fulfilment were measured and limited by this mutual involvement.

Arun: A Middle Class Life in Pune

Arun was twenty years old when I first met him. I had fled the noisy jolliness of 400 teenagers in a tent waiting to perform in a dance show at a theatre hall in Pune. As I sat in the shade taking notes, a young man in jeans and t-shirt with a backpack over his shoulder approached me. He was very polite, genuinely friendly, open-minded, thoughtful, unpretentious and relaxed though insecure. He had been brave to approach me but it took him half an hour to ask to sit down next to me which he did in proper distance. It was easy to talk and relate to him. Arun became one of my key informants. Through the perspective he provided, it was clear that something more was changing in this young generation of *middle class* Puneites than the development of a commercialised

leisure culture, increased income and mobility and changing family structures. His is a generation that has grown up under circumstances so different from their parents that it was altering the way they saw themselves and the world. And with his diverse circles of friends he was a connecting point. During our first encounter I asked him what he was doing in life. He replied without hesitation: "Well, partying and wasting dad's money." Thus he had proudly identified himself as a member of the café culture. He was a third-year engineering student with considerable free time and money on his hands.

By choosing to tell Arun's story I am not suggesting that his life is 'typical Indian' or even 'typical café culture'. In a way it is an extreme case, on one edge. Yet his example raises issues that are familiar to many of the café culture crowd. It tells of the changes occurring in India and especially in the urban *middle class*. Arun used the same rhetoric that others did, and so evinced a commonly understood set of practices and moral aesthetic standards among the café culture, as well as common views of generational differences.

Arun was the younger of two brothers. His parents migrated to Pune from Tamil Nadu before he was born, due to his father's work. While his father was from Chennai, his mother grew up in a small town further south. Their marriage was arranged by the father's older brother. Arun's father was the youngest of three brothers and four sisters. Arun's mother had two sisters and two brothers. When I asked Arun what distinguished his generation from his parents', the first thing he replied was: "I didn't grow up in a joint family but in a nuclear family." He mentioned that his parents had more siblings and hence "four or five of them lived and studied in one room. And they never had any quarrels." The siblings were all very close, helped each other out, learned to adjust and make do with available resources. In his generation amongst the *middle class* in Pune most people

> "have a room of their own. They are more used to their privacy and guard it fiercely. They are also less tolerant. And I suppose a little indifferent too. But one advantage of the nuclear family, I must admit, is that it is making the kids more self sufficient. From a young age they learn to live alone and do their own jobs."

Another time Arun remarked: "I'm glad my parents left [Chennai] for whatever reason." He told me about his "eldest cousin", his father's eldest brother's eldest daughter. She was a brilliant student and had completed her BSc. She wanted to continue doing a postgraduate course which was "a big thing" back then, as Arun said. But the grandfather (Arun's father's father) did not allow it, arguing that they would not find a groom for her. "The humiliation of a better educated wife," Arun stated. I inquired what her parents wanted. "It's hierarchy, man!", he asserted. They could not object to the grandfather. Aware of the implications of Indian family life through stories from his own family, Arun appreciated the fact that he did not have to grow up or live in a joint family. He grew up not only residing in a nuclear family but without any extended family around. He intermittently experienced extended family life during summer vacations when he visited Tamil Nadu with his parents and brother. Sometimes family members or friends came to visit and stay with his family in Pune.

Arun's parents' migration to Pune led to the 'nuclearisation' of his family. Habermas (1980 [1962]) argued that in the nuclear family the individual was born during the European Enlightenment. He wrote (ibid.:63) that the shared space of the nuclear family was the site of a "psychological emancipation" which went hand in hand with the politico-economic emancipation. The sphere of family life becomes directed towards itself, incorporating and cultivating family life independent of other social relationships. However, the nuclear family depends on the market economy providing jobs and goods. This dependency can be easily felt as independence, Habermas argues, because assets are only subject to the market's rationales not to the state. Furthermore, success and failure in the market were increasingly perceived as the individual's responsibility (Bauman 2000). In Europe the family developed into a voluntary love relationship which facilitated the development of the individual, according to Habermas. A sense of humanity developed in the bosom of the family, where people cultivated relationships as mere humans. Habermas hastens to say that the reality of the bourgeois (middle class) European family in the nineteenth century contradicted this ideal. Women and children typically depended on men, marriages were arranged on the basis of class and money, and education was

pursued according to job options. Habermas suggests that a further individualisation took place when most of a person's socialisation was managed by the wider society, e.g. schools and peers. The family loses the purpose of upbringing, education, protection, caring, tradition and orientation (ibid.:188).

India has a different history and therefore the process and the outcome will differ. The trends towards mobility and 'nuclearisation' do not in themselves necessarily alter the expectations of relations between younger and older. Derné (1992) documented how men in Varanasi in 1986-87, who had separated from their joint families, expressed regret. They said that it was wrong to not live with one's parents and/or brothers and that their families' honour would be lost. They often talked as if they were still residing jointly. Nilima and Nilesh talked to their sons in the UK every single day. Arun, a member of the young generation, not only did not show any regret over not living with his extended family in Chennai; he thought it was good that they did not. He imagined his parents' past to be dominated by emotional security, economic austerity and *conservative*, meaning old-fashioned, family hierarchy. He did not per se condemn the *Indian* tradition of the joint family and embrace the allegedly *western* nuclear family; however, he constructed his nuclear family life as a success, as the contemporary *Indian* condition of life. The distinction with his parents' generation allowed him to distance himself from undesired parts of the Indian past, often described in terms such as *conservative*, *backward* or *old-fashioned*. Moral aesthetic standards regarding nuclear families were changing. Nuclear families were wider spread, thus more accepted and gradually '*Indianised*'. Furthermore the parents' generation had already been socialised outside the family to a large extent. Most of them had at least fifteen years of formal education. Nilima's wish to be loved made her feel like she could not instruct her daughters-in-law, yet these very actions are what would define her role in a traditional *Indian* family of the past. Due to her sons' living separately with their wives, Nilima had to rely on a voluntary love relationship. This illustrates the 'psychological' changes that were taking place as the nuclear family was becoming economically independent, socially accepted and locally adapted. The hierarchical practices that used to govern family life were being

replaced by more egalitarian trends as family units became smaller.

The Osellas (1998) argue that ambiguity, indeterminacy or ambivalence form part of moral aesthetic standards in daily social life in India. They were "islands of anti-hierarchy within a wider hierarchical system" (ibid.:189). I propose that the young adults of the café culture were challenging and modifying hierarchies within (extended) families, namely in the relationships between generations. They strived for freedom from parental control and for more self-determination regarding life decisions. However, they did not overthrow parental authority completely. The second half of this chapter will explore whether café culture friendships and activities were indeed challenging other social hierarchies, such as caste, class or gender. This exploration will lead to a reflection on a) the nature and orientation of these challenges, and b) the relation between class and caste.

Housing

When Arun's parents first came to Pune, they rented a bungalow. When they wanted their own place, they bought a one-room-apartment. "When we were kids it was no problem. But when we grew up it became difficult, all of us in one room," Arun said. His brother slept on the couch in the end. Four years ago, when Arun was almost seventeen years old, they shifted to the present 3BHK (three bedrooms, *hall* and kitchen) apartment, where they all had their own room. The apartment was a typical *middle class house* in Pune at the time. Through an iron grid and a wooden door one entered directly into the *hall*, the term commonly used for living room. The floors were polished white concrete. All rooms were lit by bare fluorescent tube lights. The *hall* housed a sitting arrangement including couch and armchairs, a TV, a stereo and a couple of showcase shelves filled with some books and English thesauruses. In Arun's house, the books were rather unusual. Mostly the shelves were filled with decorative items such as Ganeshas[41], little figurines, souvenirs from other regions in India and abroad, and other 'bric-a-brac'. More bric-a-brac was

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[41] Ganesha is the Hindu god with the elephant head. He is the most prominent god in Maharashtra.

decorating the *hall*. Some pictures adorned the walls. A glass door led to a balcony. Adjacent to the *hall* and only separated from it by an opening were the kitchen and dining areas. The kitchen was equipped with a sink, a double cooker using bottled gas, a refrigerator, some electrical kitchen appliances such as a blender, and wooden cupboards. Opposite stood a table with four chairs. From there a short corridor led to the three rooms. The first one had a single bed and was used by Arun's older brother when he visited Pune. It also held the house shrine and served as a guest room. Opposite was a bathroom that could be used by guests, especially for washing hands after eating. Many *houses* had a sink in the corridor for this purpose. The other two rooms in Arun's house had en-suite bathrooms. His parents' was the biggest room. Arun's room housed a single bed, two large cupboards and a desk. The only decoration was a David Beckham poster showing his face in black and white stating: "A lot can happen in a match". Arun had his own en-suite bathroom. The only computer had internet access and stood in his room. On the computer he had created a password secured folder where he kept his files including emails and pictures of friends and girlfriends. One of the cupboards had a drawer that could be locked. There Arun kept his cigarettes, pictures of friends and girlfriends and other things he wanted to hide from his parents. The door to his room had a lock.

Arun argued that before they moved to the 3BHK *house* his family was *lower middle class*. With the bigger house they ascended to *middle middle class*. However, this was not merely a matter of affordability or consumption. It was also a matter of what was perceived to be appropriate space for a *middle class* family in Pune. Arun recounted his family's shift to the current apartment:

> "When [my brother] came to college, he shifted to the *hall*. I was still going to school. So I used to sleep in the bedroom and my parents used to sleep with the bed on the floor. So that was the four of us. So my parents realised that when I came to college the place would actually be too small for all four of us. So they started looking for a *house*. We bought this *house* in 2005. The new *house* is a 3BHK one. With, so that we all have a bedroom each and it's a really nice place and quiet and good location and all. […] So we could have friends over and, you know, without actually disturbing our parents. And we all have our privacy and our space."

Between his parents' generation, who shared a room with siblings or relatives, and Arun's generation, a considerable change had taken place regarding the perception of appropriate space. This went hand in hand with the achieved

economic capacity to afford more space. Arun suggested that his parents wanted more space for their sons and themselves. Despite growing up with four siblings in a room, his parents desired more space or thought more space would be more appropriate.

Manya, one of the yoga ladies, was in her late forties like Arun's mother and had children his age:

> "We all need more space nowadays. The children had so many toys. I didn't have any toys. I remember we had one toy, a plastic doll. We shared it among us three sisters. Children today have toys, toys for school, school books, and what not."

As a child Manya lived with her parents and five siblings in a two room apartment with no bathroom. The two rooms served as bedrooms, living rooms and kitchen. Later they shifted to a new *house* with three bedrooms, two *halls* and two kitchens. All the siblings moved out except the youngest daughter who was divorced. The other siblings all lived in their own houses "even though we all still live in Pune. We all got so much stuff, we need more space," Manya remarked. With her use of 'even though' she acknowledged the social expectation, especially for sons, to stay with their parents when living in the same city. But instead of expressing regret as Derné's informants did, she justified 'living separately' with the need for more space. After marriage Manya lived with her parents- and brothers-in-law for many years. When her children were about ten years old she decided: "There was not enough space for the children to have their own space, too." Her nuclear family moved to a ground floor flat in the same building. The need for more space might also be interpreted as a changing middle class status marker, namely from one to two or more bedrooms.

Thus the perception of what is appropriate space had changed along with more available housing space and the economic ability to afford bigger flats. Furthermore *middle class* families tended to have fewer children. The children, therefore, either had their own room or at least more personal space than their parents who had more siblings and/ or lived in joint families. However, both parents and children now wanted their own space. The corporeal experience of spatial distance has an impact on how a person sees herself and the world. It triggers a change in the conception and practices of personal space, and might

facilitate personal autonomy, namely to decide and act independent of others. In the previous chapter Leela requested from her parents, "Give me more space." It was a request for more freedom from parental control. Arun mentioned the aspect of "privacy" with regard to more space. Both he and Bunny told me several times: "Being alone helps me to introspect". The parents' generation enjoyed frequent company and did not mind sleeping in the same room with other (same sex) people. Arun could not imagine sleeping with many others in the same room on a regular basis: "I'm very particular about my sleep. I need my privacy." There was a time when his school friends came over every day. After some time it started to "irritate" him. It also irritated him when neighbours would drop in "behaving as if it was their home. I have a schedule. I have to study. And I gotta get other stuff done." Arun was accustomed to the "comparative seclusion and spaciousness of the self-contained apartment" (Naipaul 1991:70) and appreciated it. He justified it with highlighting his individual responsibility for his success. Nilima missed communal life and regretted that her neighbours did not talk to her much. She suffered emotionally from the seclusion and the 'life of privacy'. Furthermore, she ascribed my personal need for privacy to my 'nature', my foreign, *western* nature.

In Pune in 2008 the increase in housing space, the tendency towards smaller – sometimes nuclear – families, and the trend towards a room of one's own reduced the influence and control of other family members over the young person. Not sharing space and time led to a certain degree of alienation. For example, watching different TV shows and isolated computer time diminished common topics to talk about.

Sharing Time: Does Women's Autonomy create Independent Children?

Both of Arun's parents worked. His father was a banker, and his mother worked for a telecommunications company. When Arun was born, his father insisted that his mother quit working to take care of the children, but she refused. When Arun was not even six months old she had to undergo training in Bombay. Every weekend, she rushed back to Pune. Later she commuted daily for years.

As a banker, Arun's father was getting transferred every three to five years[42]. At the time he was working in a small town not too far from Pune. He took two months sick leave to take care of his sons. In his life story interview Arun said:

> "So that time my parents again had a discussion. But my mom was again not ready to quit her job. So me and [my brother] were raised at a guardian's house. We still refer to them as *Aai* and *Baba*. The Marathi equivalent of mother and father. I call <u>my</u> mom and dad *Amma* and *Appa* which is mother and father in Tamil. So ya, we still call them *Aai Baba* and they raised us really well. I've been at their house since I was six months old. And [my brother] was like three."

His guardians had older sons and sometimes other daycare children for short periods. Arun went to his guardians' house until he was nine and entered secondary school. Then his school hours changed. He and his brother were alone at home for an hour in the morning and returned when their parents did.

> "And we would really wait for them to go so that we could watch cartoon network for one hour. [He laughed.] And do like stuff that we wouldn't do in front of our parents or, I don't know, get friends over for one hour. Play something. Play cricket in the house. [He laughed.] Then in our summer vacations we played a lot, too. Since like we were old enough, we were no longer going to our guardians. So from once our parents left at ten, they wouldn't be back till six. So our house was the cool hang out where, you know, our friends used to come over. So I made a lot of like good friends there. And we spent all the vacations together. Playing every day. Playing cards. Playing cricket."

While he was growing up, the time Arun spent with his parents was limited to mornings, evenings and weekends. His mother's refusal to stay at home provided a lot of freedom and later even space to do what he wanted.

In his second year of college, when Arun was nineteen years old, "I suddenly got freedom that I couldn't handle," he told me. His brother had moved to Bangalore for work and his parents were working all day. About three times a week, he and his college friends would gather in his *house* after college to drink alcohol and smoke. Arun regretted this time because his performance in college suffered. The assumption that he could not handle too much freedom is reminiscent of Derné's (1992) informants who stated that they felt lost without social control. Arun felt lost without the guidance and control from his nuclear family. But he learned his lesson, stopped the partying and focussed on his studies. He internalised social control.

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[42] Arun explained that it was a bank policy to transfer employees every three to five years in an effort to avoid corruption.

This is how Arun described a typical day in his present-day life. At the time he was studying for exams and used to wake up late. "When I get up everybody has left for work already." After getting up Arun checked his emails and social network sites, Orkut and Facebook. "Orkut is boring. Even Facebook has become boring now." He explained that he used them mainly to stay in touch with people such as his cousins who are dispersed all over India. He also used to play *FIFA,* an online football game. "After that I go for my shower. I often have a long shower. At that time I'm usually alone and listen to loud music. That can go on for twenty minutes or an hour when I am depressed. I listen to loud music and smoke." Then it was time for breakfast which his mother prepared. Finally he would head to college and study for some hours. He carried the lunch his mom made in a tiffin with him. He usually ate on his own since most of his friends had already finished their lunch by the time he arrived in college. For dinner he used to go home. "It's an unspoken rule that we have one family meal together. I try to be on time." After dinner his parents watched their daily Tamil TV serials. "I get bored and go to my room. I go online again, chat to friends. I also play football sometimes. But even that I have put off now due to exams. But I still hang out with my friends. Sometimes we meet in the library again after dinner to study some more. Or we study together at someone's house or we go some place to chill." Chapter One introduced Arun's habit of frequently meeting two of his friends to smoke in a small tea shop nearby. Once or twice a week – usually on the weekend – Arun went out to a nightclub, restaurant or bar with friends.

From very early on, Arun spent most of his time not with his family, but in the company of friends or even alone: at his guardians', at school and college, in his housing society and at home. Much of Arun's socialisation took place in a – mostly male – peer group. The Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2007) argued that the peer group played an important role in the lives of young men for the transition to manhood. As shown above, the peer group already played an important role for Arun as a child. Arun had a lot of freedom, namely freedom from the control of his parents and to do what he wanted. There were key incidents, such as important school exams, where his parents featured

prominently, but overall Arun felt rather alienated from his parents. Since his father was transferred every couple years he only saw him on the weekends. He felt he did not know his father well. When he was a child, Arun said, his father told him to never come to him if he had problems with other children or got into trouble. His father had thus encouraged him to take responsibility for his own decisions, actions and their consequences. On the other hand the father stressed Arun's dependency through such practices as not letting him go out whenever he wanted at the age of twenty or telling his mother to not give Arun money to go out.

Thus the peer group had a formative influence on who Arun wanted and felt he ought to be. The friendship groups offered alternative models, even if within a *middle class* habitus. As mentioned in the first chapter he felt explicitly that his values started to divert from his parents' *traditional* and *conventional* ones when he entered junior college. This generation distinguished itself from its parents' past with a desire to "change India for the better" which would be accomplished by retaining the "good" *Indian* things. "You will never know where you are going until you know where you came from" was cited by many young adults, as a means to express their intention to retain their roots yet remain steadfast to the freedom they were cultivating.

As shown in the previous chapter Leela spent comparably little time with her parents. The peer group was just as important to young women as it was to young men. The young women's peer groups also tried to get together outside of home as often as possible. Friends thus brought about a certain 'cutting of the cord' with one's parents. However, this did not necessarily mean a rebellion against or detachment from the parents. As will become evident in the second half of this chapter, friendship circles represented similar values as parents, namely the primacy of the relationship. Furthermore not every life decision in Pune was a choice; there was no 'anything goes' attitude.

Working women are a pre-liberalisation phenomenon, but they continued to be a minority amongst the *middle class* in Pune in 2008. A woman was predominantly judged as a housewife and mother, as evident in Nilima's

comments. Arun himself concluded that his mother "did the right thing". He was grateful for his mother's decision to continue working. On the one hand, her income saved them when his father was laid off for two years. On the other hand, Arun thought that he and his brother thus gained "a minimum of independence". Since they stayed home alone as soon as they were old enough they learned how to take care of themselves to a certain extent. He mentioned as examples that they had to help with household chores and learn how to heat their food. However, the mother continued to prepare all the meals. The father usually bought the groceries. The mother provided pocket money.

Even when at home and his family was present, Arun engaged in individualising activities, such as browsing the internet, checking emails, communicating via social networking sites, or watching his favourite USAmerican TV shows such as *Prison Break*, *House* or *How I Met Your Mother*. Rofel (2007) and Thomas/Cole (2009) aptly describe the pedagogic influence of media on young people in China and Africa respectively. They taught young people to be "desiring" (Rofel 2007) and "passionate" (Thomas/Cole 2009) selves. Similarly young people in Pune engaged in media learning about the world out there, understanding the changes in their world and thus distancing themselves from their parents. However, as Arun mentioned, having dinner together every day was an unspoken rule. On Saturdays he also had lunch with his mother regularly. He used to sometimes enjoy these family meals and sometimes lament them, depending on his mood and the circumstances. Personal freedom was limited by these family occasions.

Arun's rather unusual freedom was not enough. Several times he burst out: "It sucks that I'm still accountable to someone. Ask anyone. We are all tired of it. It is just irritating. Now you know why so many young people pursue their higher education abroad and don't come back." I asked: "You mean to get away from their parents?" He replied:

> "Not to get away from parents. But to get out of reach of the constant check and control. They smelled the freedom and don't like the restriction in India."

Thus Arun wanted to be free of the control of his parents but he did not want to neglect the obligation of generational reciprocity. He asserted that he also

wanted to leave, and if he could not go abroad he wanted to at least leave Pune. He said he could not bear living with his parents for more than ten months from then[43]. He was tired of being accountable to them, of always being asked questions about where he was and what he did, of having them enter his room without knocking, or of having them walk into his room while he was sleeping. On a different occasion he exclaimed: "I want my freedom to do what I want and to be with a girl without all the hassle."

Arun used a rhetoric of 'freedom', 'independence' and 'privacy'. Due to his family and living conditions, he was accustomed to and desired this freedom, independence and privacy. He contrasted it to the 'constant check and control' by his parents who grew up in a more *conservative* or *traditional* way and in more constrained circumstances. Arun, like many of his generation, wanted the freedom to live life on his own terms, to participate in the café culture, to fulfilment and to be part of a bigger world. But in other regards parental authority, support and dependence remained unquestioned. Thus most young adults still lived at home and received their money from their parents. Many young adults longed to move out and live on their own. But here they were also dependent on their parents and no parents wanted to cover the expenses when the children studied or even worked in the same city. Furthermore, it proved rather difficult for some who lived on their own because they could not cook. Moreover, as will become evident in the next two chapters, parents had an enormous influence on questions of a young person's career and marriage partner, major life decisions.

Parents tended to be afraid to lose control over their children on a daily basis. They feared that by losing control over daily issues, the children would get into bad company, adopt bad values and hence be unapproachable when it came to major life decisions. However, many of the parents claimed to also have grown up with more freedom. They saw themselves a the "sandwich generation" between the "old world of tradition" and the "new changed world". Many spoke of a "generation gap", where parents and children did not understand each

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[43] Indeed Arun stayed on for another three years until 2011 which included two years of working after finishing his engineering degree. Then he went to Germany for an MA with the financial help of his parents who took out a loan to finance the study abroad.

other anymore. Parents expressed the fear of younger generations dismissing or forgetting *Indian* traditions and values. This was articulated concretely in the distress that children might dismiss the generational reciprocity, to be left alone and not taken care of. The young generation, on the other hand, emphasised and embraced family and its appertaining natural solidarity as 'being *Indian*' which they were very proud of. To varying degrees, they wanted more of a say in decisions regarding their own lives. They wanted to embrace their parents' values if they considered them right, on a voluntary basis, rather than as a (parental or social) dictate. One young man said he would like India to be hospitable with an emphasis on family values but without the hierarchy: "I want to show people respect if I think they deserve it but not because I was told that it has to be like that." This might be read as an inclination to 'western-style' individual autonomy, namely as free from will of others, tradition, custom and religion. In Pune, this personal autonomy was subordinated to or encompassed by the 'natural solidarity' of family, friendship and other relationships. This will be further illuminated in the following with regard to experiences of friendship amongst the café culture crowd.

Friendship Practices: Sharing and Caring

Contrary to kin relations, friendships are voluntary relationships. They are a marker of individual preference and tend towards egalitarian ideals. Bourdieu (1979:82) suggested that emotions such as love and friendship might not originate in vague positive feelings between two people, but from a perceived similarity in habitus generated by growing up under similar physical and social circumstances. By implication then, the sharing of time, space and activities will cultivate a shared habitus and the feeling of friendship. Other work on youth cultures suggests the "socially productive nature of hanging out" (Jeffrey 2010:92, Cowan 1991, Herrera/Bayat 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Liechty 2003, Nisbett 2009). Growing up as part of the *middle class* at the same point in history ensured similarities in habitus. Moreover there was a high caste bias in the *middle class* as will become apparent. The friendship circles were diverse with regard to (high) caste, religion, gender and place of origin. However, all

members had grown up in similar *middle class* situations, such as in small (often nuclear) families, in a flat (which often increased in size during young generation's teen years), with emphasis on good English education, often in exclusive schools, with relatively affluence and considerable freedom of movement.

Friendship Circles: Denying Hierarchy?

The Osellas (1998), Jeffrey (2010) and Nisbett (2007, 2009) argue that friendships amongst young men in India transcend differences such as caste and class. I argue that in the case of young Puneites they transcended caste, regional, religious and gender differences within a *middle class* predominantly consisting of higher castes.

At the beginning Arun claimed that he did not know his caste. Experience revealed that people from lower castes tended to feel uncomfortable revealing their caste, while those from higher castes proudly announced it. Much later in a conversation about social mobility Arun said that his mother was from an OBC family. OBC stands for *other backward classes*, an official bureaucratic category for a group considered socially, educationally and economically backward and associated with former untouchability. But caste affiliation follows the father. His father, Arun explained, was "open caste" which meant "just Hindu". He said: "Educationally I know my caste". It was no specified caste like OBC, BC, SC or ST which were eligible for reservation at college admission. Furthermore, it was nothing to be proud of or politically useful as in the case of Brahmins or Marathas. Caste can be determined from a person's last name. In Tamil Nadu, it became common practice to use the father's name as surname to protest and forgo caste discrimination. Arun recounted several incidents where a university professor or policeman had picked on him for not having a last name. He was particularly enraged with one of his professors who used to single out everyone who did not mention their father's name as their middle name, which was a peculiarly Maharashtrian practice. In front of the entire class the professor would recite common prejudices against Gujaratis, Christians, Sikhs, South Indians, Parsis, Sindhis and others.

Arun's friends called him *Anna* which means 'elder brother' in Tamil but also in Marathi. One of his friends from junior college had given him the name as a joke. According to Arun, it was a popular, yet prejudiced, name given by North Indians to South Indians. Some of his friends did not know his real name, he claimed. He did not feel offended. It seemed like an affectionate gesture. Sometimes his friends also teased Arun with his dark skin colour and called him 'Blacky'. This referred to another stereotype about South Indians having darker skin than North Indians.

Teasing people with barely disguised references to caste and regional origin was very common amongst young people in Pune. Arun's friend Usha, for example, was from Bihar and was often teased because of her typical Bihari accent and because Biharis were considered *backward*. Mira was teased for her mediocre Marathi. Her father was Parsi, her mother Christian and they spoke mostly English at home. Arun's Maratha friend, Mohan, was jokingly called "*sarkar* of the market area" which they explained meant the "godfather or the don of the market area". The Peshwars, the former rulers of Maharashtra, were allegedly Marathas. Even today they are said to hold powerful positions in the state. Mohan's family had a wholesale vegetable business run by father and son.

The Osellas (1998:191) remark that joking is well-known amongst anthropologists as a practice that negotiates hierarchy and promotes egalitarian relationships. As Nisbett (2009:86) notes, it also has an element of competition: teasing creates an oscillation between feeling superior and inferior amongst relatively equal partners. While amongst the friends of the café culture, regionalism and caste were joked about, in the wider society these prejudices were still strong. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my Indian hosts often asked me for the last names of my friends. When they determined the *community* (or caste) to which someone belonged, they would evaluate a person based on that. They told me that Parsis were clean and collected old furniture, that Sindhis were stingy and ran family businesses and that people from the CKP *community* had fair skin, grey-green eyes and were very intelligent.

Neither the teasing amongst the young generation nor the prejudices of the parents, however, seemed ever to have led to open caste discrimination within their social environment. The Osellas (1998) report an incident where a young man refused to take water at a friend's house because this friend was from a lower caste, even though his mouth was full of petrol. As Nisbett (2009) reports for young men in Bangalore, the Pune café culture friends not only regularly shared food, alcohol, hookahs and cigarettes when going out, they also visited each other at home for religious celebrations. Many of them ate at each others' houses independently of the "food habits" (e.g. veg or non-veg) of the family. This was not restricted to the young generation. Nilima and Nilesh, strict vegetarian Brahmins, ate food at relatives' and friends' houses who belonged to the CKP *community* and were non-vegetarians. One of Nilesh's best friends was a low caste South Indian like Arun and a regular guest in their house. The parents' generation already had mixed *community* and mixed gender friendships. In college Nilima's circle of friends consisted of young women as well as men, although all of high caste. When asked directly, this generation would answer that they used to have exclusively same sex friends in college and no friends from lower castes. These replies perhaps reflected reality as much as they reflected social expectations.

The café culture crowd showed an even more pronounced inclination for cross-*community* mixing. They were proud to have diverse friendship circles as seen in Chapter One. There I described a mixed group of friends who had a nighttime run-in with the police who must have wondered what such a diverse group was doing out at night. At the time of my research Arun's three closest friends were his college buddies, all of whom were Brahmins from Maharashtra. The wider circle of friends from college included two more Brahmins, a Maratha, an OBC guy from a village, a Muslim, a Christian, a young woman from Gujarat and two young women of the CKP community. Another important circle of friends were his football and party friends, which consisted of Mohan (Maratha), two Sindhis, Mira (Parsi), Usha (Bihari) and a Goan Christian girl. Arun had won his newest circle of friends while taking dance classes: a young woman whose father was Parsi and mother Maharashtrian, a young man whose father was from Rajasthan and mother from Maharashtra, a Punjabi Muslim, a young CKP

woman, a Brahmin woman and a Gujarati woman. These identifiers are how people either described themselves or others. I join the Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2007) in their observation that these friendships were challenging important Indian ideas and values, in particular the hierarchical principle that structures family, caste and other relationships. Nisbett speaks my mind when he writes:

> "... explicitly denied, followed openly only within family marriage practices ... [c]aste and religion were not becoming irrelevant to these young men's lives, but then neither were they the primary structuring principles." (ibid.:939)

Arun's friendship circles were diverse in terms of caste, place of origin, religion and gender but lower caste members were underrepresented. The challenging of hierarchies was restricted to a *middle class* that was dominated by higher castes.

I wish to complement the Osellas' and Nisbett's observations. First, as I will show in Chapter Six, though marriage was the main arena where caste practices were justified widely by the *middle class*, many young Puneites chose their marriage partner themselves. Where parents had mixed-*community* marriages, caste affiliation was often weak and the children more inclined to marry at their own wish. Secondly, I argue that young women should be included in the above statements. Young women took part in many of the practices that buttressed egalitarian conviviality in these friendships, thus also challenging gender expectations and hierarchies. They hung out in cafés, went to night clubs, smoked, drank, had boyfriends and stayed out late against their parents will. But young women were in the minority and had to fight harder for freedom since parents seemed more protective of young women. Moreover, young men and women formed close friendships. Arun had several very close female friends. He had a special teasing friendship with Nikhita whose father was Parsi and mother Maharashtrian. Whenever they met there was verbal fireworks. As they put it: "We enjoy pulling each other's leg." Nikhita would start teasing Arun for being late. He would retaliate by commenting that she was half naked in her tank top. Not shy, she replied that she was always better dressed than he, and so forth. Here the endless competitive character of teasing is observable. Each tried to belittle the other one, highlighting their fundamental equality. Furthermore, Arun was an ally in matters of the heart to many of his

female friends. They came to him for advice when they had boyfriend problems.

Sharing

As Arun's life and daily routine have shown young adults in Pune shared most of their time with each other, be it at school or college during the day and, in the case of those working, in the evenings or on the weekends. In Arun's case, spending time with people outside his family, started very early in his life because both his parents worked and they had no extended family as support system in the city. About his two years in junior college, attended from the sixteenth to the eighteenth year of life, Arun remarked:

> "When we went to junior college, I used to hang out with [three guys]. Like the four of us used to hang out all the time. Like those two years we almost did everything together. Go for movies and dinners and wherever."

This was something all of my young informants related, young men and women alike. And their favourite places to hang out were cafés. During, and as part of, the transition to adulthood, college life confronted young Puneites with new challenges. It was a world very different from home. Other authors highlight the importance of schooling in the emergence of youth cultures (Herrera/Bayat 2010, Jeffrey 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Liechty 2003).

That young people spent the majority of their time with friends corresponds to what the Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2007) observed with regard to young men's lives in Kerala and Bangalore. Again I wish to emphasise that in the case of the young *middle class* Puneites, young women were part and parcel of the café culture. They participated in mixed group activities but also formed their own circles of friends. In general, however, they tended to spend more time at home with their families than young men did. They had much stricter curfews and parents feared more for their safety. But recall what Leela said in the previous chapter about her parents leaving her alone because they both worked, and about her desire to be left alone. She also spent the majority of her time in the company of her friends. She used to go to school for eight hours and afterwards hang out with her friends at a café. When I met her, she had just finished junior college and had not yet started her university degree. Thus she had a lot of free time on her hands, some of which she spent volunteering and

modelling, but most of which she spent visiting cafés with her friends, watching movies, hanging out at a friends place or partying. That was one of the reasons why she had frequent arguments with her parents at the time.

Whether they went to college, worked or were at an in-between stage, young *middle class* Puneites loved to hang out in cafés. While hanging out was connoted positively as leisure in the café culture, Jeffrey (2010) shows that unemployed educated young men of the lower middle class in North India associated it with boredom, feeling stuck and waiting. The latter reasoned they engaged in it out of lack of more meaningful things to do. The former saw it as relaxation between bouts of work and as an opportunity to get away from home. The hanging out of the café culture in Pune also stood in stark contrast to the wider *middle class* attitude of working hard in order to achieve wealth and status (cf. Chapter One and Five). Many other café culture activities such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or having a premarital relationship were frowned upon by wider society. The café culture acknowledged these circumambient moral aesthetic judgements by mentioning that the activities were frowned upon and by hiding them. But they were not as bothered by them as their parents. Participating in an activity that was frowned upon by wider society had three effects: a) the young people kept it to themselves, b) it was regarded as *cool*, and c) it increased the sense of camaraderie. Jeffrey (2010:95) uses Herzfeld's (2005) notion of "intimate culture" which refers to aspects of social life that were regarded embarrassing in front of outsiders but viewed as a basis for establishing community spirit and building trust within the group. The same mechanism was at work amongst friends of the café culture.

Arun spent much time playing football. "We used to play religiously every day. We used to play every day. Every day. Whatever happens at five thirty everyone, like you work, you go to college, you have practicals, at five thirty you finish everything and you come to play. It was serious football." Afterwards they would hang out, smoke and drink. The national sport of India is cricket. Being interested in football seemed to have been a *middle class* occupation. It is noteworthy that football is globally more popular than cricket and might thus tap into the café culture's global ambitions. It is a bodily practice which

simultaneously transcends the local and domesticates the global (Rofel 2007). Playing football daily, these young men formed close friendships. They still went out partying together, joined by some female friends, or they met on their football field in a housing society to drink on the weekends. Another extra-curricular activity Arun enjoyed were the Shiamak Davar[44] dance classes. For two years he went four times a week. The mixed circle of friends he gained there was still meeting regularly once a month, mostly in cafés and sometimes at someone's house. They invited each other for birthday parties and religious festivals such as the Hindu festival Diwali or the Muslim festival Id. They actively cultivated their friendship. A no-show invited upset phone calls from all those in attendance. In general friends would get upset with each other when one of them did not call for several days. They would call and give the person "a hard time" about not being in touch. The caller often succeeded in making the person feel guilty for the neglect of a relationship. Arun often regretted his friends' attempts to make him feel guilty. Pressure was applied to value and take care of friendships.

Apart from time and space, friends shared many other things. I did not observe the aggressive sharing that the Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2007) report, especially for clothing items. It did happen but rarely. The café culture crowd in Pune was expressing individual taste in their clothing which made swapping clothes less desirable. However, they shared music, movies and American TV shows by exchanging thumb drives. College students passed homework solutions around amongst themselves. They readily lent each other motorbikes or mobile phones when needed. They would jump to each others rescue if someone got stuck in the city without petrol in the tank. Without asking they would use a friend's mobile phone or computer when in reach.

When going out to a café or a nightclub friends treated each other to drinks, cigarettes and food. Smoking hookahs was very popular and sometimes the reason to go to a café. The shisha would be shared amongst everyone. Someone would always order food and share it. When we went out for dinner,

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[44] Shiamak Davar was a famous Bollywood choreographer who had opened a dance school with branches in all major Indian cities. Hip-Hop, Contemporary and Bollywood Jazz were being taught (cf. www.shiamak.com).

we shared meals and decided together what to get. When it came to paying, several options were possible. Most of the times we would all pay equal amounts to settle the joint bill. Sometimes we each paid for ourselves. Each paying the same amount or settling bills individually was indicative of equality and autonomy. When going to a nightclub the guys might collectively pay for the girls. For a rendezvous the guy would usually pay. Arun's friend Mohan, "the *sarkar*", and another friend sometimes paid the entire bill for a small particular group of about eight close friends, arguing that they were already earning (working in their family businesses). Other times they wanted to pay a smaller amount if the bill was shared, reasoning that they did not drink alcohol which was more expensive. They singled themselves out while still acting within the expected moral aesthetic standard of sharing. Entering the café culture spaces and paying for it, the young adults appeared as autonomous individuals. However, the money often came from their parents, especially in the case of students and women.

In general, these practices of sharing fostered egalitarian friendships, "breaking down social distance" (Osella/Osella 1998:191). As Nisbett (2007:941) noted the rejection of hierarchical principles through this kind of sharing is especially noteworthy in South Asia. Caste practices used to forbid commensality. It was believed that through sharing food and saliva polluting substances would be passed on. However, for the café culture members eating at each others houses despite different "food habits" was common.

Physical contact was another practice that denied social distance, as the Osellas (1998) and Nisbett (2007) pointed out. In Pune, I observed elaborate greeting rituals of young men involving lengthy handshakes and a hug in the end. Many young women greeted each other with cheek kisses. Close friends hugged each other. Young men and women also hugged each other. Young men, and occasionally also young men and women, launched at each other and fought jokingly. Good friends of opposite gender might dance closely in a nightclub.

Thus practices of sharing and teasing, along with participation in activities that

were frowned upon by the wider society such as *timepass*, drinking alcohol, smoking and dating (cf. Chapter One) cultivated equality, social intimacy and a sense of communion amongst friends. As noted above, friendships were certainly not always harmonious. Competition was not only observable in the teasing regarding caste and in paying the bill but also in playful fighting, clothing practices, having affairs or in showing off one's motorbike. Vale de Almeida (1996:91) argues with regard to masculinity in Portugal:

> "The notion of equality implies both communion and competition, friendship and rivalry […]. Masculinity, because it is fragile and constantly (re)constructed, and menaced, unites *and* opposes men. Thus the game of drinking continuously, of buying and being bought for, creates superiority and inferiority in never-ending rotation among relative equal partners."

I hold that the same applies to femininity and female friendships as well as to mixed gender friendships. Moral aesthetic standards of masculinity and femininity were also (re)created and transformed in cross-gender relationships. My main point, however, centres around the creation of equality through the practices of the café culture. However, the equality was limited to the café culture and the *middle class*. It was a matter of class (in terms of economic, cultural and social capital), but not of caste, religion or gender, to participate in the café culture. These hierarchies were not the "primary structuring principles. Caste, religion, and family back-ground fed into wider hierarchies of capital" (Nisbett 2007:939). The *middle class* in Pune was dominated by higher castes. Lower castes were underrepresented.

Caring

Arun and his friends took care of each other in an intense way. Caring reached from making sure everybody got home safely after a night out, to helping each other with coursework for college, to giving advice and *gossiping*. After dark, young women would always be picked up and taken home. The friends waited until she had passed the guard and entered the gated housing society. Young men called each other upon reaching home to report their safe arrival.

Arun and his friends from college used to do homework and assignments together. During the day they usually worked in college. When they had to pull nightshifts they met at a friends house who had his own apartment. His parents

lived in a different city and were "filthy rich", as Arun used to say. Sometimes they met at the "class topper's" *house*. He was a young man from a village and he shared a flat with eight other guys. Recounting these nightly workshops was a source of amusement when they went out together. People would get teased for falling asleep over their books accidentally, or on the floor on purpose, or for smelly bodily functions, etc. But they would not just sit together and help each other with their own work. The circle of friends included the *class topper*. The others called his work "the original copy". He did the work and the others copied more or less from his work. When they had to do drawings they would meet at Arun's house, spread the original on the glass dining table, put another sheet of paper on top and a lamp underneath the table, and then copy the drawing. This seems to indicate that they did not place much value on doing their own original work. However, it did not prevent them from claiming the resulting overall course pass or grade as individual achievement on their own merit as an argument against caste reservations (cf. Chapter Five). Copying homework is still work and all exams had to be studied for and written personally.

These friends also saw each other through exams. If one of them failed they encouraged him to try again and study harder. One of Arun's friends kept failing his math's exam. The others kept studying with him and encouraging him to go to his tuition class. As I was leaving India, Arun and his friends were preparing for their final exams. They were an incredible source of help and moral support for each other. During this phase they also had recruitment fairs. Friends would always be there for each other before and after the challenging moments of job interviews. Arun had difficulties finding a job. When he finally found one he was happy with the work but not satisfied with his salary. After a year his friends advised him to do more job interviews. When that failed they encouraged him to threaten to leave his current employer if he did not raise his salary. Friends fulfilled many roles of parents.

In general friends sought each other out for advice, be it for matters of career choice, for trouble with their parents or for matters of the heart. Arun used to recount *boozing* nights with his male friends and how, in their intoxicated states of mind, they would pour out their hearts to each other about their problems with

the ladies. Leela used to invite me to girls' nights out which followed the same pattern. This shared intimacy fostered feelings of communion and friendship, and highlighted the importance of peers: parents do not understand, friends do.

Spending more time with their friends and doing things that they wanted to keep secret from their parents, young Puneites turned to their friends for advice and emotional support. The circle of friends also fulfilled the role of exerting social awareness and control. Meeting friends and catching up usually involved *gossip*. As I mentioned in Chapters One and Three, gossip mostly consisted of recent love stories and break-ups, parties and other news about common friends, interspersed with some boasting about oneself. Nikhita was upset when she found out, rather late for her liking, about Arun's new girlfriend. For the next three weeks she mentioned it every time I met her. She claimed she and Arun always told each other everything. Arun did not see it that way at all. As outlined in the previous chapter gossip meant caring, which meant that everybody should talk to and know about everyone else.

Arun tended to keep things to himself, which sometimes upset some of his friends. He confided in his three best friends from college. And even with them he was selective. He did not want people to know too much about him, as he said. I often felt he confided in me and looked for advice because he relied on my outsider status and professional discretion. His secrecy with regard to Nikhita and the Shiamak friends was partly due to the fact that they did not know he smoked and drank alcohol. He never did in front of them. He feared appearing in a bad light or being lectured on how he had to quit. Non-smoking friends regularly scolded their smoking friends for their bad habits. The lectured smoker reacted ashamed. Few told the lecturer off. Arun used to wish he could, but his body language spoke to the contrary.

The young adults valued friendship highly. Friends fulfilled many roles of parents. They were companions in a developmental stage offering support and advice. The parents' generation fondly reported in a similar way of their college friendships. They also entertained mixed-*community* friendships. However, many amongst the parents' generation claimed to only have had same-sex

friends. A boy and a girl going out alone used to be frowned upon. One mother told me she used to have only girl friends, when she went to college. Her son had many girls as friends and even brought them home without asking. They would vanish to his room and close the door. The mother said this would have been unthinkable for her. She did not mind it claiming that she was glad her son had so many good friends. The parents' generation had less freedom, appertaining (commercialised) spaces and money to hang out. Nevertheless parents equally valued friendship highly and continued to foster them. Their lenience partly allows for the young adults's freedoms.

The practices of caring and gossip exhibited by the café culture crowd showed that even amongst peers in Pune, at this point in historical time, not just 'anything goes'. Peers were not as judgemental and guilt-provoking as parents, but they still formed an external social net to control and constrain the individual. Peers have taken over this function from the family. The circles of friends were formed based on personal liking and individual choice. They shared values and ideas.

Friends are chosen as advice and care givers, parents are not. One thing I heard over and over again from my young friends in Pune was best said by Nikhita on the sad occasion of her dog's sudden death:

> "I'm so detached from my mom I can't cry in front of her anymore. Or at least I can't finish crying with her. I have become so distanced, detached I can't share my grief with her. [My boyfriend] says he knows me better than I know myself. My mother doesn't understand me for nuts!"

Nikhita used the spatial terms "detached" and "distanced" to express a lack of intimacy and emotional separation. These were also the terms that Nilima and some of my young friends used to describe my *formal* behaviour. Nikhita and her mother had a close relationship, which improved when Nikhita and her boyfriend spent a year in the UK. Upon their return to India Nikhita and her boyfriend got engaged.

Finally I wish to remark on the relationships between siblings. On the one hand, siblings are part of the same generation, on the other hand they occupy different positions in the family, based on whether they are older or younger. As

illuminated in the previous chapter, siblings did play roles in each others' lives. Older siblings took care of younger siblings, brothers took care of sisters. Arun's older brother regularly called and checked on Arun. One night he called while we were all hanging out at Shisha's. He scolded Arun for going out between his exams. He inquired whether Arun was drinking alcohol. Arun was obviously annoyed but blushed and answered. Arun's brother also regularly inquired about Arun's progress in college. A friend of Arun's brother told Arun off for smoking. Arun was annoyed but also crestfallen. He made sure to not smoke in front of that friend again. Arun on the other hand felt obliged to his brother. For his brother's birthday, he helped organise a party and a prank. During the party he played the animator constantly trying to get people to dance and have a good time. He made quite a fool out of himself. He said it was his duty since it was his older brother's birthday.

Brothers were responsible for taking care of their sisters. They would drop them off and pick them up from meeting friends or from parties, especially when it was late at night. Parents expected it from their sons. However, siblings were also secret keepers for each other. After all it was perceived as less intrusive to be picked up or checked on by a sibling than by the parents.

Conclusion

In Pune in 2008 the increase in housing space, the tendency towards smaller, sometimes nuclear, families, and the trend towards a room of one's own reduced the influence and control of elders over the young person. Especially when both parents were working, the time spent with family was greatly reduced. As my young friends suggested themselves, this led to more freedom and independence, both from a joint family patriarch as well as from parents. Furthermore, this young generation was mobile in the form of motorised transport, TV and internet, as well as they themselves, siblings or friends travelling abroad. Increased family income from a growing economy filtered down to the young adults. It considerably transformed consumption styles and general demeanours of single persons and of the groups. It allowed the young

adults to participate in the café culture and its promises. The consumer culture was alluring with its promise of freedom to individual choice, to 'fulfilment', to be who one wanted to be. Conspicuous items of consumption, such as brand clothes, motorbikes and cellphones, not only reflected the rapidly growing markets of post-liberalised *middle class* Indian but were used by the café culture participants to express themselves. One dimension of this self-expression was *middle class* status, another one individuality. Arun labelled himself as athletic, sportive and loving to play. He was convinced that under his grandfather's authority he would not have been allowed to engage in sports. Playing football and dancing were part of his self-expression, just like hanging out in cafés and drinking with his buddies. Nikhita chose certain brands of clothes because she said they expressed her sporty casual personality (Chapter Two). Driving a brand new red motorbike also supported that image, I assume. Another good example for expressing one's individuality through lifestyle choices was the young man who appeared to a *puja* in torn jeans (Chapter Two). He was a 20-year-old BCom student. He said he was a DJ, loved to talk about women and sex, was learning Capoeira, had recently been on a forty-day *Vipassana*[45] retreat and visited the temple every Monday and Thursday. He also wanted to learn Latin-American dances. In the café culture young adults appeared as individuals, even if the money to participate came from their parents. Consumption played a big part in these young people's self-identification, and consumption transcended the local while domesticating the global.

The young adults often spent more time with their friends than with their parents. The friendship practices of sharing and teasing, as well as the joint indulgence in 'illicit' activities fostered equality within the friendship group. Young Puneites acknowledged that activities such as smoking, drinking, having a date, partying or even just hanging out were 'frowned upon' by parents and wider society. To some extent they hid these activities. However, by enjoying them and knowing that their parents were not completely ignorant, the young adults asserted their independence from their parents and their moral aesthetic standards. Considering those practices as *cool* was a moral as well as an

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[45] *Vipassana* is a meditation technique.

aesthetic judgement. They were seen as appropriate and as something that the young adults wanted and thought they should do. Within the café culture these moral aesthetic standards were used to praise and criticise someone, thus highlighting individuality, e.g. by teasing someone about an alcohol-induced embarrassment. One's parents were certainly not going to take responsibility for such lapses. The children would probably not even want them to know. In the café culture individuals were responsible for themselves and had to take care of themselves, at least to a certain extent. Many opined that they could not "be themselves" at home. The café culture offered the spaces to 'be oneself' which included hanging out with friends and indulging in activities the young adults felt they could not do at home.

However, the café culture world was also a continuation of the world at home. Mutual caring was marked amongst friends. A person was never left alone to do whatever he or she wanted. Some moral aesthetic standards differed – perhaps were more lenient and relaxed – from the parents' but other people continued to play an important role in asserting social control. The judgements by others remained a strong guide for young adults. Friends have taken over some of the functions of the family such as caring, protection, learning and communion. Young adults turned to each other instead of their families and perhaps increasingly also to themselves. After all, friends are self-chosen, often on the basis of similarities in habitus, as Bourdieu noted (1979). Turning to friends is turning to people who are like oneself. Yet it is not necessarily the same as turning into oneself. Friendships were interpreted as very caring relationships which involved a sense of intimate concern for the wellbeing of friends and a stress on mutual involvement. Thus autonomy and freedom for individual fulfilment were measured and limited by this mutual involvement and supervision. The mutual commitment might not have gone as far as in the family but friends were expected to support and be interested in each others' lives. The café culture crowd increasingly enjoyed and valued individual autonomy and freedom, but the stress on caring, mutual involvement and solidarity subordinated or encompassed the value of the individual.

There was much talk about having gained and striving for freedom,

independence and privacy amongst the café culture crowd. They wanted freedom from parental control in order to live life on their own terms, especially on a daily basis. Some also sought more control in major life decision such as career and marriage as will be seen in the next two chapters. However, striving to have a say in decisions about one's career, marriage, who one wants to be and other life decisions does not automatically indicate a trend towards individualisation. It is not identical with expecting an individual to make decisions autonomously, that is free from dependence on the wills of others, tradition, custom and religion. The latter is the western liberal understanding of a human being which implies that a human has to and only can realise herself independently of wills of others, tradition, customs and religion. The young generation in Pune in 2008 continued to value relationships, especially family but also friendship, higher than individuality. They were striving for more egalitarian, and not patriarchal or at least gerontocratic, decision-making processes regarding their own lives. Self-realisation took place within a set of cultural tools comprised of the wills of others, especially parents', custom and tradition. The *middle class* in Pune in 2008 continued to understand 'being human' and 'being *Indian*' as paramountly valuing the social whole, particularly family but also friendship. The young adults' pursuit of freedom and individuality within the café culture was encompassed, limited and modified by the value of relationships and 'natural solidarity'.

The café culture members continued to be highly socially connected selves who happily manoeuvred their way through the landscape of family expectations and decision-making that did not put all the burden on the individual. Firstly, the young adults were still dependent in many ways. They usually lived with their parents who cooked, did laundry and provided money. Children were an investment into the future (Donner 2005). Secondly, parents' wishes were usually either accepted or discussed to find a compromise. Their authority was not overthrown. Especially with regard to career and marriage, the parents continued to have a main influence. The young generation was striving for an egalitarian rather than a patriarchal or at least gerontocratic decision process. But few wanted to make decisions completely on their own. Thirdly, there was no 'anything goes' attitude in Pune in 2008. Or better not all life decisions were

a (consumer) choice. For example, none of the young adults considered not getting married an option even though the stigma of being unmarried has eased in the urban middle class (cf. Chapter Six). Marriage and parenthood, amongst other life decisions, continued to be perceived to make a person into a human being. Fourthly, while many of the young adults argued for the equality of individuals, there were no working class and only two scheduled class youths in the circles of friends I got to know. The latter's families were part of the *middle class* at least since the parents' generation and the parents moved to Pune, away from their caste and family affiliations. Furthermore, many of the young adults strongly opposed caste reservations (cf. Chapter Five). And high caste members of the *middle class* often justified endogamy (cf. Chapter Six). The friendship circles of the café culture were diverse in terms of high castes, place of origin, religion and gender. The challenging of hierarchies was restricted to the middle class dominated by high castes. Basically the middle class was defending its privileges.

An abstract notion of equality, namely the 'western' idea that all human beings are physically equal, was subordinated to a notion of equality that was context-sensitive. People were not considered to be qualitatively the same per se (Alvi 2001:51). Equality seemed to refer to a sense of belonging to the same category such as family, friendship group, caste, gender group and – very importantly – class. Even within these groups persons were not regarded equal as evident from the young adults struggle for more freedom from their parents. Despite being legally of age they considered themselves accountable to their parents, namely dependent and subordinated. Thus a person in Pune formed a notion of the self that was not autonomous or distinct from or against the wills of others, custom, tradition and religion, as an individual in the west tends to. Rather he or she formed a notion of the self in accordance with the wills of others, custom, tradition and religion; reinforcing or subverting but also performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to and reaching for social roles and expectations.

These considerations of the person in Pune necessitate a reconsideration of western liberal understandings of the autonomous individual and individual

agency. Indian personhood constitutes another version of being human. To be human and to realise oneself, a single person does not have to be autonomous. A person can realise herself by fulfilling the wills of others, tradition, custom and religion. This still leaves room for agency, the importance of experience and the consideration of alternatives. People realise themselves not only by either reinforcing or subverting social norms and roles but also in the way they perform, inhabit, experience, aspire to and reach for them (Mahmood 2005). This leads me to question the 'modern western' ideal of the autonomous individual. Individualisation is not a choice, it is a social norm. The individual is not free of the social norm to be free. Moreover, autonomy is an illusion because dependency on the market, social inequalities, institutionalised discrimination, risks and contradictions continue to be socially produced. However, the individual is told and believes that she has to find a solution by herself. Decisions, actions, successes and failures are her individual responsibilities. If she fails she was not good enough and did not try hard enough.

Education and choosing a life partner are among the most important decisions in a person's life. Elders used to make these decisions for children. These two arenas of life and the café culture crowd's negotiations of them, will be discussed in the next two chapters.

5 Education: Indian Success Stories

"Well, basically I come from a middle class family, eh which is primarily quite the largest bulk of Indians eh that you would see anywhere. Mhh, I think the numbers now are close to about four hundred or three hundred fifty million people in this country. So what I mean by middle class is that eh we grew up in a household where the father worked. The mother was a housewife. Eh, the father didn't have a car. You know, and he had to struggle. The money wasn't, was comfortable but wasn't lots. And eh that's how we, my brother and I started. You know. So there was always a need, as I grew up, to excel at most things that I did. Primarily because eh it was also eh economically not a very comfortable zone. As well as eh eh a lot of the people eh in in this class of India, the middle class in India, wanna study hard enough. So they're guaranteed of some income when they grow up. That's like the overpowering need. But also that a large number of people who, from this class wanna excel at whatever they do. Primarily would it be. If it if it's a sport and they wanna do well in it. If it's eh mhhh eh social interaction they wanna do well in it. Eh, they wanna be known. You know. So there's a, there's there's what you call, eh, hunger... to do, to do well. So I come from that breed of eh people. So right through school and college I worked hard, you know.

Pravin, 42 years old (7 January 2009)

Education was the main asset of the Indian *middle class*. It can be transformed into economic capital, social capital (status, prestige and connections) and cultural capital (credentials and respective habitus distinctive of the *middle class*). Education is attractive because it represents an achieved model of success rather than an ascribed social status. Having nothing else to fall back on, the parents' generation valued education very highly. Pravin also identified a desire to excel and to attain fame. These impulses led the *middle class* to place much emphasis on education. Accordingly, parents applied enormous pressure to their children. The pressure was aggravated by reservation policies which made access to higher education a gamble. Certain professions such as engineering and medicine were valued higher than others for the prestige and

the monetary reward they promised. The young generation, however, grew up in an economically more comfortable situation. Hence education was gradually becoming a means to self-fulfilment and not just a means to sustain a family. This was emphasised by the habitus of the college world which was the entrance to the café culture. Other work has shown the importance of schooling for the creation of a youth culture (Herrera/Bayat 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010, Liechty 2003). Which school one attended, what clothes one wore and how well one spoke English were judged by a more diverse crowd. In college young people judged themselves and others increasingly in terms of caste and wealth. Personal achievement and appearance – independent of parents' connections – were valued even if not always realised. The world of education was modulated by the other worlds of the café culture and of home, and it, in turn, modulated these.

The subtitle 'Indian success stories'[46] refers to the Indian inclination to tell 'from rags to riches' stories. The recipe for success usually consisted of either education or entrepreneurship, or both. Indian success stories were equal parts reality and *middle class* myth. On the one hand, there were many such success stories which confirmed social mobility. On the other hand, the notion of the Indian *middle class* was built on the assumption that everybody can become part of it, as Fernandes (2006) suggested. Most members of the *middle class* successfully repressed the fact that the *middle class* in India was still a minority and an elite, as Pravin's remark about the *middle class* being 'the largest bulk of Indians' showed. The urban *middle class* in particular thought their lifestyle was predominant in India at the time.

Inequalities in India's Education System

The relation between the Indian *middle class* and educational politics, in general and in the light of economic liberalisation, has been explored by Fernandes (2006). Several authors have shed light on schooling and its relation to family and to the reproduction of inequality (Béteille 1991, Chopra/ Jeffery 2005,

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[46] The subtitle was inspired by Martin Webb (2010) who explored the use of 'success stories' by activists in the Right to Information movement in northern India.

Donner 2008, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010, Scrase 1993, Srivastava 1998). Jeffrey et al. (2008) show that education in India is a "contradictory resource" which provides opportunities but also reinforces inequalities. They argue that "the ability of young men to benefit from education depended crucially on money, social resources and cultural capital" (ibid.:208). It was only a small top layer of the urban Indian middle and upper classes that benefitted from education by seamlessly moving into a secure, salaried job. This chapter illuminates how young adults in Pune perceived their education process and what it meant to them.

Access to education, especially to higher education, is in most societies restricted by a person's social background. In India access is still severely restricted in this way. Béteille (1991) made this argument with regard to the access of the Indian "service class" in general, which was conceived to be part of the *middle class*. Contributors to the volume edited by Chopra and Jeffery (2005) observed inequalities in access to education in different Indian states.

Brief Historical Overview

Education is considered by many to be one of the foundations of the Indian *middle class* (e.g. Béteille 1991, Scrase 2002, Donner 2008). Fernandes (2006) argued that the emergence of "India's new middle class" is historically linked to the introduction of the British colonial education system. In the first half of the nineteenth century the British intended to create a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect" (Macaulay 1835). It was a fundamental assertion of the construction of the Indian *middle class* that anyone can gain access to it by acquiring the appropriate "capital" (Fernandes 2006:xviii-xix) such as English education and "credentials of higher education" (ibid.:xxxi). English education distinguished the colonial middle class from traditional and wealthier elites and from less privileged strata (ibid.:5). Education and language became the middle class' cultural and social capital. This was exaggerated by the fact that economic and political power were controlled by the British (ibid.:4). To date English education plays a defining role in the self-conception of the Indian *middle class*.

English education furthermore created "new and enduring socioeconomic hierarchies both within the middle class and in relation to subordinated groups" (ibid.:6). The upper castes who already had been literate in the past were granted privileged access to English education. In western India, of which Pune was a part, it was Brahmins and poor literary castes who constituted the emerging colonial middle class rather than the wealthier business classes (Dobbin 1972). The British actively recruited into the Indian Civil Service (ICS) those from family backgrounds defined by property ownership and by occupations such as government service, medicine, law, and teaching (Fernandes 2006:7-8). ICS jobs were most sought after, since they provided financial security.

After Independence, caste-based discrimination was condemned by the Indian constitution. It recommended reservation of seats in the legislature, access to education and provision of jobs in government offices for the lowest castes (Guha 2007:113-17). Considered disadvantaged and *backward*, these groups were classified as scheduled castes (SC), which included former untouchables; scheduled tribes (ST), also called *adivasis*; and other backward castes (OBC), or *classes* as most people in Pune said. Per India's constitution these groups were entitled to about 24 per cent of public sector jobs and higher education admissions. This percentage was supposed to reflect their proportion of the total population. However, Fernandes (2006:20-23) elucidates how the bond between the Indian state and the middle class, formed through educational policies and state employment, continued after Independence. During the early decades of Independence higher education received more state funding than primary education and health care, partly due to demands from the urban middle class and rural elites. Until the 1970s the growth rates in enrolment for higher education far surpassed that for primary education. The ICS was expanded into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and by the early 1980s it recruited more than 70 per cent from the English-educated middle class.

In 1980 the so-called Mandal Commission concluded that certain castes were still disadvantaged (Rahu 2007:607). It recommended reserving an additional 27 per cent of seats in public sector jobs and higher education for OBCs. The

recommendations of the Mandal Commission were highly contested by the Indian *middle class*. High caste, *middle class* students burnt themselves in protest and a case was filed with the Supreme Court of India questioning the constitutional validity of the recommendations (ibid.:608-90). The *middle class* feared for its privileged access to education and for its predominance in securing jobs. In 1992 the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the recommendations were valid but that the total amount of reserved seats should not exceed fifty per cent (http//:indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend76.htm).

On April 10, 2008 the Indian Supreme Court confirmed the 27 per cent quota for OBCs. It further stated that the quotas were applicable for graduation courses only, not for postgraduate courses. The judgement therefore excluded the "creamy layer" of the "backward castes", or those who have graduated and thus could no longer be considered *backward* (TOI 2008b). However, the judges also doubted the effectiveness of the quota system:

> "There is no deletion from the list of other backward classes. It goes on increasing... is it that backwardness has increased instead of decreasing?" (TOI 2008c)

The controversies over reservation policies show how intricately interwoven state, class, caste and education are.

Economic liberalisation, which started in the 1980s and was fully implemented in the early 1990s, led to a rapid expansion of the service sector and of private-sector employment (Fernandes 2006). Now, it was not the IAS jobs that were most desired, but rather careers in multinational companies which promised high salaries. The IT boom put India on the economic world map. Recent research (Donner 2008, Favero 2005, Fernandes 2006, Fuller/Narasimha 2007, van Wessel 2004) shows that it is mainly the urban middle class that has benefitted from economic liberalisation in India while it has threatened jobs, educational strategies and access to state goods of the lower middle class (Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010).

"Study Hard, Become Big": Education as a *Middle Class* Value and Asset

> "The *middle class* believes in education. This might be interesting for your research: the *middle class*' faith in education. Within the *middle class* there is

what we call the *business class* and the *service class*. The *business class* is not so bothered about education cause they know pop is there. Ultimately they will work in the family business. [One of my football friends] did a BCom. Not a real degree. You don't study hard and spend most time in a café. It was for the sake of having a degree only. [Mohan] never even finished his BCom. He dropped out after a year and started working for his pop[47]. The *service class*, like everyone who's employed, is more hard working because they know they have no back-up. They have to put in more will-power and have more faith in education. They are struggling hard. If the father is the sole breadwinner he struggles hard to put two children through college. But he would never complain about it."

In this statement Arun tellingly summarised the importance of education for the *middle class*. In his eyes it was doubtful that his two football friends were members of the *middle class*. For him education was a defining attribute of the *middle class*. Like Pravin he described the typical *middle class* family as a nuclear family of four with the father as the sole breadwinner and with no resources to fall back on. There is no social security system in India, so the depths to which a family could plunge is much further than in Western European countries. Education was a means to an end. It was not sought for its own sake. It was the basis of existence for the (*service) middle class*. Parents wanted their children – especially sons and increasingly daughters – to be able to provide for themselves and for their parents according to the ideal of generational reciprocity. In general, *middle class* Puneites were hopeful that education would enhance chances of well-paid employment, marriage opportunities, social competence, cultural capital (cf. Jeffery 2005:35), social status, and eventually happiness. "Education is also attractive […] because it provides an *achieved* model of success distinct from *ascribed* ideas of social value" (Jeffrey et al. 2008:203, orig. emphasis). Young men commonly said that they gave themselves until the age of twenty-five to establish themselves in their career, earn a decent salary and thus be able to marry and provide for a family. Young women often wanted their own career in order to be independent. Parents added that mothers should be able to help their children with studies. A university degree had become a desirable marriage criteria for both genders, though not everybody necessarily wanted an employed wife.

Educational achievement was perceived to be directly linked to economically

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[47] This young man was specifically conceived with the purpose of taking over the family business. He had three much older sisters. His grandmother insisted on having a boy to continue the family business. His fate was determined before he was born.

determined stratification (Donner 2008:126), to status and to happiness. The parents' generation communicated anxiety that the economic changes in India had led to an erosion of social security. Donner (2005:124) observed for the *middle class* in Calcutta that a "perceived loss of financial security is parallelled [sic] by a notion that social relationships have become less reliable, and that 'new women' are responsible for the 'breakdown' of the old order". Others suggest that it is the lower middle class whose financial security is under threat since liberalisation (Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010). Financial anxieties only befell the young generation in Pune in the light of the 'credit crunch' in fall 2008. People I talked to instead held materialistic tendencies responsible for a decay of family values. Nilima said:

> "I don't like all this change going on in India. These people don't want their parents anymore. Today newly married couples want to start life with everything: fridge, TV, stereo. You name it and they have it. They take loans out to get it all. The housewife will not even start working in the kitchen until everything is there: electrical mixer, microwave. We saved for two years before we bought a fridge. I personally think that too much money is not good for people."

A mother in her forties who, with her family, spent half of the year in the US and half in India remarked:

> "The US is very materialistic and India is becoming like the US. People are very superficial. It is all about what car you drive, how big your house is and how much money you earn. In the US parents tell you how beautiful their children are. In India parents talk about their children's education and successes in education."

When I asked a thirty-nine year old IT professional what he wanted from life, he answered:

> "I want to earn lots of money. I want a new car, new flat, good friends, a peaceful life. I will be happy when my children get good marks in exams and they are well qualified to take any challenges in their life."

Amongst the generation of the forty-year-olds in particular there seemed to be a constant desire to show off assets. A new item would be shown to all present and its price named. Pravin, the restaurant owner, celebrated the new opportunities of earning money after economic liberalisation in the name of his restaurant, 'Post 91'. The generation of the forty-year-olds, who had just entered the job market in the early 1990s, were the tipping point from the Gandhian ideal of austerity to an embrace of consumerism (Srivastava 2007).

However, money was not all that could be gained with education. Arun often

quoted his guardian who used to tell him:

> "Khup shikun, motha hoycha." (Marathi: Study hard, become big.)

He explained:

> "It's not about money but about status. It's difficult to explain. Education is a means to become big. People look up to you. To become a doctor or an engineer means a lot of status in India."

The (social) value of education was instilled from very early on. Arun alluded to the phenomenon of the big man. According to Mines (1994:19) a big man is a person of social importance who has a following. He (rarely she) has ways of getting things done by means of his social status and influence in a society where not everyone is treated the same way and has the same rights.

Hence sons and increasingly daughters were put under enormous pressure *to achieve*, to be successful in their studies and careers. *Achievement* was the buzzword. A good student was called an *achiever*. Young people often called their grandparents or parents *achievers* because they were the first to get formal education in their family and to accomplish a decent lifestyle. To work hard and achieve (through education) were defining ideals of the self picture of the *middle class*. Education was the main resource for the *middle class*. It could be converted into economic capital, social capital(status) and cultural capital (credentials and habitus) (Bourdieu 1984). Education offered an individual the opportunity and burden to 'achieve', independent of ascribed social status (Jeffrey et al. 2008:203).

The Pressure to Achieve

> "The school has emerged as a major institution for mediating the relationship between the family and the new occupational system, and it also plays a major part in the reproduction of inequality." (Béteille 1991:17-8)

In Pune people called the school system "ten plus two". First through fourth standard, attended from age six to age nine, were regarded as primary education. Secondary education started in fifth standard at the age of ten and carried on until the tenth standard when most pupils were sixteen years old. For those first ten years of schooling my young informants had either attended an English medium school or an (English medium) convent school[48]. Only one

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[48] Convent schools in Pune were run by Christian brothers and/ or nuns and, more often than not, they were single-gender schools.

young man had gone to a Marathi medium school. Other research has shown the preference for English over vernacular education amongst India's *middle class* (Donner 2008, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Scrase 2002). It was considered a prerequisite for success. Nilima explained:

> "Parents want their children to get the best education and the best jobs. And parents want their children to go abroad later. Children also want that when they get older. So we send them to English schools. They tell us to speak English with children at home also. So my sons speak very basic Marathi only. It's sad. My granddaughter [who lives in the UK] speaks no Marathi."

Nilima highlights the *middle class*' global aspirations. Arun put it more bluntly:

> "If you speak English here people think you're educated and they think twice about fucking around with you."

Chapter Two was opened by Nisha's remark equating the mastery of English with being educated, *modern*, affluent and with wearing jeans. Amongst the café culture, speaking English was also considered *cool*. These are moral as well as aesthetic judgements. They expressed how the *middle class,* and especially the café culture, wanted and felt they ought to be: globally savvy citizens of the world. Speaking English and attending a 'good' school were perceived to be crucial to one's success in life.

Admission to the best schools in Pune was expensive and difficult to obtain. Convent schools were the most expensive options and considered the best. Many English medium schools and all convent schools required parents and prospective students to appear for an interview. This put pressure on both parents and child. Status and wealth of the family were at least as important as the child's potential. Donner (2005, 2008) and Béteille (1991) noted that since the 1980s the involvement of parents in their children's education and career prospects had increased noticeably and had a considerable impact on the family. Donner illuminates the constant challenge schooling presented to parents and family life, and how it thus shaped the family, especially motherhood. Nilima likewise indicated that mothers had become the educational providers for children. They were expected to speak English with their children, tutor them at home, prepare them for exams, make lunch *tiffins* and organise transportation. Thus the *middle class* mother distinguished herself from poorer uneducated women (cf. Donner 2008). Sending a child to a 'good school' also involved organising transportation since it was rarely the local school in the

neighbourhood. Like many others Arun was picked up by a rickshaw with other students. Rickshaws packed with six or more children in school uniform were a common sight in Pune. Mira's and Leela's fathers took them to school by car.

For the students themselves the tenth standard presented the first major challenge. Upon completion of standard ten students were required to take national (ISCE = Indian School Certificate Examination) or state board exams (SSC = Maharashtra State Secondary School Certificates), depending on the school. This examination is not only important for gaining entrance into higher secondary education or junior college, it also seemed to have been a marker of status and success. Arun recalled it in the following way:

> "So after I got my results my dad was really proud of me. Because I scored more than [my brother]. He scored only eighty-five. Whereas I scored eighty-seven percent. So he was really proud of me because it's always a comparison when you're siblings. Being from a family of teachers. Which will have high expectations to keep up to. So my aunts are all teachers. So their sons, their daughters are like some of them are teachers and scoring really good marks throughout their graduation and everything. Getting economics gold medals and stuff like that. So we were like the youngest so we had to live up to the expectations and the standards set by the siblings and cousins. So it was always pressure. And me being the youngest, so I was always compared to [my brother]. How he is an all-rounder, and he's the cricket captain and he's also second in his class. I never managed to get second in my class but I was always in the top ten. And by class I mean we had a class of more then sixty. And I <u>did</u> get eighty-seven percent. My dad was really happy. He bought almost three kgs of sweets and distributed them to the entire colony. [Arun laughed.] And told them the results. And I went along with him. Totally really proud. So that was nice and he was showing off. I missed the boards, like the merit list of... The merit list is the top hundred students from the entire state. So I missed that by only like 1.5 percent. So my dad was like: If he hadn't got jaundice he would have been in the merit list. But it's okay. I'm so proud of him and... So that was the <u>high</u> point."

Arun expressed the pressure of expectation from his parents, the competition with his brother and other relatives, and the involvement of the neighbours. As mentioned before, talking about the successes of children was a major part of neighbourly gossip and entailed social control.

The next hurdle was the twelfth standard exam which was crucial for entrance into higher education. Every year the best results for standards ten and twelve were published in the newspaper. Having achieved status of the "class topper" or the "school topper" or the "state topper" will be a character trait for the rest of a person's life. When I was introduced to a family friend, Nilesh said about the

almost forty-year-old doctor and mother of two children that she was the "state topper" when she finished twelfth standard.

For their eleventh and twelfth standard, commonly called junior college, young people at the age of sixteen had to decide for either science, arts or commerce in junior college. The two years of junior college were designed to prepare young people for their later career path. It was important to get a good mark on the tenth standard exams to increase one's chances to get into the college one desired. However, reservation policies had the final say, according to my interlocutors. They were a source of great frustration among my informants, none of whom were eligible for reservation. Everybody had a story to tell of grandchildren, children, siblings or themselves about how they did not get into the college or even the degree course they wanted due to reservations. Between the parents' generation and the younger generation the number of reserved seats, as well as the number of students from reserved categories, had increased tremendously.

Arun had wanted to go to Ferguson College, said to be one of the best colleges in town, and in India, for his eleventh and twelfth standard. Despite his good marks he was rejected.

> "For junior college Ferguson College closed at 88. And I missed that college by point five percent. This girl after me got it at 64 percent. Being reserved class. She was Enti which is a nomadic tribe. And she did not look nomadic from any angle. [He laughed.] I don't know. This reservation was like deserving candidates are being overruled over on caste and reservations. So that was a dodgy issue then."

The same happened when he started his engineering degree:

> "I got in on my own merit. I'm doing production engineering. There were a lot of people who scored less marks than me and got like better colleges and better branches. Of engineering. I would have liked to do mechanical engineering. But I had to settle for production engineering because of my average marks in the entrance test and the twelfth standard. So a lot of people, a lot of students got better colleges because of the fact that, like, I got 75 percent in my twelfth standard. And in VIT people who were getting like the best branches they were getting seats at like what, 60, 65 percent because they were Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribes. Because of reservations."

This was a very common story amongst my *middle class* informants. Arun acknowledged that he had not done well enough in his exams. But he was frustrated because people who had done worse got better options. One of

Arun's college friends remarked:

> "It's really difficult to get into a good college if you're a boy and not eligible for reservation seats. Reservations for STs, SCs, OBCs and NTs, numerical tribes[49], sum up to 51% in some colleges. It goes by percentage of population which is raising because it's the third generation of OBCs now. And people claim to belong to these castes. It reinforces the caste system in a different way. And then there are also seats reserved for girls. In some colleges there are maybe eight or nine seats for open competition. For that you need 95 or 96% marks which is really difficult to get. You basically have to slog your ass off all the time. It's a really fierce competition if you are a boy and not from a caste that gets reserved seats to get into a government college. Also, excellent marks are not a guarantee to get into the college you want."

The pressure to do well was consequently extremely high. Every year around exam time the newspapers were full of tips for studying and stories of the pressure with which young people lived. There were also frequent reports of young people taking their lives due to the pressure or poor results (e.g. TOI 2008a).

Parents and young people imagined education to provide personal and collective development. However, it also provoked caste and class resentments (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010). The narratives of my informants revolved around merit versus reservation or bribing. If hard work was not enough, they said, one could bribe one's way into a good college. Nilesh, a doctor, told me the following:

> "The caste policy of the government creates resentments between castes and we are reinforcing the caste system in our own way. One develops resentments against *Dalits*[50]. My sons didn't get accepted to medical college because only 70 out of 200 seats are for non-scheduled castes. And we did not have the money to send them to private colleges. Private colleges accept what they euphemistically call donations. People pay to get their children in. The children take an entry test. The lower the marks the more the parents have to pay. Then the college manipulates the test results. That's why my sons became physiotherapists. People less smart than my sons become doctors. Once a doctor no one cares anymore whether one got the degree from private or public college. Of course as a father I would have liked my sons to become doctors. The college where my sons studied was new. So for them to go to the UK they had to ask the University of Pune to make it a university degree. "

Friends of the family told me that it was thanks to Nilesh's reputation and connections that his sons got somewhere in life, especially to the UK.

Karim, who was twenty-one years old and had just finished a BA in

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[49]   I have no idea what numerical tribes are and have only heard the term this one time.
[50]   *Dalit* was the current politically correct term for former Untouchables.

management, told me about a private medical college in Pune where they had a room that is reserved for parents to bring bags full of money. Legend or fact, it was a telling image. One of Arun's school friends remarked that it was considered normal to pay "donations" to get into a college:

> "We would appreciate if colleges became honest and accepted students on grounds of their marks. But we don't want to be left behind. If we don't pay we will be left behind. It's a vicious circle. The standard and reputation of educational institutions like the IITs, IIMs, will suffer when people are accepted on the ground of caste and not merit."

People talked about a downright parallel economy that was developing around education or said that education had become a business in India. Fernandes (2006:131) called it "privatised strategies". For one thing, many parents sent their children to additional tuition classes to further their academic performance (cf. Mukherji 2008). Furthermore getting a child into a good college required the parents to pay *donations* on top of tuition fees, if they could afford it. Moreover, since the 1980s private colleges have mushroomed around India. Karim argued that many people sent their children abroad because it was cheaper than educating them in India. The US was the preferred destination for higher education, especially graduate degrees.

> "Why do you think so many young people are going abroad? Education is too expensive in India. Often the donation to only get into a college is higher than tuition fees, living expenses and the flight for studies abroad would sum up to. Plus the roads are pathetic here. The lifestyle is better abroad: clean, less people, good infrastructure."

Fernandes (2006:132) identified two main reasons for the growing privatisation of education: government funding for education has steadily decreased since the early 1980s, and parts of the *middle class* "use migration strategies and overseas education as a means of upward mobility". Pune, often referred to as the "Oxford of the East", with its nine recognised universities and hundreds of affiliated colleges attracts thousands of students from all over India and the world every year.

Education was a major investment for a family (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010). People who were neither members of a caste eligible for reservation nor very affluent were frustrated. They were afraid to be left out. This was mentioned as a reason to pay *"donations"*. Moreover, Dr Rajeshwari Deshpande, then a reader in Politics at the University of Pune, argued that

education was not a good criteria to conceive of the Indian *middle class* because it had become so widely accessible and was hence devalued. Her statement confirmed the *middle class*' assumption that they were losing their privileged access to education. It has become more widely accessible to other social segments, while the *middle class* seemed to struggle for access. However, the urban *middle class* in Pune I worked with is part of the thin top layer of young people in India who actually did benefit from their education. Other research shows that "educated unemployment" is spreading amongst the lower middle class in rural India (Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey 2010). Rising educational enrolment and declining job opportunities in the light of neoliberalism are shaping youth cultures around the world (Cole/Thomas 2009, Herrera/Bayat 2010, Jeffrey et al. 2008, Liechty 2003, Nisbett 2009).

Most of my informants were in favour of a system based on merit, which emphasised personal achievement[51] rather than knowing the right people. However, caste (reservation policies) and family (economic means, home pressure, social connectedness, cultural capital) were the determining factors for getting a good education (cf. Fuller/Narasimhan 2006, 2007). These factors were thus recreating inequalities and stressing dependence on parents (cf. Béteille 1991). Affirmative action policies in the form of reservation quotas were especially hotly debated with regard to reputed colleges like the IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institute of Management), and with regard to postgraduate courses. Arun's college friend explained resentfully:

> "Everybody wants to get into government colleges. They're better than private colleges because they have long standing reputation. International companies will have heard about these only. Companies from abroad like Google will employ maybe two or three Indians. They will go directly to Government college of which they know that good engineers have come out of them continuously over the past years. With the reservation policies applicable to reputed colleges like IITs, IIMs their reputation will suffer."

Béteille (1991) was right to highlight the importance of the family and its cultural (education) and social capital (connections) for gaining access to good education and in reproducing inequalities.

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[51] Personal achievement did not necessarily mean producing original work, as seen in the previous chapter. Friends copied each others' homework. However, the end result in form of a pass and a mark were claimed by the single person. Personal achievement seemed to imply that it was not due to the parents' influence or bribing. It did not exclude the help of friends and copying.

> "The emergence of a new educational and occupational system gave individuals an increasingly secure basis for freeing themselves from the demands of caste and sub-caste" (ibid.:23).

It offered the opportunity for personal achievement and to leave ascribed social status behind (Jeffrey et al 2008:203). However, caste continued to play a role. Jeffrey et al. found that economic, social and cultural capital – largely a result of caste, class and religious background – determined whether a person benefitted from education and his strategies for economic uncertainty. The implementations of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in the form of reservation quotas caused new caste resentments. The growing political power of SCs, STs and OBCs caused anxiety, too[52]. Interestingly, as Lukose (2009:166) notes, caste is historically understood by anthropologists as a traditional, religious practice and category. But here it became part of a modern, secular institution, namely education. Upon entering junior college, identifying oneself in this context and in relation to others suddenly became a problem. Most of my young friends said they had never really heard or thought of their caste before, except perhaps in relation to the performance of a religious function. Some of them had been instilled with pride in belonging to a certain *community*. But there was no value attached in relation to others, at least not within the *middle class*. As mentioned in the previous chapter circles of friends amongst young *middle class* Puneites were mixed to a certain degree. Somewhat paradoxically the education system brought caste back to the fore.

By drawing on its economic, social and cultural capital – wealth, social connections, status, and educated parents – the *middle class* in Pune sought to maintain its privileged access to education and employment. Through tutoring, *donations* and private colleges it sustained the elitist character of the Indian education system that the state half-heartedly intended to undermine (cf. Chopra/ Jeffery 2005). As a result the pressure to *achieve* was immense for young members of the *middle class*, not least because of the major expense their education constituted for their families. Arun expressed this vividly:

> "The guilt eats you up from inside. Every time it comes to paying tuition fees dad

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[52] It was an open secret that these groups decided the outcome of elections. A founding member of the People's Party India (PPI), a party by and for the *middle class*, alleged that the *middle class* was systematically kept from voting. While politicians had bought support from entire *backward* communities.

indicates that I better do well with all the money he is investing. My pop has never said anything or made me feel guilty. He just behaves in a certain manner to make me study hard."

Arun's tuition fees for his engineering college summed up to about 80,000 rupees (~1,100 GBP) a year.

The Career Choice: Moralising Work

The previous section showed that many young *middle class* Puneites were not only unable to gain access to the colleges they wanted, but also could not pursue the careers to which they aspired. What did they want? Did they follow their own dreams in their career choices? Or did the decision lie with their parents?

My young informants in Pune had chosen either science, arts or commerce in junior college. Taking up science opened the door to any university degree. Following the arts branch one was restricted to BA, BCom or law. The commerce branch prepared one for a business career. The most sought-after careers were in medicine and engineering, followed by commerce and law. Other subjects from the arts branch such as languages, sociology, psychology etc. were perceived as a fallback option or undesirable compromise. Arun expressed the prevalent attitude:

> "When you're seventeen you don't know what to do. If you don't do engineering or medicine people think you are a potential failure in life. It's pressure from parents, the public like neighbours and all that, and even from peers. Engineering and medicine are over-hyped careers in India. It goes far enough so that parents buy their children into reputed colleges. I'm really proud that I got into my college on merit only. I wouldn't like it to be due to my dad. But it is changing slowly. People make lucrative careers in other fields. Basically it's a decision whether you want to have fun after school and enjoy the good life. Then you choose to do a BA. Their curriculum is minimal. They only study for a week for their exams. Five months they spend in cafés and restaurants or at home but not in college. They only study when their ass is on fire. Or you wanna make a good career, which means obtaining a BE or BSc. I wanted to enjoy life. But I didn't have much of a choice but to do engineering. My brother was already doing engineering, and my family does not have a lot to fall back on."

Note the mixture of envy and arrogance towards everyone who was not becoming a doctor or engineer. Arun often felt stuck and out of place in his production engineering degree. He had wanted to do mechanical or software

engineering. Sometimes he even wondered whether engineering was his cup of tea at all. He mentioned general societal exptectations and his older brother as reasons to pursue engineering. The prospect of better economic opportunities and social standing, along with an older brother who could help him, were convincing arguments to him. Arun also alluded to his family not having much "to fall back on". Thus his career choice depended significantly on the wills of others, social expectations, custom (status attached to certain jobs) and systemic peculiarities (caste reservation), rather than individual choice. Finally, he expressed pride in having gained college admission without the help of his father, thus insisting on some independence.

Béteille (1991:5-6) argued that doctors, engineers, scientists, economists and lawyers characterise a modern society. Their social importance is far greater than their numbers in a society. Their proliferation was historically linked to the growth of a middle class. He points out that these professions have not only greatly expanded in India since Independence but that they have also gained "high social prestige". The esteem does not derive solely from income but also from high levels of education and the associated specialised knowledge and technical skill. The investment pays back. Nisbett (2009:194) – following Bourdieu (1984) – argues that the recent stress on technology and engineering is due to those subjects being the "middle ground" claimed by those classes who have little other cultural or social capital. The post-colonial elites by contrast focussed on literature studies. Engineering and medicine were by far the most sought after careers of the *middle class* in Pune in 2008.

Since parents invested considerable amounts of money, effort and time into their children's education and expected reciprocity between the generations, they staked out a major claim in their offspring's career choice. Doctors usually wanted their children to become doctors. Civil servants like Arun's parents opted for more lucrative careers in the private sector for their children and hence chose engineering. A builder wanted his son to study civil engineering in order to take over the construction company. Business owners encouraged their children to get a commerce degree to assume the father's occupation.

When I first met Leela she had just finished junior college at St. Mary's, an English convent school. She told me that her parents wanted her to become a doctor: "In my family they are all doctors or engineers. But I'm really not interested in becoming a doctor. You know, I see how my parents are working so much. I'm just not made for that." Instead she wanted to get into the "hotel management business" which was becoming increasingly popular. But her parents considered medicine or engineering the secure and proper career choice. "Family is very important in India, you know. That's why the situation at home is quite sad." She explained that she had to fight a lot with her parents over this issue. Her father had even refused to talk to her for two months. Now her parents had accepted that she did not want to become a doctor or engineer. Leela ended up enrolling in psychology, a compromise she had reached with her parents. She neither bowed to her parents nor did she get to choose independently.

I often got the impression that young people were unhappy with their parents' choice, but they felt obliged to obey. Education was a means to an end and not an end in itself. However, as Arun indicated, things were changing. Career counsellors were increasingly in demand and children were increasingly taking a stand against their parents. Nilesh's sister, a private career counsellor, remarked that increasingly the counselling happened without the knowledge of the parents: "The youngsters want to pursue a career against their parents' will." She would usually ask whether the parents were informed. This is a further indication that independence was not encouraged in young adults' development but that they increasingly sought it.

"Follow Your Heart"

A first change is observable in the generation of the forty-year-olds. Parents in this generation told me that they wanted their children to become whatever they wanted. This was often due to the turns their own lives had taken.

Ravi, a big-hearted, bubbly journalist in his early forties with a wild curly mane and usually dressed in cargo trousers and a colourful cotton shirt, had not

always been a journalist. He used his experience to create a workshop to inspire young people, which he titled "Follow your Heart". He intended to write a book about it. At the age of sixteen, he said, he had his heart set on doing arts in junior college and becoming a journalist. He liked history and English. He got an admission form for Ferguson College. He went to his father to get his signature. Ravi was from a Brahmin family. His father had a BSc and used to work for a multinational company. Ravi recounted:

> "[My father] battered the table and said: Nothing doing! Bullshit! [Ravi laughed] I wanted to start my book saying 'bullshit'. That's exactly what he said. Bullshit because he said: What's the arts degree going to get you. You won't even get a job as a peon. You know, that's the way the Indian thought in the seventies. That's the only job you'll get for a BA. You need to become an engineer. [His father suggested that Ravi could work in his uncle's company as an engineer and eventually run it.] There is so much scope as an engineer. […] What's wrong with you? You must do science. I said: I don't like science. I don't understand it. It's too heavy for me. I like my English. I like my history. He said: You're a waste of time! Nothing doing and all that."

Ravi's father forced him to do science in junior college. For three months Ravi struggled and failed. So he and his father reached a compromise and Ravi went on to do commerce.

> "I was stuck now. My father didn't win. I didn't win. But I was suffering. At the end of it I was suffering. But that was the big joke. That is actually gonna result in my first book perhaps. You know. That 'Follow your heart'. So I wanted to talk to the good-looking girls. We used to fall in love every day. Get infatuated by all the good-looking girls. Because I was in a boys' school where you were, you know, short-changed in stuff like that and only ogled at good-looking teachers. You see. And here the girls were pretty. But you didn't know what to do. Because you have never spoken to girls before. So you only admired them from a distance. And the guys will push you. So from whole class eleven I said: forget the commerce! At least make friends with girls. I wanted a girlfriend. Past eleven the project was project girlfriend. Nothing was happening. By then all the girls were hooked. Guys with mobikes [motorbikes], you know. Because the studies are boring. If I was in arts, I would have gotten a girlfriend in Ferguson College. No problem. But I would have been enjoying the academics also. You know. Here I was not enjoying the academics and the girls were also not happening. So I was losing both ways."

Though it was a compromise with his father, Ravi emphasised that he suffered, not his father. He did not fail to mention that, despite not liking commerce, he achieved a first class in his twelfth standard examination. He went on to do a university degree in commerce. During his first year he bought a moped:

> "I was more out of college than in college. I was more out of college writing articles for newspapers. I had this moped and I had to pay the fuel. So I had to write. And I wrote a lot just to pay for the fuel. You know. I mean I enjoyed writing. It was a vicious cycle. So I wrote. Because I had to write I used to bunk college. Anyways, I was least interested in commerce. But I had to finish that degree. You

know. And I spotted my wife during a new year's eve party in my second year."

In his final exams Ravi failed one subject and he had to repeat it. But to do so he had to wait an entire year.

> "So that whole year was like a break year. So good for me! So I was all over the place. Writing. You know. I became a semi-full-time journalist. I used to go out of town to cover a cricket match, and go to Goa for a football match. You know. I used to cover sports a lot. Like the Maharashtra cricket team I used to be like the fifteenth player. You know. I used to go with the team to Gujarat and, you know, sit with them and, you know, cover the match. Report for the magazine or the local paper. I made a lot of friends in those days. It was great fun. The quick beer after the game."

His father was not happy with Ravi's lifestyle and urged him to study. Finally he passed the exam.

> "What happened was that there was a lot of peer pressure. When I was finishing my BCom I had a job offer from Sports World, the magazine. Which I wrote for. In Kolkata. At the princely salary of eight hundred rupees. That was a stipend. Six months probation and eight hundred rupees per month. In 1984. Can you imagine. That's all. And in Kolkata. And to live, huh! Means than I would have to live like this. [He pointed at my one-room apartment.] At eight hundred bucks. Impossible! But I was ready to go. But my father was still not happy. He said: You reached up to BCom. Now I think you should do an MBA. You do an MBA. Because after MBA if you're not happy with the corporate world you can become a journalist again. MBA is a good fallback. And somebody challenged me that time. After a couple of beers somebody said: You didn't clear your BCom, I bet you can't do an MBA. You need brains for an MBA. Or some crap like that. You know how you have ego at twenty-one."

Ravi took up the challenge, beat the guy at the entrance exam for an MBA, and commenced the MBA course. Ravi said the MBA was "hip. Even today it has brand value. In 1984 it was **the** course." He finished the MBA with a second class. He again mentioned peer pressure which encouraged him to seek a job in sales and marketing. He joined an advertising agency in Mumbai. He said he should have returned to being a journalist but the salaries were around 3,000 rupees (~40 GBP) while the corporate world offered 6,000 rupees. He struggled for three months, quit and joined a housing company in Chennai. Ravi got married. Both he and his wife moved to Chennai and worked for the same company for three years. Then Ravi joined a "multinational" company. Again he said it was due to peer pressure. For six years he worked for the multinational company, an Australian bank.

> "Imagine, me a banker! Actually sitting and looking at balance sheets only. With a tie. Clean shaven, short hair. Every day a new tie. Big leather shoes. Trousers with the correct pleat. And three course meal. And, you know, all talking rubbish over lunch. How is business? Oh, customers are a little down. But let's improve the frontage of the bank..."

The last three years Ravi joined the advertising department of the bank. Here he was able to apply his creativity and edit the bank's magazine. At the age of thirty-four, comfortably settled in an air-conditioned two bedroom flat in Juhu, the best suburban neighbourhood of Bombay, Ravi was getting increasingly "frustrated in [his] mind". A friend gave him a book titled *Find the work you love* by Laurence Boldt. The book changed his life, he said. He wanted to go back to journalism. It took him several months to convince his wife, by then a "homemaker" raising their daughter. If he was earning 30,000 rupees (~400 GBP) at the bank and the available journalism job offered 8,000 rupees (~110 GBP). Ravi finally quit his job at the bank and became a journalist again. He recounted that it was a "soft landing" because they went back to Pune where his father owned a flat that Ravi could buy for lower than market price. Additionally his wife started working part time. For two and a half years he "really slogged" working sixteen hours a day covering two or three stories.

> "I was so happy to be in the line that I was meant to be in at the age of twenty-one. Thirteen years too late. But finally there."

He remarked that he became a first-class journalist by writing several stories a day, learning that in which he had not been formally trained. In 1999 he got his "dream job" at the Times of India. But in 2003 he realised that he was missing his daughter's growing-up. Again he followed his heart, as he put it. Since his wife was doing well at her job, Ravi started working from home. He said he misused his freedom, joining an Urdu theatre group and an association for environmental awareness. This allowed him to travel India and the world. These experiences shaped "[his] personal growth". Ravi is very proud of the international friendships he has developed.

Ravi eloquently expressed the expectations, attitudes and pressures from family and peers, and how difficult it was to resist them. Ravi's story strikingly mirrors the tendency towards individualisation and self-fulfilment. This trend is also reflected in the title of his workshop 'Follow your heart'. Ravi's life story describes an inner development which speaks of a process of individuation. His initial career was dominated by his father and social expectations. He 'followed his hear't only when he was a made man, husband and father. Furthermore, he was able to eventually become a journalist because he could live in his father's

flat and his wife went back to paid work. Hence his career was initially guided and later aided by others and by social expectations. He was dependent on others to realise his personal choice.

Nisha's story is also telling. Twenty years younger than Ravi, her story had an even faster trajectory. When she moved to a bigger flat with her family after her sister had earned a lot of money in the USA, things rapidly started changing for her, she said. She was in twelfth standard at the time:

> "Till then I had been the lovely little studious girl. Not generally the topper but, you know, the one who was very career conscious. Very this: Oh, I have to become a genetic engineer. And so once the twelfth standard got done I started bunking. After school I was in this recruiting firm. I was like hiring people for high-end jobs. And with work came that financial independence. I started enjoying it a lot. And once that was established I didn't want to go back to college. Because basically I was getting an admission only in the BSc. Okay. Which is like a basic science course. But I wanted something special. Like genetics or biotechnology or something. Which didn't happen. Or perhaps even engineering. Which didn't happen because I didn't get admission. Thankfully."

Her parents used their influence to get her into a good college:

> "It was an all-girls college and it was full of girls who wore the hijab[53]. And they didn't really like people who wore jeans. And t-shirts. That was like one of the loneliest periods in my life. Waiting for someone to talk something meaningful to me. Rather than just tell me oh, is your journal complete. Can I copy it? I just couldn't deal with it. And, you know, that's where this whole, this dire bit of I don't wanna study. I don't wanna do anything. It just, it, my existence became just so languid. And I just didn't want to continue with anything. But nonetheless mom told me no, you get back to your old college. Which is like a, which is like one of the best colleges in Pune. It's like Nowrosjee Wadia. And that's like *cosmopolitan* and all that. Fine. Like managed to struggle through this one year. And next year went back to Wadia. And eh again realised that the location might change but what is happening to me didn't change. Because again, you know, it's just I don't know. Maybe it was like a personal thing. Or maybe it just became like that fish out of water things. [...] So again I was just drifting through existence."

Nisha described the mid-term exams at Wadia college as a changing point in her life. She recounted how she slept through her first exam by ignoring her alarm clock every time it went off. She said she could not explain to herself why she did it. She only went to three out of six tests:

> "When I got the mark sheet for that exam I couldn't show it at home. [She laughed.] Because I flunked three papers. [She laughed.] In general I was considered one of those people who gets good marks in English. And I had flunked English. Because that was the first paper I didn't go for."

Nisha missed the deadline to enrol for the next academic year. Half-heartedly she tried to convince the admissions department at the university with excuses.

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[53] Nisha's father was a Muslim, her mother a Hindu.

But when they declined, she accepted it.

> "Again I still didn't tell anything at my house. And my mom was like how come you're not going to college anymore. I'm like oh, I flunked out. And, oh god! Then the crying, the tears, the agony. Oh, oh, oh. Man, you could have had like a soap opera in my house. You really could have. My parents had very small beginnings. And my dad never completed his education. My sister was the first graduate in the family. My mother always regrets not having done her education properly so as to have become a better teacher. A teacher with a higher pay. For some reason that degree getting was like a big thing for them. It generally is so. Oh god. Had those angry talks. Had those lectures. Had those emotional begging moments. Why, *beta* [daughter], why? You know like ohhh... ohhh... [She laughed.] If I wasn't at the centre of it I would have probably enjoyed it a little more. But it just became too much to take. And then, you know, like it just created that detachment. Like okay go deal with your problems. Don't give me lectures. You know, when they'd start talking about it I like either walk out of the house or like, you know, like shut down. Like not listen to them. Start watching TV. [She laughed.] But nonetheless at that time I did like a skip of job again. I have done a lot of jobs. That is one thing you should know about me. This time I started writing articles for the internet. Which is like a nice little job. Four hours a day. It paid well. Met someone really interesting over there. A girl called Nabunita. And she was this, this, this bohemian sort of woman. Who like was from Kolkata. Living here. On her own. Living in with her boyfriend. And she just led a very cool existence. My mother ganged up with her."

Together they managed to interest Nisha in a distance learning programme in Anthropology and Psychology.

> "That's when life stabilised also a little bit. You know, my job became a little more steady. My, my routine became a little steady. And, you know, like the pressure of pleasing my parents was suddenly off my head. You know, like it was a big thing. You know, like my whole life I was compared to my sister. Because of course she is like the first parameter. And she was like a very straight kid. She was a very good kid. Okay. So, you know, it becomes doubly important. It also became like this need like my parents won't recognise me if I don't do well academically. And that's why I kept pushing myself. But then I gave up. I was like okay, to hell with it. And, you know, that was such a release of pressure. I mean I don't remember feeling that light ever in my life. Because you know I was just stuck in this: I have to be with my books. I have to score well. The friends put you on a pedestal. Any time you get anything less they're like: Yar, what happened, [Nisha]? You weren't well or something? I don't know how to explain it. It's just a pressure. Okay. From parents, from parents' friends and you know like one of the biggest things when I quit my science programme, one of the biggest arguments. My parents were like what are our friends gonna say? Are we supposed to tell them that our daughter has quit education and is sitting at home? And, you know, like I didn't have an answer to that. That pressure just dissolved. And life just became a little easier. And then like I got a steady job. I started working for Crossword, the bookstore. Became like a full time job. I loved what I was doing. And, you know, and then like the education went alongside. I wasn't struggling with it to try to be on top anymore."

Nisha was a young woman with an unusual story at the age of twenty-one. She was outspoken, self-confident and brave. She did not only oppose her parents

but rebelled against them in her quest for self-fulfilment. She ignored her parents' expectations by walking away or watching TV. Like Ravi she emphasised the expectations and enormous pressure from family and peers. She also mentioned the pressure that her parents felt from their friends because parents frequently talked about their children's education. However, since she started working right after school, Nisha had tasted independence early. Her self image as an individual with her own wishes was strong and soon prevailed against her parents. She mentioned the detachment from her parents that emerged from her struggle to find her own way. Though her story was unusual Nisha expressed that her generation was more individualised, had strong opinions and wishes, and took a stand against social expectations and family. Thanks to her psychology studies she explained it in terms of individual psychology, as the urge to impress her parents so that they recognised her.

"I Don't Want to Slog My Ass Off like My Parents"

Arun, Leela and Nisha expressed another change that was occurring in their generation, which was born right around economic liberalisation (cf. Chapter One). Arun wanted to enjoy the "good life" and Leela said she did not want to work as hard as her parents did. Nisha resisted the pressure and force by simply sleeping through her exam. Once she was doing what she wanted she actually enjoyed studying.

Asked to describe the main differences between his and his parents' generation, Arun initially mentioned that he did not grow up in a joint family. This was closely followed by the statement that his grandparents and parents "all excelled in academia. That's all they know and believe in." As we heard in the previous chapter, Arun was very fond of his social life, e.g. hanging out with friends and playing sports. Furthermore, the parents' generation had a different attitude towards work and life. Arun explained:

> "My dad is all idealistic. He works from 9am to 9pm. I don't get it! Dad is not getting back in money or happiness what he is putting in. I'm not saying it is all about money, also happiness. Maybe he is happy. I don't know. But I don't get why he works so much when he is not getting paid accordingly. He is slogging his ass off while other people just come and they don't take work home. Dad could just leave at 5pm and say 'That's it, I'm done.' But he does not do that. He has

never taken more than 3 or 4 days of holidays."

The young adults uniformly wanted what they called "a better work-life balance", which meant working forty hours on five days and then enjoying the weekend. Reality was different though. Most people worked at least one day of the weekend. Since Arun started working after finishing his degree he has been working every Saturday. He was not satisfied with his salary, which within one year had increased from 15,000 INR (~205 GBP) to 25,000 INR (~340 GBP) per month. He complained that some of his friends started with 30,000 INR (~410 GBP) and that in the newspaper one regularly read of 50,000 INR (~680 GBP) entry level salary in the IT sector. Note how monetary expectations have risen since Ravi's entrance into the work force.

Having grown up under much better economic circumstances than their parents the young generation had very different expectations and attitudes. Work was not everything to them. They strove for personal happiness.

Self-made Man

Striving for a better work-life balance was one reason young Puneites gave for going abroad for postgrad studies and work. The most interesting answer to the question as to why to go abroad came from twenty-one-year-old Karim, who had just finished a BA in management. His aspiration originally had been to become a chef because he loved to cook. His father wanted him to become a mechanical engineer and open a showroom for cars. His mother wanted Karim to do whatever made him happy but suggested that his father could use a helping hand in the business, and hence suggested economics. "I neither got it my way nor dad's way." When I inquired Karim admitted that he was sad he did not become a chef. "But I'll do it sometime. Even if I just do a course." His parents agreed with it as long as he paid for it himself. Karim said: "People will always eat."

Several months later Karim intended to go to Canada to do an MBA. So I asked him why he wanted to go abroad. His first answer was passionate:

> "India is such a stupid and monotonous society. Infrastructure sucks. Everybody is corrupt. The private sector pushes the economic growth while the government

is only corrupt and slows it down. To get good education you need a lot of money. Education has become a business. It just sucks. All my family who went abroad worked really hard. They are much better off in money and health. They have big houses. They have pools. They have a weekend."

When I nagged a little, Karim gave this answer:

"I want to be a self-made man. I don't want to be a burden for anyone. Here you only become someone when you have connections."

I was surprised since his family was very rich and well-connected. He confirmed this fact but explained that it was precisely the problem.

"Here in India my dad will always be there to cover my back. Even when I stab someone I can go home, and he will get me out of it. Abroad I would have no one. I have to rely on myself only. Either I'll make it or I'll go down. It will be very tough without connections. I don't want people to say that my dad opened the doors for me, that I was born with the silver spoon in my mouth, that I only made it because my dad gave me everything. I want to succeed on my own hard work. I want people to acknowledge that I made it myself without others. Abroad people are valued for their hard work and not for their family connections. One's success is the merit of one's own hard work."

This statement echoes Arun's pride in having gained access to his college on his own merit, without the help of his father. On the one hand, Karim's statement reflects the importance the *middle class* in Pune gave to *achievement* and hard work. On the other hand, it points to the trend towards independence from one's family, especially from fathers. The young generation wanted to make it on their own and on their own terms. However, Karim's story also shows paradoxes, as described at the end of Chapter Three. On the one hand he strived for freedom and independence from his parents, on the other hand he remained dependent in many ways. His career choice was a compromise reached with his parents. His parents bought his flat. His mother cooked and did laundry for him. And, as will be seen in the next chapter, he wanted his parents to arrange his marriage. Yet the rejection of nepotism seems significant in a country that is known for its nepotism.

Navigating Diverse Life Worlds

"So when I came to my junior college there was a wider, more diverse crowd. Like a lot of them didn't know Marathi. So we were not used to conversing in any other language other than Marathi. So that time it was really diffi, it was kind of difficult to adjust and, you know, talk

in Hindi and English. So although we did learn correct grammatical English and could absolutely write. Written English was not a problem. However, spoken English was a problem. So initially like I was shy to converse. I'd be very self-conscious when I would speak in English. Even like friends from school who I was like so used to speaking in Marathi with and when I met them in college they were like all talking in English. And I was wondering what the hell is wrong with them. Because all our school lives was spent talking in Marathi. English was the universal mode of communication. Everyone would understand. Also it was like considered that, you know, you are not that cool or you're not from a good... It was, when you went to junior college, it was mainly that which school you came from. So if you went to like a convent school, your English is good. You're like one of the cool people. And if you went to like a government school or Marathi medium school like people would kind of ridicule. And being immature at sixteen and seventeen you don't know how to take it. So even though I went to an English Medium school I was apprehensive of speaking English. So you can only imagine what the people who went to Marathi medium school would feel. It took me a year or a year and a half to like get over my apprehension and be comfortable talking in English. Also, in school there are no differences between rich and poor. Everybody wears school uniforms and everybody comes to school by rickshaw or bus, whether rich or poor. But in junior college things change. You're judged by your clothes, your phone, your bike. It took me some time. But then we started hanging out. Going for dinners and movies and all."

Arun, 21 years old (3 Feb 2009)

Arun vividly described the new world that young Puneites encountered upon entering junior college. Suddenly he felt judged by his English, his clothes, his mobile phone and motorbike. How well-to-do his family was became an important question. Initially he had neither a motorbike, nor a mobile phone. For two years he saved pocket money and the little prizes he won to buy himself a mobile phone. He hid it from his parents who thought he did not need a phone. In his second year in junior college his parents gave in to his begging for a motorbike. They realised that his schedule was becoming too hectic for public

transport. Hence consumption practices became a marker for the young *middle class*. It affected how they wanted and thought they ought to be. Speaking English, wearing the right clothes, having a motorbike and a phone were considered *cool*. College life encouraged young people to increasingly judge themselves and others in terms of economic class. Others have observed this as part of a link between schooling and youth cultures (Herrera/Bayat 2010, Liechty 2003, Spronk 2009).

Upon entering (senior) college at the latest, more temptations lured young Puneites. The other sex became interesting. Ravi was very expressive about it. Having gone to a boys school, contact with girls was new to him. He made it a project to get a girlfriend. Like Ravi, Arun mentioned that the good-looking girls fell for the guys with cars and motorbikes.

Furthermore, college life introduced young Puneites to hanging out with friends in cafés and the appertaining activities. All my young friends recounted "mass bunks" where the entire class would skip college and go watch a movie or hang out. These practices were considered *cool* (cf. Chapter One). The college world on the one hand was an extension of the world at home with its emphasis on hard work and achievement, and the prospect of providing for a family of one's own. On the other hand the college world formed a stark contrast to the world at home. Through the college world young Puneites were introduced to speaking English, wearing jeans and brands, hanging out in cafés, going to parties, consuming alcohol and drugs, and having premarital relationships, all activities frowned upon by parents.

Nilima actively sought to keep her sons away from these perceived temptations and dangers, as mentioned in Chapter Three:

> "After college young people go everywhere. They go where all the women are and look at them. They smoke, drink and take drugs. So I cooked for my sons and their friends. They would come to my house and study here so they would at least be under my eyes."

Donner (2005:128) remarked that this "intimacy with control" was characteristic of "'modern' parenting" in general except that in India the aim was not to encourage independence in the child. The college world and the café culture

encouraged a person to act and appear as an individual independent of family.

As mentioned in Chapter One navigating different life-worlds was part of a young person's habitus. Jeffrey (2010:20), following Bourdieu, argues that successfully navigating different social fields creates confidence which itself is cultural capital and "is communicated in people's everyday demeanour, movements and speech". We all navigate different life-worlds throughout our lives: family, school, work, shops, government offices and hospitals. It is taken for granted that we know how to navigate them. The European middle class often has three generations of experience with higher education. The children benefit from their parents' knowledge. My young informants in Pune were the first generation to have grown up after economic liberalisation. The occupational and educational system, as well as other aspects of the 'liberalised economy', such as the commercialised leisure culture, were new in their current form. Arun's statement reflects the struggle to fend for oneself in a new world, and how this further fostered individuation through consumption and class privileges.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how education was a struggle of a particularly poignant character for the young *middle class* generation in Pune. Education is perceived to be the main resource for the *middle class* to generate economic capital (money and assets such as real estate), social capital (status and knowing the right people) and cultural capital (credentials and habitus of the *middle class* as distinct from the poorer, uneducated masses and from the rich, often business, elite). Having nothing else to fall back on, the parents' generation valued education very highly. It was considered to enhance not only chances of employment but also marriage opportunities, social competence, status and eventually happiness. The young generation felt an accordingly enormous pressure. The agonising importance of education for the *middle class* was amplified by the values of hard work and the desire to *achieve*, to stand out as someone of status (big man/woman) and complicated by the hurdles of

reservation policies.

The young generation, however, grew up in a more comfortable situation since the parents had already worked hard to build up capital. They increasingly saw education as a means to self-fulfilment. Some fought hard battles with their parents, their social environment and themselves to 'follow their hearts', namely to realise themselves independent of others' wills and social expectations. Most young Puneites, however, followed their parents' expectations or at least reached a compromise. Typically a person's career choice was not considered the matter of a single person since the whole family depended on it. Income did not belong to the single person but to the whole family. Older siblings often financed the younger's education or a bigger flat for the family, as in Nisha's sister's case. Furthermore the parents expected the children not only to be able to take care of themselves but also to care for their parents in old age. Hence the young adults could not always realise themselves through their careers. Financial independence, however, seemed to bring it within reach.

The trend towards personal autonomy and independence was encouraged in college by expectations of being *cool*, i.e. speaking English well, wearing the right clothes, engaging in *middle class* consumer practices generally, having a boy- or girlfriend, smoking, drinking alcohol, hanging out and partying. The college world was an extension of the café culture and vice versa. The college world was transformed by the café culture and the world at home. The latter were in turn modified by the world of education. The café culture members increasingly valued personal autonomy, encouraged by an economically liberalised society, in which status lies in the accumulation of wealth in the market through job and consumption. The young generation wanted and felt they ought to be 'self-made'.

6 Dating, Sex and Marriage

Family remains the backbone of Indian society despite recent shifts towards nuclearisation and individualisation among the *middle class*, as explored in the previous chapters. Marriage and parenthood were perceived to be part of being a person and a human being. Donner (2008:65) argued with regard to the Bengali *middle class* that marriage is a life cycle ritual "and is thus necessary to make a person into a full human being, a process of mental as well as physical transformation through sexual activity, reproduction and nurture". Marriage and parenthood were the norm in Pune in 2008. Although being unmarried and childless was not a social stigma anymore, as several middle-aged unmarried women claimed. All of my young informants intended to marry and have children, except Nisha. Whether to get married or not was not a lifestyle decision as in 'the west', with its ideology of individualism whereby people "actively have to construct and shape themselves" (Werth 2002:163). In India there were few alternatives to marriage. Divorce was still rare and homosexuality illegal at the time. Marital life was the only option for legitimate sexual relations, especially for women. For young *middle class* Puneites the question was not whether to get married but whom to marry and when. In the past parents and kin selected partner without asking their children. Premarital relationships and sex were condemned. In 2008 most young adults wanted to decide for themselves. The café culture crowd's open embrace and display of courtship reveal changes in ideas and practices of love, gender relations, marriage, conjugality, sexuality and cohabitation. The changes in moral aesthetic standards reveal how young Puneites understood and positioned themselves in their world and who they wanted and felt they ought to be. The transformations revolved around negotiations between the family and the individual.

Marriage among the Indian Middle Class

Ethnographic evidence shows a trend towards companionate marriage amongst the Indian *middle class* (Baas 2007, Donner 2008, Dwyer 2000,

Fuller/Narasimhan 2008, Mody 2002, Nisbett 2009, Nishimura 1998, Osella/Osella 1998, 2002, Pache Huber 2004, Seymour 1999, Trautmann 2003, Uberoi 2006, Upadhya/Vasavi 2006). Young adults are increasingly consulted and encouraged to communicate with each other before finalising a marriage. This process is intended to ensure the prospective couple's compatibility and personal happiness, which have become important criteria. This trend is neither recent (Vatuk 1972) nor restricted to the *middle class* (Grover 2009). However, the research also corroborates that arranged, endogamous marriage still remains the norm for the majority of *middle class* Indians, both ideally and statistically (Donner 2008, Fuller/Narasimhan 2008, Mines 1994, Nishimura 1998, Pache Huber 2004, Seymour 1999, Upadhya/Vasavi 2006, Vatuk 1972). Consequently competent scholarship has pointed out that the contrast between arranged and love marriage has become blurred or fluid (Donner 2008, Mody 2002, Nishimura 1998, Pache Huber 2004, Seymour 1999, Trautmann 2003, Uberoi 2006). The prospective couple's compatibility and personal happiness have become as important in arranged marriages as they are in love marriages. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008:751) point out that though several anthropologists acknowledge this change, they tend to replicate their informants' concern with the dichotomy between 'modern' love and 'traditional' arranged marriage. In practice, Fuller and Narasimhan (ibid.:752) argue, "a form of companionate marriage created through arrangement has become the modern ideal".

In the postmodern 'west' companionate marriage is associated with the ideal of individual freedom of choice. Fuller and Narasimhan (ibid.:751) propose that marriage amongst the Indian *middle class* reflects neither the 'traditional' Indian process in which parents and kin select the marriage partner without consulting their children nor the 'western' model where the children merely inform their parents. Rather "parents and children together select the partners, motivated by an ideal of companionate 'emotional satisfaction' that is not premised on young people's unfettered personal choices" (ibid.). There is a shift towards individualisation in the sense of an increased concern with individual personality, self-expression and free will. These notions are in turn connected to enhanced education (especially for women), rising marriage age and more

gender equality. However, this trend towards individualisation differs from 'western' individualism: decision-making, success and failure are not burdened on one person alone. In 'the west' it is assumed that being human means to be free from the dependency on the wills of others and only voluntary relationships do not restrict individual freedom. In India, by contrast, companionate marriage through arrangement has become the normative ideal. Many perceive endogamy to contribute positively to companionate marriage ensuring compatibility between spouses. Bourdieu (1979) argued similarly for 'western' societies that a perceived similarity in habitus encouraged 'love'. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) conclude that arranged, endogamous companionate marriages play a crucial role in the emergence and reproduction of the *middle class*, which continues to be dominated by upper castes.

The fact remains, however, that people in India generally and in Pune in 2008 particularly continued to oppose 'modern' love and 'traditional' arranged marriage. In Pune the controversy was tied to conceptions of *modernity*, *globalisation* and *westernisation*. Through these narratives people understood and positioned themselves in their worlds. Cole and Thomas (2009) argue for Africa that many generations of young people have claimed that romantic love and intimate passion distinguished them from their elders and the past. Love served as a rhetoric for generational and cultural distinction and to claim a "modern" and "civilised" status (ibid.:16). Cole and Thomas (ibid.:21) interpret the increased pervasiveness of a rhetoric of romance as a general shift from production to consumption, namely towards a lifestyle of (consumer) choice. Rofel (2007:127) argues that in China young adults constructed an opposition between their generation, which desired love, sex and happiness, and their parents, who they imagined to have married out of kinship obligations. These young adults placed their parents' generation in a traditional past in order to transcend this local tradition and become "desirable, globalized subjects" (ibid.:126).

In India the 'typical' Indian marriage was contrasted with the 'typical' European marriage as a result of the colonial encounter (Donner 2008:67). Through this

opposition they were also constructed as 'traditional' versus 'modern'. Donner (ibid.) notes that both the 'traditional' arranged marriage in India as well as the 'traditional' love or companionate marriage in the western worlds are constructs as they are presented today. European models of love and marriage were 'modern' rather than European. Egalitarian marriage-as-companionship had not always been the common practice. According to Donner (2008:83) the "ideal of companionship between spouses prevalent in middle-class settings today emerged over the course of the past hundred years and profoundly affected women's view of marriage". During colonial times the debate about marriage was fuelled by the British legislative intentions to counteract what they considered morally wrong such as child marriages or polygamy. On the other hand, the Indian elites were unsettled by the changes the new socio-economic order might bring about in marriage practices and the joint family. "Emotional fulfilment" became "part of a modern endeavour and a reflexive self" (ibid.), while love marriages continued to be proscribed. Mutual respect, affectionate ties and compassion became attributes of a successful marriage, but "neither 'love' nor mutual consent" (ibid.) were considered necessary preconditions for marriage.

In India the dichotomy between love and arranged marriage is retained despite the fact that amongst the *middle class* an arranged companionate marriage has become the norm, in which 'modern' notions of personal happiness and compatibility are as important as in love marriages (Fuller/Narasimhan 2008). Srivastava (2007:15) observed that the consolidation of the commodity culture in India introduced "imperatives of choice" into middle class family life and sexuality.

> "To be in love, then, operates as a metonym for 'freedom': the freedom to 'achieve', to individual choice, to be part of the 'real' world, and, finally, to 'fulfilment'." (ibid.:153)

A majority of the café culture members in Pune in 2008 preferred 'love marriage'. 'Love marriage' was understood as finding one's own partner, dating for a while and eventually seeking the parents approval to marry. These young adults had premarital relationships, usually involving sex; and many led to marriage. These so-called 'love matches' were often exogamous. This stands in

contrast to observations of other authors who noted that romance amongst young adults rarely leads to physical relationships or to marriage (e.g. Donner 2008, Dwyer 2000, Fuller/Narasimhan 2008, Nisbett 2009, Osella/ Osella 1998, 2002). Thus in Pune not all parents and children decided together; rather the parents retained a veto. However, the arranged companionate marriage described by Fuller and Narasimhan was also frequent. Amongst this young generation in Pune romantic love was a normative ideal, which could be realised both in a 'love marriage' or an arranged companionate marriage. Finding one's own partner and dating were more individualised, but still did not put all the burden on the individual since the parents's approval was sought. The rhetoric of romantic love, both with reference to 'love marriage' and arranged companionate marriages, served to distinguish the current *middle class* from the past and from other classes, despite the fact that in reality this trend was neither recent nor restricted to the *middle class*. The discourse of romantic love was used to transcend the traditional past and the local and to domesticate the global in order to establish the young adults as citizens of the world.

Marriage and Love amongst Pune's Middle Class

In Pune in 2008 the majority of the grandparents' and parents' generation venerated arranged marriages as part of *traditional Indian family values*. They were better matches and lasted longer, it was argued. A low divorce rate was quoted as proof. Many women of these generations said that children had no way of knowing what was best for them. Love marriages were a threat to *Indian traditions*. The majority of the young generation, on the other hand, preferred a love match. They could not imagine getting married to someone they did not know. They did not want a partnership of convenience. They wanted love and egalitarian companionship. However, this generational opposition was partly constructed.

Parents and young adults in Pune highlighted that nowadays the future spouses were involved in the decision process to ensure personal happiness and

compatibility. Nilima's and Nilesh's younger son had asked his parents to find a bride for him in India, while he lived in the UK. They first searched through the internet, then through an agency. Nilima recounted:

> "We didn't like those women who wrote to us directly. It should be the parents. I found some of the families disgusting. [She literally spit the last word out.] The girls were so independent minded."

Finally they found a young woman they liked. She was educated and her grandmother had lived with her family which, according to Nilima, meant she would be willing to take care of her elders. The girl's parents were contacted. Nilima's son asked permission from the girl's father to exchange emails with her from the UK. Nilima was proud of him for doing so since he could have contacted her without anyone knowing, which she considered too independent and wrong. A meeting was arranged at Nilima's and Nilesh's *house* with the potential spouses present. At the end of some mutual inquiry the parents told the children to have a coffee on their own. After lunch and coffee at a five-star hotel the young people announced their decision to get married. With the permission of their parents they exchanged emails, phone calls and text messages before the wedding took place four months later in December 2007.

In the past parents chose a marriage partner for their children, preferably from the same caste. It was perceived as a union between two families not between two individuals. The spouses were not supposed to meet before their wedding. This practice was frowned upon and considered *backward* in Pune at the time of my research. Seventy-year-old Nilesh described it as a gruesome process where the girl was put through a wringer. As a child in the 1940s he witnessed his father's sister's marriage process. The boy's parents would come to the girl's family's house. She had to prepare and serve tea and snacks to demonstrate her household skills. She would be asked to dance or sing. Later when the family inquired, the boy's family would say she was ugly, not good enough or too dark skinned. Several times Nilesh remarked that his grandparents got married at a very young age. She was seven and he was thirteen. Nilesh's grandmother used to walk her husband to school carrying his bag and lunch *tiffin*. Then she returned to his parents' house to help in the household. Ironically Nilesh noted:

> "We were so progressive, no!? What a fantastic institution to have someone carry

your bag for you."

Hence (*western*) education and progress were associated with changing marriage practices amongst the urban *middle class*. In their practices of the arranged companionate marriage, which is considered *traditional Indian*, the *middle class* in Pune sought to distinguish itself from the past and from *backward* segments of society. The *middle class* claimed that *the poor* placed more emphasis on arrangement and endogamy than they did and hence forced children into marriages.

Nilima's and Nilesh's own experience in the 1970s may be classed in-between the two above scenarios. With her parents Nilima visited several families who had contacted them. She had to cook a dish to present to the boy's family. She met the boy briefly and under supervision. Nilima was rejected several times because of a birthmark in her face. Her father would forcefully rub calcium carbonate (*chuna*) in her face in a desperate attempt to make it disappear. It caused an even bigger scar, recounted Nilima. At the age of twenty-six, she said: "I was so disappointed in life. I was so disgusted with myself." Finally Nilesh's proposal came through an uncle. Nilesh's perceived disadvantage was his relatively old age at thirty-seven. Nilima went to Pune and stayed with her aunt. Nilesh came to her aunt's place. "He just came and talked to me casually," Nilima narrated. He liked her and wanted her to meet his family. "I wanted my people to approve. They will not go against my wishes," said Nilesh. With her aunt Nilima visited his family. Two days later they "approved" of her. They got engaged and subsequently Nilesh took her out almost every evening. "He was a gentleman," she said. A couple of months later they got married. Their marriage process resembled a contemporary arranged companionate marriage. Nilima still had to present her household skills and was rejected for her looks. The prospective spouses did not spend time on their own before agreeing to marriage. After the initial contact was establish by his brother-in-law, her uncle and parents, Nilesh took matters partly in his own hands. With both his parents already dead and having witnessed the cruel practices of showcasing the potential bride in the *traditional* arranged marriage procedure, he insisted on treating Nilima humanely. With regard to Nilima's birthmark he recounted: "It was just a birthmark. I'm a doctor, I know. It wasn't her fault. People were so

ignorant. She is such a fine person."

These stories show the gradual change in marriage practices through the generations. Nilima's and Nilesh's (the parents') generation saw initial changes to customs, which transformed arranged marriages into a *modern* institution. The 'viewing of the bride' was arranged in a less humiliating way. The future bride and groom were gradually more and more involved in the decision process. Ideas of romantic love entered the practices of arranged marriages as illustrated by Nilima's comments that Nilesh, then her fiancé, took her out almost every evening and was a gentleman. She also once commented:

> "You know, we value marriage the most, and family. No relationship is perfect. It is normal to disagree, and I can understand when arguments get too much. But there should be only one man in a woman's life. By sleeping together and sharing one gets so used to each other. I could not even think of another man. I don't know how [Nilesh] and other men think. Here a bride performs a ritual twice a week where she prays to get the same husband in her next seven lives. So attached are we to our husbands. The husband is god to a wife. All other men are brothers because Krishna saved a woman's life[54]. Maybe that is why our marriages last so long."

This statement tells of this generation's ideal of marriage: a mixture of duty, pragmatism, habit, ideals of monogamy and romantic love. It contains the ideal of a woman's devotion to her husband (*pativrata*) and of fidelity. Nilima's ideal of a good woman highlighted working hard and suffering but never complaining. Hence female moral goodness was equated with a rather passive attitude.[55]

Women of the parents' generation argued that love should not lead to marriage since it can be blind, but that love should grow in a marriage. Ideas of *modern*, companionate, romantic love were introduced within the confines of endogamous, patrilocal and patriarchal arranged marriages. Ideas of romantic companionship and love transformed the practice of arranged marriage. Furthermore in this generation, from the 1970s onwards, love marriages happened more frequently in urban Indian settings. Amongst my informants of the parents' generation almost half had had love marriages[56] although "moral

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[54] Nilima alluded to the episode of the disrobing of Draupadi found in the *Mahabharata*, one of the most important Hindu mythological texts. Krishna saved Draupadi from humiliation by endlessly extending her *sari* (cf. Dwyer 2000:19-20).

[55] Carro-Ripalda (forthcoming) argues that in Mexico women's narratives around suffering can be powerful tools to move their social environment and make things happen for themselves. However, this might not change an ideal of passivity.

[56] My sample is not representative but illustrates general trends.

panic around love and marriage has kept them in the media and public discourse ever since" (Donner 2008:80). Until liberalisation love marriages were perceived not only as exceptions but as a negative and alien influence threatening *Indian* values. With liberalisation the attitude towards love marriages conclusively changed: Amongst the generation of the forty-year-olds in Pune they were not only accepted but often desired as *modern* and *liberal* in a positive sense. This generation had slightly more love than arranged marriages in my sample. The café culture crowd predominantly opined that arranged marriages were outdated and that hardly anyone practiced it anymore, only *backward* and *conservative* families. My biased sample of this generation, however, includes half arranged and half love marriages. Parents felt proud when asked to arrange a child's marriage. This shows that arranged marriages were not taken for granted anymore but still valued.

Endogamy and Patrilocality

Ethnographic evidence shows that, despite changes in the practice of arranging marriages – the emphasis on personal happiness and compatibility, the desire of potential spouses to get to know each other, the increased importance of qualifications (education and occupation) and qualities of individuals rather than ancestral status, the new ways of finding a spouse, and the initiative not necessarily having to come from the groom's parents alone – endogamy and patrilocality continued to be the norm (Donner 2008, Fuller/Narasimhan 2008, Mines 1994, Nishimura 1998, Pache Huber 2004, Seymour 1999, Upadhya/Vasavi 2006, Vatuk 1972). My findings confirm this observation, but there were notable exceptions.

Those love marriages which were also intercaste marriages often provoked the most resistance from the spouses' families. While love and arranged marriages were perceived as opposites of each other in some respects such as *modern*/*traditional* and *western*/*Indian*, their boundaries were blurred in others. Love marriages were said to also be arranged, since most couples desired their parents' consent and the appertaining family rituals. Arranged marriages were sometimes called love marriages since romantic love, personal happiness and

compatibility were just as important as in so-called love marriages.

It was with regard to marriage that caste practices were openly justified by many *middle class* Puneites. Nilesh and Nilima accepted their older son's love marriage because his spouse was from the same caste. Nilesh said:

> "[My older son] found a wife by himself. He arranged his own marriage. He and his wife had more or less decided and just told us that they planned to get married. We liked the girl. She is a Brahmin, too, and a good girl. I don't mind as long as the girl is a Hindu. A Muslim girl would be the worst. I would prefer a Christian over a Moslem girl. She would have so different customs and beliefs. She would want to raise the children in a Muslim belief system. Even the names for the children would be difficult."

Nilima's justification of endogamy highlights even more poignantly the perceived importance of caste practices and customs for the family:

> "I don't like the casteism in our culture, and maybe I am old-fashioned. But I would marry my sons only to Brahmin women. To preserve values and traditions. I could not tolerate my daughter-in-law cooking fish or meat in my kitchen. The traditions are too different. Ultimately it is the girl who has to suffer most because she has to learn all new traditions. And nowadays they are so grown up and have their own opinion. It would lead to too much fighting. I am a woman. I only think about it from the woman's perspective here."

Ravi, twenty years younger at the age of forty-two, sharing his first steps in romantic adventures during his initial year of college said:

> "I promptly fell in love with a Maharashtrian girl. But you know how it is, nothing happens. You know, Maharashtrians can be so *conservative*. And my heart used to go flutter flutter so easily. That for me it was just a heart thing, you know. And the culture was so different. She was from a Marathi school. I was from a Jesuit school, English school. No way there was going to be a match."

When he later met his future wife in college, he said it was "pure coincidence" that she was from the same non-Maharashtrian Brahmin community. Note that Ravi placed the emphasis on education rather than caste. Reshma, yet another twenty years younger at the age of twenty-four, told me about her recent marriage:

> "Ours is an arranged marriage. My mother's friend and his mother's friend are, is the same lady. So they came over to our house, his parents and him. And we chatted for a while, with our parents first and then I said I'm interested in meeting him alone. And then he said the same thing. And then we met up for coffee, three or four times. We went shopping once and it was... I don't know. The first time they came to our place I had decided for myself that this is the one I wanna marry. And he said the same thing. Ya, it sounds unusual and maybe strange and maybe too romantic and idealistic. [She laughed.] But ya... So after three or four times we told our parents that ya, we wanna get married. And then after fourteen months we got married. So there was a considerable amount of time before marriage. And during that time I stayed with my parents, of course. He stayed with his. But we used to meet almost every day because his office is very close

by. So after his office was over he used to drop by my place. And we used to go out, have coffee or something, dinners, you know, all the usual stuff. And [She laughed] ya it was a very straightforward kinda thing. [She laughed] No hassles. No complications. Both the families got along really well. We belong to the same caste, Kokanastha Brahman. But, you know, that was never a criteria, neither with him nor with me. It's just a coincidence, really. I mean if I like someone else from another caste that is just fine with me. But fortunately for me we belong to the same caste. It's much easier. Because you're culturally very similar so you don't have to adjust too much. And if you wanna, if you have to stay with your in-laws then it's better if you are within the same cultural set-up, you know. So you don't have to adapt too much."

Reshma expressed her generation's ideal of romantic companionship despite the fact that the marriage was arranged. There was an element of individual choice involved. Personal happiness and compatibility were emphasised. She acknowledged that her husband and her sharing a common family background facilitated living with her in-laws. Nilima and Reshma admitted that the customs of the past still had a strong grip on women, who were expected to adapt to their husband's family's ways and to preserve values and traditions. Caste practices played an important role in creating common habits and ideas, but religion, regionalism and schooling were also mentioned. These statements highlight that endogamy was perceived to ensure compatibility between spouses and their families, thus also facilitating happiness. Fuller and Narasimhan (2008:752) argue:

> "endogamy is functionally consistent with companionate marriage and is not a survival from an earlier epoch before an Indian middle class and its new forms of marriage arrangement emerged."

However, this is not peculiar to India. It has been argued that in 'the west' congenial marriage partners share a common habitus (Bourdieu 1979, Dwyer 2000, Fuller/Narasimhan 2008, Illouz 1997).

With regard to cohabitation, patrilocality was still the norm amongst Pune's *middle class*. Whether arranged or love marriage, a young couple usually stayed with the groom's parents, at least initially. One of Nilima's nieces, however, stayed at her parents' house with her husband after getting married. They moved recently into their own brand-new apartment. Sunil, a thirty-year-old PhD candidate and teacher in sociology at the University of Pune, had married outside his Maratha community, against his parents' will. Furthermore he had lived with his girlfriend prior to marriage, which was called "live-in relationship" in Pune and very frowned upon. After marriage he brought his wife

home to live with his parents.

> "If I wasn't the top earner they wouldn't have allowed me to marry an outsider. And if my brother was normal[57] he had more power traditionally. I would be very subordinated and I would have had to marry a Maratha girl. But now I have more authority because I am earning more. Decision-making is done by my father, me and of course my mother. I think if they are from a different community mothers are afraid to lose power over their daughters-in-law and also their sons. I confess that I listen to my wife more now than to my mother."

Hence an intercaste love marriage may result in patrilocality and the couple of an arranged marriage might decide to initially live with the wife's parents. A young couple could very rarely afford to live on their own immediately. This was the case of a good friend of mine, Sushila, who endured months of suffering trying to get permission from her parents to marry her long-term boyfriend. Her father was against the inter-caste liaison and made life hard for her. She was hardly allowed to leave the house, had to work hard on her studies and in the house. Finally her parents agreed. After marriage she moved in with her husband, who had had his own flat since he moved to Pune from Bombay where his parents lived.

Financial independence increased the right to live life on one's own terms, as Sunil's account suggests. Mothers were increasingly worried to lose their sons to their daughters-in-law, which was generally perceived to be the fault and bad influence of the economically independent daughters-in-law. However, parents were also becoming more lenient. Especially when they had had a love marriage, parents not only accepted but often encouraged their children to find their own mate.

The Time and Space of Dating

Young Puneites usually entered the world of romance with junior college, as Ravi and Arun mentioned in the previous chapter on education. Romantic adventures were an expected part of college life, as depicted in and fuelled by popular media. This was already the case when Nilima and Nilesh went to college in the 1950s and 1960s. Nilima complained that no boy made advances to her because her father was the head of the department. Nilesh recounted

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[57] His older brother was handicapped.

with a smirk that girls used to tie the *rakhi* with boys who had a "crush" on them. On the day of *Rakhi Purnima* girls tied a thread around their brother's wrist symbolising him as her protector. By tying *rakhi* around a college mate's wrist, a young woman indicated that she did not reciprocate his feelings. Abraham (2001) observed similar practices amongst college students in Bombay in 1996-98. During Nilima's and Nilesh's days premarital relationships rarely went beyond flirting. They were frowned upon and highly problematic.

Most of my young friends in Pune in 2008 had their first romantic relationship in college around the age of nineteen. These relationships usually went way beyond flirting. The boy was generally expected to make the first move. Words, glances, notes, text messages, emails were exchanged. The next step would be to ask her out for coffee or even for dinner. When he felt sure he would "ask her out" or "to go steady", i.e. to be his girlfriend. Arun once explained the process as follows:

> "First you meet, then you do stuff together. Going out for dinner is a big thing in India. Then the guy can be pretty sure. In India the guy first has to ask a girl out, whether she wants to be his girlfriend. Only then can he make any move on her."

Ashok, Nikhita's boyfriend and good friend of Arun, remarked that now people in Pune were "Americanised". Many young men would ask young women out after having met them only a few times. "Actually people don't meet before marriage or go out. It used to be all arranged marriages," he concluded. Nikhita teased him: "Had I not asked you out we would still be just friends." Ashok pointed out the assumed foreign origin and relative newness of the practice of dating. However, given that arranged marriages were not between strangers anymore, Ashok meant that people did not used to go out prior to agreeing to marriage. Nikhita rejects the equation of female moral goodness with passivity and took matters into her own hands. She thus asserted her own wishes and agency in relation to the other sex.

When I first met Arun he told me that lately he had been feeling "kinda lonely. Being single for some time does give that feeling." His comment seemed surprising since he had so many friends and was always busy with college, meeting his friends, playing football and other activities. He did not seem to be the guy to feel lonely. However, his statement reveals the desire amongst young

middle class Puneites for a companion. He longed for personal happiness and self-fulfilment through a relationship. Courtship was a way to express oneself. Having a boy- or girlfriend was part of who these young adults wanted and thought they ought to be.

Premarital relationships among the young generation had become accepted to the extent that many parents knew of their children's premarital relationships. However, many young adults kept them a secret. Arun explained: "See, there are very *conservative* Indians on one end and very *modern* ones on the other end. *Modern* meaning open to premarital relationships, not sex." Ashok remarked: "Maybe if the parents had a love marriage they will be more open." Nikhita added:

> "I don't think it matters anymore what the older generation thinks frankly. People do what they want. It's none of their business. I tell my mother that I have a boyfriend. Of course I wouldn't tell them with thirteen but now I'm twenty. I wouldn't tell my mom how far my relationship goes, of course."

With this statement Nikhita asserts her independence of her parents.

Educational institutions and what Donner (2008:67) called "privatized public spaces" such as cafés, restaurants, bars and nightclubs played a crucial role in young Puneites dating practices. They offered opportunities to intermingle with the other sex and spaces to meet away from home. They were public but the public was restricted to a group of same-aged and like-minded people catering to the young urban *middle class*. The subtitle of the Indian retail café chain Café Coffee Day reads "a lot can happen over coffee". With spaces secluded from the public gaze, cafés in Pune seemed to explicitly cater to the young adults' desire for privacy. There was always one or the other young couple around holding hands, snuggling and sometimes even exchanging a light kiss. Perhaps some of these couples were married, but most of them were college students and likely unmarried. "It is no taboo anymore for a boy and girl to go out alone," Nilima's sister told me. Her son married his "childhood sweetheart", an inter-state and inter-caste union. Her daughter had a boyfriend and often discussed "matters of the heart" with her mother. The daughter's boyfriend had even spent a night at her *house*, in a separate room, of course.

239

Initially the young people's open display of affection in Pune's streets and cafés was surprising. They challenged my expectations of Indian modesty in public. Donner (2008:63) reports of a similar experience in Calcutta in 2005. After all, in India the public display of affection is a criminal offence (Indian Penal Code 1860, Section 294) and may be penalised with up to three months in prison. Its implementation varied. The *Times of India Pune* regularly reported of real and fake police officers fining young couples in secluded public places such as parks. According to my young friends, the police would threaten to inform the couple's parents and file a case. At the beginning of 2009 the case of a young married couple who had kissed outside of a metro station in Delhi made international headlines (BBC February 3, 2009). They were charged with obscenity. The judges dismissed the case arguing it was an expression of love of a young married couple. Arun commented:

> "In India you can shit on the street but not kiss. In the US you can kiss on the street but not shit.[58] India is basically a sex starved country."

Holding hands was nowadays accepted in public, as café culture members often claimed. Nikhita revealed that she and her boyfriend sometimes gave each other a light kiss in the street. Less often observable was putting arms around the partner's shoulders or waist. A brief hug also seemed accepted. In a blog on the subject a psychologist specifies that a "bear hug" should not last longer than a few seconds (http://nighi.com/2009/02/03/public-display-of-affection-india/). Most of my unmarried interlocutors would never display any affection with their boy- or girlfriend in front of family. It was accepted in front of friends though. However, I observed young married couples hugging or cuddling up on the sofa in front of their parents and other relatives. Thus the young generation acknowledged the difference between family, the general public and the café culture public. Different levels of affection seemed appropriate. The anonymity of the general public and the assumed like-mindedness of strangers in the café culture seemed to have facilitated moderate display of affection.

Getting even more physical was accepted in nightclubs. Close dancing, kissing and snuggling couples were a common sight. As seen in chapter two on

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[58] This ironic comment was originally from comedian Vivek.

clothing, nightclubs were the more sexualised spaces of the night, the time for adventure, risk and deliciously dangerous excitement. The 'normality' of the day was even more markedly transgressed. Cafés, restaurants, bars and nightclubs were dimly lit in the evenings, fostering an intimate atmosphere that augured privacy.

One question remains: where did young *middle class* Puneites go to have sex? Reportedly couples used to "make out" in cafés and nightclubs. As a result the jazz café Shisha put up signs reading:

> "Shisha is a family restaurant. Our young patrons are requested to not get intimate."

So if privatised public places were taboo and parks too risky, where did they go? Young Puneites benefitted from the increased affluence of their parents. Having a room of one's own offered considerable privacy, especially when the room could be locked and had an en-suite bathroom. In cases where both parents worked outside of the house, young adults had timeslots during which they had the house to themselves. Things were more difficult for those whose mothers were housewives. But parents occasionally went to weddings and other social events. Some housewives pursued regular activities during the day. The young adults skipped college to take advantage of these slots. Leela told her parents that she was spending the night with a female friend. Instead she went out with her boyfriend and then home with him. He smuggled her in and out of his room. Young men occasionally took their girlfriends to one of the nearby hill stations for the night in their cars. It was also common for a group of befriended couples to organise a weekend trip to one of the hill stations around Pune.

Dwyer (2000) and Lukose (2009) have argued that in 'the west' and increasingly in India an expanding transnational commodity culture has come to link romance and consumption. Sites of consumption are favoured for romantic situations whether gastronomic, cultural or touristic. Hence love increasingly moved out of the family and towards a means of self-expression and -fulfilment. It challenged the boundaries between the private and the public in Indian society (John et al. 1998). Ideals of romantic love indicated changes in the

perception of marriage and family "and the birth of a new class of pleasure-oriented consumers" (Favero 2005:158).

Lukose (2009) points out that the increased sexualisation of these spaces bears risks, especially for young women. However, these spaces also offered opportunities of self-determination, self-expression and self-fulfilment. Young men and women had a choice to participate or to stay away. Those who chose to participate seemed to enjoy the freedom between love and marriage that these places facilitated. It was not forced on them. They actively partook in appropriating those spaces. They embraced agency and choice and at the same time held on to the *Indian* value of marriage and the ideal of generational reciprocity.

Dating

Among the café culture crowd romantic relationships were not just accepted, they were desired, actively sought and often displayed publicly. They played a crucial role in who the café culture crowd wanted and felt they ought to be. Who is dating whom, who fancies someone, the latest break-ups, who is cheating and who wants to make who jealous were amongst the favourite news exchanged between friends. Dating seemed to bear a powerful fascination. Bollywood movies, national and international media depicted premarital love among college students as desirable and normal. The 2008 success movie *Jaane tu…ya jaane na* (*Whether you know…or not*), for example, tells the love story between two close college friends. The story was narrated by their friends who, contrary to the couple itself, knew all along that the two were in love and presented it as the most romantic love story. Shaped by and shaping reality the movie reflects the self-image of the café culture, emphasising ideals of romantic love, friendship, autonomy and benevolent understanding parents.

Through the practice of dating young Puneites negotiated a more self-determined and self-fulfilled life – in various ways and sometimes restricted to a certain space and time. Following one's heart and being in charge of one's own

body mattered equally to young women and men in Pune. Most could not imagine marrying a stranger. They were convinced that nowadays love marriages were the norm. Many hoped that their romances would lead to marriage. Parents increasingly knew about their children's relationships. Even those who preferred arranged marriages emphasised romantic love, personal happiness and compatibility.

In what follows the stories of several young *middle class* Puneites will be presented to illustrate the diverse attitudes towards and problems they were facing in dating, love, sex and marriage. The narratives highlight how young adults maintained but also negotiated and transformed social practices and moral aesthetic standards. They show that, just as they do through clothing practices, young Puneites understood and positioned themselves in their world through their dating practices. We have already heard of two examples which seem to present opposing extremes: Reshma's arranged marriage and Sunil's intercaste love marriage which he forced on his family.

Arranged Marriage: Reshma, 24 Years Old, English Teacher

Reshma never had a boyfriend. She trusted her parents with finding the "right match" for her. She described the first encounter with her future husband as romantic in the sense of a 'love at first sight' experience. She did not use the word 'love', but rather recounted how she knew instantly that she wanted to marry him. She said about her marriage, living with her in-laws and her husband:

> "I got married last month and I'm staying with my in-laws at the moment. But it's wonderful ... to stay together. [She laughed.] Contrary to the conception that, misconception that staying with your in-laws can be tough and, you know, it's a very typical Indian thing, I guess to stay with your in-laws after marriage. But I really like doing it. We might shift in a flat downstairs which we have already purchased, my husband, after say about six months or one year. But at the moment we're happy living together."

Later in the interview she confessed:

> "I do miss my parents a lot. A lot! So much! This weekend my husband had gone to some other place with his office crew for two days for a trip. So I had come over to my parents' place to stay. And I really didn't wanna go back. I wanted to stay with my parents. The two days were like going back to my old life. [She laughed.] But I'll get used to it. It's just been a month, so. There are new people around. Their ways of living are different. But my husband is really understanding

and, you know, whenever I cry at night he says don't worry, you know, you can always go... So I can like come back here any time I want. But still it's not the same. I mean, you start living in some other place. But if you have supportive, the family where you're staying is supportive things become easier. And my husband really is. He's not a typical Indian uhh shouldn't be derogatory but [She laughed]. But he's not a typical guy, you know, macho and uhh... He's sentimental. He cries when he sees emotional movies. Ya, he's very thoughtful. […] Now after marriage my husband and I are in total synchronisation, wavelength. And we think the same things and if we are happy then I'm happy."

"My parents are very progressive. More than my in-laws, really. Because my father told my brother that stay separately. Lead your own life. Be happy. And you can always come over for dinners. We can maintain a beautiful relationship. We're so close to each other. You don't have to live together. And secondly, he believes in equality, totally, you know. But he said I can say that to my own son. But I cannot tell your husband to stay separately. If you want to, that is, if I want to stay separately they would look for a husband who's, you know, staying separately. But since I was not very staunch on living separately so fine then if you're okay with it, it's fine with us. He's not against it. But when it comes to his own son he was and it takes elders. You know, most of the time father and mother want their children to stay with them, not ready to let go. So it was a very big step for him to say himself that you go, go stay separately. Have your own life. My sister-in-law is so thankful to my dad, you know. And her parents. They say that you've been ahead of times and … you've been very progressive."

Reshma's story is a textbook case of the *middle class*' struggle to move from 'tradition' to 'modernity' without selling out *Indian* customs and values. An arranged companionate marriage could be a *progressive* institution. Interestingly she appeared at the interview in jeans and a short *Indian* top. She justified the practice of living with her in-laws, certainly in front of me, a *westerner*; but also in the light of her own family who she perceived to be more progressive than her in-laws: I stay with my in-laws <u>but</u> it's wonderful. It is typical Indian <u>but</u> I like it. She acknowledged that *Indian traditions* such as living with her husband's parents were not endorsed by everyone, including her own family. She struggled with it. However, she presented it as her own choices, both the choice of husband and the choice of living with her in-laws. She described her husband as understanding, supportive, sentimental and not a typical *Indian* man which she classified as "macho". Furthermore her ideals of a companionate, fulfilling relationship were expressed in her statements that she and her husband "think the same" and were "in total synchronisation". Her intentions also seemed to be to clarify that she was not suffering or suppressed by either traditions, her in-laws or husband. She did not present her story in the passively suffering way Nilima used for her life. Interestingly, she never

mentioned love with regard to her husband. During the interview she said that she loved her parents, the English language and children. Did she take love for her husband for granted or was she waiting for it to grow?

Love Marriage: Sunil, 34 Years Old, Sociology Teacher and PhD Candidate

This is what Sunil said about his love marriage, which he undertook against his parents' will:

> "I had a love marriage. And initially there were hiccups. In the family. Cause you usually don't marry someone outside the Maratha caste. And me being a little educated and getting a good job meant that I would have probably got a good girl. Good in the sense of uhh a powerful family. So marital alliances which had political and economic ends to them. Ya. Less of economic, I would say, but more of political. My sister had found out of the families. Where the girl was from so and so. And she had done some course and they were politically quite influential. Locally also regionally. And they wanted me to get married to one of these. But I had a different idea.
> I met my wife here in the department. She was doing an MA in political science. She's a non-Maharashtrian. She's from Manipur. We knew each other for four years. We did something rather interesting. Which is totally against the culture of Marathas. We had a live-in relationship. Just before marriage. We got married in 2007. So for almost two years we had a live-in relationship. We stayed in Sangvi, which is quite close to my house. And which was highly objectionable. I used to go and change my dress every morning at my parents'. [He laughed] But I did stay with her also. And it was made quite clear that I'm gonna marry this particular girl. No one else. I think it was partly rebellion in some ways. In some ways."

Sunil had a very clear opinion that "real love marriages" tended to be inter-caste marriages like his own. In an endogamous love marriage, he argued, the was the possibility of 'arranged love':

> "It is basically you should fall in love with a girl who belongs to your own caste. It's an arrangement in your own mind. So if you were to actually find a girl whom you want to marry. You'd first narrow down on a girl belonging to your caste. I don't think that's love marriage. Unless it goes beyond caste and it may not always be. I mean the person might fall in love and then might realise okay she belongs to the same caste. There are instances of that also. But when you're narrowing it down and you're instrumentally looking at it uhh it becomes difficult to call it love. It's just saying okay this is a mate whom I can get married to. But I think if these are the kind of marriages that take place I think we won't see it changing. I think there are changes. It's not that there aren't. But dominantly I think there is still this burden that we're carrying."

Sunil's narrative is highly individualised. He emphasised how he went against caste customs and his family's wishes with his marriage, calling it a rebellion. He had not only married someone from a different state and hence a different

caste, but had also lived with her prior to their wedding. Due to the implication of sex before marriage, live-in relationships were extremely frowned upon by the parents' generation. "These live-in couples do things that are not healthy," asserted unmarried Elliza, a college teacher in her early fifties. Her housing society had to clean the drainage because it was blocked. She was "utterly shocked" to find that condoms had blocked it. Sunil had asserted himself completely against his family's plans and wishes. He acknowledged that this was possible because he was the main breadwinner and together with his parents in charge of family decisions.

Sushila's story was similar. But contrary to Sunil she did not marry her boyfriend against her parents' will. Instead she tried to persuade them and finally succeeded. She did not have the leverage of being the main breadwinner in the family. However, she thought that being successful in her studies, getting a good, stable job and proving to her parents that she was serious about marrying her boyfriend convinced them.

Nikhita and Ashok met no such resistances. They were what people in Pune often called "childhood sweethearts". According to them they were a couple since they were thirteen. They grew up in the same housing society. Both their parents had love marriages and approved of their children's relationship. During my stay in Pune Nikhita and Ashok went to the UK together for a master's degree. After they returned to India they got engaged.

Without a Girlfriend: Mohan and Karim, 21 Years Old

Mohan and Karim were the only two young men I knew in Pune who did not have a girlfriend at the time. Mohan's parents conceived him with the plan that he would take over the family's business. He was a Maratha like Sunil. Mohan was well connected and knew influential people in Maharashtra, a desired trait of a Maratha. He was demanding with men and shy with women. His English was deficient. His family had made it clear to him that he had to marry a Maratha. He could do what he wanted but he had to marry a Maratha. It turned out that he had had three girlfriends. He thought they were too much hassle.

The first one told her parents about him and her father threatened Mohan, so he never called her again. The second one was a friend of a friend. He was annoyed that everyone gossiped about them, commenting their first date, their first holding hands, their first kiss. The last one he said was too possessive and too expensive. She expected him to pay for everything. She was not allowed to go out after seven p.m. To go out with her Mohan had to arrange for her to stay over at Mira's, which he thought "makes [Mira] feel uncomfortable. I had to make a thousand calls to make sure her parents would not find out." Furthermore she would call him at work and be offended when he said he could not talk. Mohan gave priority to work, family and friends over his girlfriend. She did not accept that.

Mohan had very clear ideas about his marriage. He wanted his parents to arrange it when he was twenty-eight and had successfully expanded his family's business. He insisted though that ultimately it was his decision to agree to a young woman. To Mohan it was essential that his prospective wife would get along with his parents and vice versa since he would rather leave his wife than his parents. Furthermore, he expected his future wife to be a virgin just like himself. Thus Mohan embraced his parents' authority in decision-making and his duty in the mutual reciprocity between generations. However, he also claimed a degree of self-determination by being part of the decision-making process.

Karim seemed to be in a similar situation. When I asked him why he did not have a girlfriend he replied:

> "Girls can be so irritating! She will call every ten minutes and ask 'Where are you?', 'What are you doing?'. I dated two girls, one when I was sixteen and one when I was eighteen. One relationship lasted one and a half years. Now I think flings are better. Less hassle."

He bitterly and at length complained about his best friend's girlfriend, too. It was hard to tell who was more jealous, he or his best friend's girlfriend. With regard to his own future Karim said:

> "My parents always know what is best and right for me. They always make the right decisions for me. I want them to choose the right woman for me. I think they will know better."

His parents wanted to marry him off in two or three years, but he had asked

them to postpone it.

These two cases show that an arranged marriage had a comforting aspect for some young adults. They trusted their parents to find the right spouse and did not wish to cause friction in the family. Furthermore, it appeared to be easier, less painful and less humiliating if the parents looked for a spouse, while the children retained the choice to accept or not. Parents and children making decisions together seemed satisfying to both. These young men felt an arranged marriage promised a more successful relationship, both with their parents and their prospective spouses. Last but not least it guaranteed that one would not end up alone.

Contemplating Elopement: Nitin, 23 Years Old, Recruiter for US Company

Nitin was originally from Hyderabad. He completed an BA in Information Systems in Melbourne, Australia. He moved to Pune to be with his girlfriend, whom he had met online. Initially he said their parents knew about their romance. Later he explained that his girlfriend was from a "very *orthodox*" family. She was not allowed to leave the house after six in the evening. Her parents thought he was just a good friend. His parents used to know about their relationship.

> "But something happened in the past. Something happened. Now they don't like her anymore. So I'm hiding my relationship."

Nevertheless, both of them were determined to get married. They intended to "elope" to the US where Nitin had very good job opportunities.

The last time I met Nitin in his favourite café, he asked me not to tell his girlfriend that we had met since she thought he was at the gym. Nitin nonchalantly confessed that he gazed after other girls. When his girlfriend complained he countered: "Then look like her!" She ran straight to the gym, according to Nitin, and demanded that he go as well. Obviously distressed, Nitin started talked about how demanding, possessive, insecure and jealous his girlfriend was.

> "[My girlfriend] is very caring. I have had other girlfriends before who did not care whether I was there or not. [She] brings me food, cares for me when I'm sick. She even buys my clothes. Using my credit card of course." He laughed.

But then he complained about the downsides of her caring. When Nitin was with friends, she would call and tell him to go home soon. When he went to Hyderabad for more than two days she was upset.

> "While I was in the US she was very insecure. She always called me during work. I couldn't answer the phone 'cause private calls were not allowed and they had cameras everywhere. It upset her and she told me to come back. My boss thought I wasn't dedicated to my work since I seemed distracted. I could have stayed longer in the US but I came back only for her. There I earned Rs2 lakh. Here I first made Rs40,000 and now Rs20,000 per month."

Nitin was obviously upset about it.

> "For [my girlfriend] abroad is only for shopping and holidays but not for living. Go for two weeks and come back. I'm twenty-three. I only got two years left to make a career, to settle, to gain financial security."

> "[My girlfriend] is very expensive. I want to provide her with the life she is used to. Maybe she would compromise but I don't want her to."

He added that he had received very good job offers from Australia, the US, the UK, Dubai and Bombay. He declined all of them for his girlfriend. He recounted in detail how much he could have earned. Even his father could not understand what he was doing.

> "When I am good to [my girlfriend] my parents are upset. When I am good with my parents [my girlfriend] gets upset."

Nitin elaborated that he sometimes wondered whether all his compromises were worth it, whether it was the

> "right decision to go ahead with [my girlfriend]. When she talks about marriage I get scared. And when we are together she always talks about something else, never about us."

> "She also controls my finances. When I want to buy something she will ask: 'Why do you wanna buy this?' She thinks it is unnecessary for me to have it. Why can't I just enjoy? It's so frustrating!"

Nitin was often tired of Pune, he said, and wanted a change of scenery.

> "But then I can't leave [my girlfriend]. I have friends who say: 'Let's start a new life.' But I don't want to leave her alone. I feel attached to her. But she doesn't understand. She gets upset: 'How can you even think about going somewhere without me. I can't imagine to be without you anymore.' She doesn't understand."

> "Oh ya, and going out. [My girlfriend] doesn't go out much. Her parents don't allow her. That's another thing. She pretends to be so *modern* but she really isn't. When I ask her to go out she says: 'No! What will my parents say!'"

Nitin's narrative is another very individualised one. He had come to Pune for his girlfriend, had rejected good job offers, and his parents were not in favour of the relationship. Nitin's story spoke of a desire for self-determination and self-

fulfilment through a romantic relationship. However, it was also a story of two very different habituses. She was obviously from a richer family than he was. He felt under pressure to establish himself in general but also in order to live up to her rich family background. Furthermore he was disappointed that she was not as *modern* as he was. He wanted a more *modern* woman who was open to living abroad, travelling, going out and letting him live his own life. At the same time he enjoyed her caring yet complained about her demanding and possessive way. The future seemed very uncertain with her parents not knowing and his parents disapproving. Nitin was facing the problems of a voluntary, companionate love relationship based on individual personality, compatibility, happiness, self-expression and free will. The burden of solitary decision-making seemed to weigh on him, just like the alienation from his parents. Overall, however, getting married was beyond debate.

A Boyfriend to Marry: Mira, 29 Years Old, Fine Arts Student

Mira had her first romantic relationship when she was nineteen with one of her younger brother's friends. She said she never noticed him until he asked her out one day. Her friends told her, he was bad company. She now regretted not having listened to them:

> "Ya, I was in little bad company that time. He wasn't too bad. He was just about getting there, you know. I had big major problems from home. My parents were giving me a lot of grief about this boy. After some time he went to the States. We called it quits. Long distance just doesn't work. But anyway. That was an end of that. But then he'd keep coming back for his holidays and then I'd go see him. And I would go back to being his girlfriend again for the next, I don't know, one month. Until he had to go back again. Until I was tired of waiting and I was tired of hearing people talk around me. What I found out is what they were saying was actually true."

Mira obviously felt betrayed: she wanted love, but he wanted sex and went after other women. She portrayed herself as a naïve young woman who had let a man mistreat her. She justified herself by saying "he was not too bad", he was only after sex. In the end she reclaimed agency by stating that she was tired of waiting.

She met her next boyfriend on a family vacation and her parents approved of him:

> "He is Parsi. And his parents are all right. And my family is half-Parsi. So my mom

saw him and she was like, oh, nice boy for my girl. They're gonna make such a happy couple. And the boy's a Scorpio just like dad. And he thinks just like dad. And he talks just like dad. Maybe my daughter won't, you know, miss her dad that much. Anyway. Turned out to be an asshole. Yeah, yeah. Because he'd start talking about women. And I'm not the sort to talk about men in front of my boyfriend. I, I don't do that sort of thing. You know, horses have blinds? Ya. I'm like that in a relationship. I have blinds on. I completely concentrate on that person, one person only. And make that person my universe and everything. My world, everything, everything."

Compatibility due to a similar family background was important for her parents. Mira herself expressed romantic ideals of companionship and making a man the centre of her world. Being blind to other men could be interpreted as a romantic ideal and as the Indian ideal of a wife's devotion to her husband (*pativrata*).

> "He was my first erm, [in a lower voice:] first guy that I actually slept with. I hadn't slept with anyone before that. And he convinced me that erm if I slept with him he'd be happier. And that it would make <u>him</u> believe that I trust him more. So I believed him. I'm a complete asshole. I believed him. And then he'd keep talking about things like <u>he</u> would one day land up and marry me. He'd lead me towards, you know, thinking that he will, he is gonna get married to me. Cause he would say stuff like eh oh, Natasha, would you help my mom in the kitchen? In the future?"

Mira's parents encouraged their relationship and Mira felt his parents did the same by treating her like the future daughter-in-law and asking her whether she could cook, among other things. He accompanied her to family get-togethers and functions. After eight months of dating he got a job with Qatar Airlines and left. She again called herself a fool for waiting for him. One day he called her and told her that he does not love her anymore. To her own surprise it was her father who consoled her and told her it was not meant to be and that everything was going to be okay. She was furious when the young man's parents sent her family a wedding invitation when he got married. She said they made a fool out of her parents. It took Mira four years to get over the heartache.

> "And then I went for this trip to Tenerife. Just by chance. And I met [Edgar] sitting right next to me."

Edgar was Mira's present-day Spanish boyfriend. They met on the flight back to Bombay. Mira invited him to stay with her family which he did. Mira told me a detailed romantic story of how they fell in love and travelled together for some time. Finally he had to go back and asked her to accompany him to meet his parents. He told her that she was the one for him.

> "I'm fine with it. Let's go, I said. But what do I tell my parents? I'm going with [Edgar] for a holiday? They don't even know I'm dating you. [She laughed.] They don't even know that.

251

So he thought it would be a problem with my parents. But I didn't know it wasn't a problem. I just was afraid to tell them that I'm dating a non-Indian. Is it okay? [She laughed.] So it was okay. Because my mum's sister is married to eh an English man. And she has children from him. So in the end I had told my aunt, Nandu, in England. I said: look, I love this guy. And he also. Okay? He likes me also. I won't say love. Let, I leave that to him. Let him say it on his own." [She laughed.]

Mira's aunt talked to her father who had no objections. He organised the visa and the ticket for her to go to Spain. She loved Spain and hated the long-distance relationship. She explained that she had matured and tried not to pester Edgar with demands for proofs of love. She often asked me for advice. She sought help to interpret his behaviour or to determine, after he had come to India again, whether she was pregnant. Just before I left Pune, Edgar broke up with Mira. She was heart-broken. She cured it by cutting her hair off and trying to look positively into the future.

Mira obviously looked for love, self-determination and self-fulfilment in her romantic relationships. She saw herself half as a victim of cruel men and half as a naïve girl. She refused to see herself only as a victim. In her narrative she constructed herself as active, even if in a naïve way. Her story illustrates how consumption (tourism), love and sexuality promise freedom of individual choice, self-fulfilment and achievement (Srivastava 2007). Through a chance encounter Mira's life and dreams were changed. It offered her autonomy, even if only temporarily.

Mira demonstrated how she negotiated moral aesthetic standards and positioned herself within them by making certain choices. Indulging in smoking, drinking alcohol, partying and premarital sex, she knew wider society might frown upon her.

"Like even I had this notion about sleeping around. My friends would say it's wrong. The worst thing that could happen to you before marriage. But then I used to think like that. I used to think that wearing short skirts and wearing red nail polish or putting too much make-up is a bad thing. But then later on there were some people, my own aunt. She would wear red lipstick. She would wear red nail polish or bright pink nail polish. And she'd dress up. She'd wear gold. And she'd look so beautiful. Okay. And dark kajal and everything. But then I wouldn't call her a bad girl. You know. Why? Why would I call my aunt a bad girl? Oh, but when I saw someone else's aunt wearing that I said: oh my god! She must be quite a thing. [She laughed.] No, but then you don't see that, na. My own aunt in England used to smoke. She quit now. She's not a bad woman. Just because she smokes. Just because she slept with her boyfriend before she got married.

> There's nothing wrong. I mean early man slept with his woman and they didn't have a marriage certificate, right? In pre-historical or whatever those ages. There was no marriage certificate that time. I'm sure there was rampant sex that time."

Thus Mira constructed a narrative around learning that things were not black and white. She braced herself against the social stigma of being a bad woman by defending the respective behaviour. However, this moralising happened within certain limits. In another conversation she distinguished herself as *middle class* and not *upper class* by saying the following:

> "Tomorrow if I am with this page three lot[59] I'd be out. One boyfriend every month, or maybe every week. Smoking, drinking heavily. Gone beyond, you know.

Hence smoking, drinking and having boyfriends was acceptable in moderation. Just as Nisbett (2009:130) reports of Hyderabad, women from the social elites were portrayed as "immoral and promiscuous". However, many young women in Pune did not condemn premarital relationships, smoking and drinking as such. They partook of it themselves. The elite on the contrary was perceived to behave immoderately.

While Mira hoped that her romantic relationships would lead to marriage, 19-year-old Leela claimed she just wanted to have fun. In one year she had at least three boyfriends. She would get physically close to several men most times we went out to a nightclub. Her nightclub outfit usually consisted of a miniskirt and a strapless top. She said she never told her parents about her boyfriends:

> "If you tell your parents they would be like: What boyfriend? Is he gonna marry you? Why do they ask that? Why think about it now?"

Despite her problems and quarrels with her parents she had a way of getting what she wanted. She often complained about men but always made sure to appear like she had the upper hand. Lukose (2009:130) observed with regard to college life in Kerala that the increasing sexualisation of young women in public spaces "reveal a more ambiguous space of freedom in which it is possible to have some choice but little agency, a sexualised space in which one can be stranded if love does not turn into marriage." Leela did not only have choices but also agency. She negotiated her presence in the public through her clothing and her involvement with young men. She showed neither remorse nor anxieties that her premarital relationships might leave her stranded in the public,

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[59] "Page three people" referred to the elite of Pune whose lives would be gossiped about on page three of the local newspapers.

without the possibility to retreat into the private through marriage. With young people's attitudes towards premarital love and sex changing, young men and women appropriated public space equally as their own.

An Arranged Marriage Gone Bad: Rita, 21 Years Old, Engineering Student

Rita was from a village in Gujarat. She had wanted to become a pilot, but her father wanted to marry her off right after junior college. They reached a compromise: she came to Pune to do a four year engineering degree. Rita had successfully negotiated "four years of freedom", as she said. She did not tell her parents that she had boyfriend. He also went to Pune for higher education. In their fifth year of dating, he refused to celebrate Valentine's day with her.

> "Valentine's Day is a big thing here in India. I was heart-broken. But I thought he had his reasons. I was so blind. More things happened. I was so blind. How could he have done that to me!?"

Eventually she realised that he was cheating on her and she ended the relationship. He kept showing up at her house trying to win her back. She was scared. Since her parents did not know about the relationship, she told her mother she missed her. Her mother stayed with her for a week. Finally her ex gave up. She recounted two more stories of guys who harassed her. She was a beautiful woman with a strong mind that she hid behind a quiet facade. Shortly after finishing her engineering degree she sent an email explaining that her parents had found "a boy" for her and that they were engaged. Not even a year later the tone of her emails changed, but she never answered inquiries about what was going on. Finally Arun, one of her confidants, related that Rita was very unhappy because she did not like her fiancé's family. She was terrified to break off the engagement due to the repercussions for the two families, particularly her own. Arun said it was all about "honour and losing your face" in the Rita's village. Rita was also afraid of her father's reaction. When she eventually entrusted herself to her father, he was surprisingly supportive. After cancelling the engagement, Rita was going to leave her village to live in Bombay or abroad. Arun explained that she could not live in the village of either his or her family anymore due to the gossip and the loss of face.

Rita could be seen as having been at the mercy of *tradition* and men: her father,

her ex-boyfriend, her fiancé and other suitors. However, no matter how hopeless the situation initially appeared, she managed to find a way to assert her own will. In the end, her personal happiness and fulfilment had not only been most important to herself but also to her father.

My argument here is not to downplay the observation that premarital relationships and especially premarital sex were more precarious for young women than they were for young men. Rather I wish to counteract the assumption that young women lacked power and agency in these spaces (cf. Nisbett 2009:126) as some argue (Lukose 2009, Phadke 2007a, b).

Sex

A growing body of anthropological literature explores sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual behaviour in India (e.g. Hershman 1974, Jeffery/ Jeffery 1996, Sariola 2010, Srivastava 2004, Verma et al. 2004). Some of them deal with *middle class* sexuality (e.g Dwyer 2000, Mazzarella 2003, Puri 1999). However literature on premarital sex is rare (Abraham 2001, 2002, Favero 2005, Osella/Osella 2002). Here I wish to highlight the changing moral aesthetic standards towards premarital sex amongst young urban *middle class* adults in Pune. My experiences confirm Abraham's observation (2001), who interviewed lower income students in Bombay: in urban areas attitudes towards premarital sex were becoming more accepting and premarital sex amongst young adults is increasing. Rofel (2007:121) argues that for young adults in China sex was a bodily practice to transcend the local and domesticate the global. Sex was about pleasure but a rather open mindset and discussion of sex also indicated a debate about what is normal. For the young urban generation in the 1990s in China it was important to be savvy about sex. I argue that a similar trend was observable amongst the young urban *middle class* in Pune in 2008. Presenting themselves as sexually more liberated than their parents, the café culture crowd intended to transcend the local and domesticate the global. Furthermore, sexuality is another sign of the trend towards individual autonomy. Controlling one's own body and sexuality, and not limiting sex to marriage have an effect on

how a person understands herself.

Mira, the 29-year-old art student looking for love, explained that premarital sex was frowned upon by the wider society. For young women in particular it was a taboo. Abraham (2002:339) argues that "the seclusion and segregation of post-pubertal women, the centrality of marriage in a woman's life, the powerful ideology of *pativrata* (devotion to husband), the preservation of virginity and the maintenance of fidelity" contribute to the restriction of female sexuality, while male sexuality was not socially sanctioned in that way. However, sixty-year-old Nilima applied the same moral aesthetic standards to her sons. When her younger, then unmarried, son went to the UK "we told him no honky-tonky and he agreed". She used a slight deformation of an USAmerican term which in this context obviously meant sex. Like most women of her generation Nilima held that women should be virgins at marriage. Looking for a bride for their son, she said that a woman's family background gave clues towards this end. There is a ritual in the Indian wedding ceremony that is called *kanya dan*, meaning "gift of a virgin", as it was explained. Not wishing sons and especially daughters to engage in premarital sex was constructed as 'being *Indian*'. This indicated, amongst other things, being morally superior to *the west* with its "loose morals" and "easy women", which was displayed by tourists and the media.

The Osellas (2002:128-9) argue that the condemning of Indian family practices such as polyandry during the colonial era and the presentation of the morally pure *Indian* woman as a national symbol, in contrast to *the west*, after Independence caused desire to go "underground": young women had to be pure and innocent before marriage, while young men developed an ambiguous fascination for foreign women. Favero (2005:170) confirms this ambivalent fascination for the "white skin" associated with beauty, *the west,* loose moral values and fun. I knew only one young man who expressed a liking for foreign women and openly displayed his sexuality in that way: the DJ with long hair who attended a *puja* in torn jeans (cf. Chapter Two). Like Favero's informants my young friends in Pune displayed an indifference to *the west*. They did not consider it as the most desirable. This moral aesthetic judgement was a "sign of participation in a community which shares certain values built on an interaction

between India and the foreign world" (Favero 2005:172).

Unlike Favero's informants, however, my friends in Pune took their premarital relationships seriously. They tended to engage in relationships and not just have affairs. I argue that young *middle class* Puneites in 2008 had embodied what Favero (2005:164-6) describes as images of the new *Indian* woman and man in 1999 in Delhi. The new *Indian* woman no longer had to reflect tradition and family. Seclusion, segregation and virginity played were becoming less important. She could be both sexy and decent, balancing career and family. She could be *Indian* while dressed in jeans. The new *Indian* man, on the other hand, had become domesticated and softened. My observations in Pune were that young men wanted and thought they ought to be muscular, sexy and caring. *India* was sexy.

I know for a fact that more than half of my young friends in Pune have engaged in premarital sex, young men and women alike. In fact, there was peer pressure to have sexual experiences. I inquired what they thought about the *traditional* concept that a woman should be a virgin upon marriage. Ashok expressed his surprise that this could still be the case in such a *cosmopolitan* and educated city like Pune. Perhaps this was still expected in the countryside or in other parts of India, he thought. Arun dismissed the concept as "bullshit" and thought this attitude was changing. Nikhita bluntly remarked: "Nowadays everyone sleeps with everyone! Sex before marriage is no big deal anymore." Thus they expressed the opinion that 'no sex before marriage' was not part of their self-understanding as *progressive*, globally savvy and educated members of the contemporary urban *Indian middle class*. They thus distinguished themselves from the poor, *backward* and rural portions of the Indian society, as well as from the more *conservative* ones. Nikhita's comment in fact suggests that premarital sex had become normal in the eyes of the café culture. It was what she wanted and thought should be the norm.

Many explained though that sex was still a taboo in India. Arun once remarked: "India is still a sex starved country." That some of my interlocutors turned to me

257

with their questions about sex and accidents or carelessness during sex showed that they had no one to turn to and few sources for getting information. The supplement to the Pune Times *The Pune Mirror* daily featured a column called "Ask the sexpert". Questions ranged from how it worked in general, to where to get one's hymen stitched back together, all the way to whether one could have babies when married after an abortion.

Carrying sexuality into the public by means of clothing, publicly displaying moderate forms of affection and dating in privatised public spaces, young Puneites challenged the prevailing *conservative* or *backward* attitude towards sex. Though this might have been limited to certain spaces – college grounds, cafés, restaurants, bars, nightclubs – and to a certain time – before marriage – it showed the changing sexual norms as part of a *modern* lifestyle amongst the young generation. They had negotiated and appropriated spaces and ways to meet the opposite sex and live romantic sexual relationships. Choosing a love and/or sex partner means being in command of one's own body. This gives one a sense of control over one's life. Young Puneites perceived sex as a way to self-determination and self-fulfilment. They thus challenged the notion that premarital sex was not *Indian* and part of the loose morals of *the west*. They communicated that one could have sex before marriage and still be a decent *Indian* valuing family. By presenting premarital sex as a deviation from the traditional past and the social norm, the young adults intended to transcend the local and domesticate the global.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to show that, though marriage continued to be an unchallenged institution in Indian society, the young generation had found ways to negotiate the when, how and who – not least because previous generations paved the way. Romantic love, personal happiness and compatibility have become as important in arranged marriages as in love marriages. Arranged marriages were held up as *Indian tradition* and normative ideal by many. But they did not involve the practice of marrying strangers anymore, who have

never met and no say in the matter. A trend towards individual choice, self-expression and autonomy has seeped into this 'typical *Indian*' practice (Fuller/Narashiman 2008). As Ahearn for Nepal (2001), Donner for Calcutta (2009) and Nisbett for Bangalore (2009) observe, the way meanings, values and emotions were lived and experienced in romantic relationships and marriage had changed. Love, dating, courtship and the expression of individual preferences had not only become more acceptable but had found their way into negotiated marriages. The chance to select one's own spouse has been regarded 'modern', 'progressive' and 'forward' since the 1970s (Vatuk 1972:87). Hence it seems not surprising that amongst the café culture crowd in 2008 love marriage, namely not only selecting but also finding one's spouse oneself, was the normative ideal for many. Romantic love – also considered *modern* and *progressive* – seemed an ideal for all, irrespective of arranged or love marriage.

While Donner (2009:87) observes that there were no spaces for Calcutta's *middle class,* where narratives of sexual encounters could be shared, I contend that the café culture offered precisely this space to young *middle class* Puneites in 2008. Donner further argues that though the young generation had different ideas of love and romance than their elders, marriage continued to be the norm and to be defined according to collective interests (ibid.:63pp). Parents more often than not continued to have the final say, even if negotiated with the children. Endogamous marriages were often preferred by young and old. My ethnography of the young generation in Pune in 2008 shows that they increasingly found ways to assert their individual choices even while they continued to value collective interests such as endogamy, patrilocality or mutual reciprocity between generations. Upper castes – such as Brahmins, Marathas, Mawadis, Agrawals and others whose caste affiliation commanded respect and political power – tended to justify and practice endogamy. Endogamy was considered to ensure compatibility between spouses. Love matches were accepted when also adhering to endogamy. The thus arranged companionate marriages or accepted love marriages reproduced caste as well as the *middle class*, which continues to be dominated by upper castes (Fuller/Narasimhan 2008:752). However, inter-caste marriages were becoming more frequent, especially amongst those young adults whose parents had already had an inter-

caste (love) marriage. Inter-caste marriages tended to be love marriages, that is self-chosen. Inter-caste love marriages sometimes were asserted by upper caste young adults who were financially independent. These inter-caste marriages also reproduced middle-classness. They might even be a characteristic of an increasingly mobile Indian *middle class*, which is exposed to meeting a diversity of people through education, friendship circles, travel, work and work-related mobility.

Thus the young generation reworked the narratives about love, marriage, conjugality, courtship and sexuality. Their narrative centred around personal choice, love, equality and companionship but also reshaped practices of patrilocality, arranged marriage, and lifelong unions. The opposition between arranged and love marriage was exaggerated but continued to form a strong narrative despite the fact that romantic love, personal happiness and compatibility have become just as important in arranged marriages as in love marriages. This oppositional rhetoric allowed the young generation to distinguish itself from the past and the parents. The distinction was considered stronger in the case of love marriage, while an arranged marriage seemed to represent more continuity. In both cases, however, by advocating romantic love, personal happiness and compatibility, the young generation was transcending the local and domesticating the global.

Ahearn (2001) and Nisbett (2009) further suggest that despite these changes gender relations themselves have remained largely unchanged. Donner argues for the Calcuttan *middle class* that choice, agency and responsibility were encouraged in mothers as long as their intentions focussed on their families, especially the success of the children, rather than themselves. I argue that amongst young *middle class* Puneites gender relations were transforming as well, along similar lines as Favero (2005) suggests for young men in Delhi in 1999. However, my young friends in Pune in 2008 invoked *India* and *the west* far less than Favero's informants. Young Puneites in 2008 needed the foreign world less to make sense of their own world, which they took for granted as a momentary figuration of globalisation. Both young men and women wanted a *modern* partner. Young women desired a masculine yet understanding,

supportive and sentimental partner who had only eyes for them, a very romantic ideal. Career conscious young women also hoped that their future husband and his parents would allow her to continue working and not only see her as a wife and mother. The young women's sexual adventures pointed to at least a partial rejection of this typical *Indian* womanhood. Most young men wanted a partner who was sexy yet decent, open to going out, smoking, drinking alcohol, premarital sex and other leisure activities. However, both genders also looked for family values in their partners, namely that they wanted to marry and have children. Heterosexual marriage, parenthood and classic gender roles, perceiving the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the caregiver, remained the dominant narrative of *Indian* personhood. However, more and more young women refused to cook, for example, while their boyfriends enjoyed it.

With marriage continuing to be the (almost) exclusively conceivable option and a family matter, not 'anything' was possible in Pune in 2008 amongst the café culture crowd. The appertaining practices were instead modified. They still guided Indian '*Lebensentwürfe*' (visions of life). However, the young generation was slowly dismantling them. After all, practices such as tight clothes for women, drinking alcohol, premarital relationships or even cross-gender friendships used to be frowned upon and virtually impossible. The café culture – with the preparatory help of previous generations – was gradually changing moral narratives about these practices. Decisions were becoming more negotiated. Instead of the decision exclusively lying with the parents (as in arranged marriages of India's past) or with the individual (as presumably in *the west*), decisions were reached jointly. Parents' authority was not completely rejected but the young generation wanted a say, too. There seemed to have been a move from a patriarchal or at least gerontocratic practice, where the elders made decisions, to a more negotiated practice where the children were trusted with, or had fought for, being able to decide for themselves. Hence individual choice, self-expression and free will were valued higher and supported more than before in India. However, they have not become the primary value. The café culture crowd continued to value caring, mutual involvement, and advice from parents and friends.

Conclusions

This ethnographic snapshot captures what was happening to young *middle class* urbanites in post-liberalisation India that set them apart as a group in historical time, in relation to other life worlds in India, to 'western' versions and as a rounded life world in itself. Arun, Leela, Nisha, Karim, Nikhita and others were challenging their parents' and wider society's values in order to negotiate who they wanted and felt they ought to be in their rapidly changing world in Pune in 2008.

My ethnography shows that trends following economic liberalisation in unprecedented ways stimulated ongoing changes. It allowed transformations of bodily practices, such as the creation of leisure spaces, new fashions, more living space, national and international employment, mobility and economic independence. These tangible changes in turn facilitated transformations of practices, which changed moral aesthetic standards, which triggered further change and so on. The young generation increasingly valued, encouraged and expected the expression of individuality and personal freedom. However, the different chapters emphasise that these trends were measured and limited by practices and moral aesthetic standards, which reworked rather than rejected older patriarchal, or at least gerontocratic, arrangements predicated on the ideal of joint family life. I have deliberately focused on a group of young people, the café culture, who had more ways of expressing their individuality and autonomy than any other generation before. There were more and more stories of young people asserting themselves or at least negotiating compromises with their parents regarding their leisure time, education and love. They were negotiating to follow their hearts and to be citizens of the world, while preserving family harmony and other local values. They thus modified their parents' ideas of what it meant to be *modern middle class Indians*.

Through their practices and moral aesthetic standards the participants of the café culture understood and positioned themselves in their world: 1) as *middle class* in contrast to poorer and *backward* segments of society on the one hand,

and to rich *upper classes* on the other, 2) as *liberal*, *cosmopolitan* and *modern* in contrast to more *conservative* and *traditional* segments of the Indian *middle class*, 3) as the young generation with values diverging from their parents, and 4) as citizens of the world: proudly *Indian* amidst the *modern* global world, en par with but different from *the west*.

The young generation perceived their world, which I named café culture, to be different from their parents' world. They claimed that their parents did not understand them and felt that they could not be themselves at home. Changes in family arrangements and the experience of spatial distance and proximity encouraged and increasingly anticipated individual autonomy. The young generation was literally and figuratively given more space. Families were becoming smaller and houses bigger. The young adults were being left alone more, especially where mothers were employed, often from early on. They were more mobile, owning motorised transport and obtaining national and international employment. They spent their days in educational institutions where the neoliberal talk of achievement, chances, choices, opportunities and agency was part of the *middle class*' capital. Finally, the creation of a youth culture in form of the café culture fulfilled the need for space of this young urban *middle class*, for a space away from home, out of the reach of parental control. Embracing consumer practices as status markers, the young adults were transcending the local while domesticating the global.

The young generation often spent more time in the company of their friends than with their families. Their friends played an important role in their lives and had taken over some of the roles of the family such as caring, control, protection, learning, guiding and communion. Friendships are voluntary relationships. They are chosen, not given. In a way friends were better equipped to care, advise and control. They collectively participated in the café culture. Young *middle class* adults were nurturing strong amicable bonds, a sense of conspired conviviality, by collectively participating in activities that they considered *cool*, such as hanging out, *timepass*, conspicuous consumption, smoking, drinking, dating and public display of affection. Their parents and wider society frowned upon these activities. Through their friendships, their use

of space like cafés and the appertaining activities, the young adults were asserting their independence and freedom from their elders' moral aesthetic standards and control. Furthermore, they were breaking down social hierarchies and distances between gender, castes, religions and regions of origin through practices of sharing, caring and teasing. They were thus fostering equality. However, the challenging of social hierarchies and distances, and the sense of equality were restricted to groups within the *middle class*, dominated by higher castes.

Friendship was interpreted as a very caring relationship, involving a sense of intimate concern for the wellbeing of friends which resembled parental control. The expression of individuality and autonomy in friendships were measured and limited by this mutual involvement. Social control and pressure were still exerted by others, but friends were chosen according to individual preferences and similar moral aesthetic standards. Perhaps friends signalled a transition from parental control to internalised social control. The value of *informality* in interpersonal relationships was linked to this way of understanding friendship. The stress on being *informal* was a stress on the 'we', the relationship or the group rather than the individual. It was hence a stress on intimacy, familiarity, mutual involvement, surveillance and obligation. The mutual commitment might not have gone as far as in the family but friends were expected to support each other and be interested in each others' lives. Further research into how far the ideal of mutual involvement went and who it encompassed would be interesting.

Premarital relationships and marriage were another aspect in the young adults' lives, where older patriarchal, or at least gerontocratic, arrangements were redefined by increased concerns with individual personality, self-expression and free will. Patrilocal residence, arranged marriages and lifelong unions continued to form normative discourses. There was no 'anything goes' attitude, as claimed for 'western' societies. Society continued to provide the person with roles, concepts, norms, ideals and dreams. However, the consolidation of a consumer culture as status marker introduced the imperative of choice into *middle class* life. Dating, premarital sex and love marriages were desired by a majority of café culture members. To have a boy- or girlfriend underlay great peer pressure.

264

Courtship was sought for personal fulfilment and development. It also created a sense of belonging to the café culture. Premarital sex further modified practices of marriage towards the ideal of a voluntary union between partners with equal rights and choices. The café culture – not least with previous generations paving the way – was gradually modifying the moral narrative about these practices. Even the *traditional Indian* practice of arranged marriages had been modified by *modern* notions of personal choice, compatibility and happiness. Thus marriage continued to be a family matter but decisions were reached jointly. There was a move discernible from a hierarchical practice, where the elders made the decisions, to a more negotiated process. The children were trusted with, or had fought for, being able to decide for themselves. Hence individual autonomy was valued higher and supported more than before in India but was not regarded as the most important value. Caring, mutual involvement, and advice from parents and friends continued to be highly valued.

The café culture's appropriation of spaces, the appertaining activities and the appreciation of egalitarian friendships were expressions of an individualising trend with a distinct *Indian* flavour of caring and mutual involvement. Individual autonomy remained encompassed by, and subordinated to, the ideal of a highly socially connected self who happily reached joint decisions with the family. The young adults continued to feel accountable to their parents despite legally being of age. They usually lived with their parents and were economically dependent on them. The young adults continued to accept and seek their parents' advice, often deciding together or reaching a compromise with them, especially with regard to career choice and marriage. A single person in Pune formed a notion of the self that was not autonomous or distinct from, or against, the wills of others, custom, tradition and religion, which is the expectation in 'the west'. Rather she formed a notion of the self in accordance with the wills of others, custom, tradition and religion. The young adults sought more freedom but continued to appreciate a process decision-making that did not put all the burden on one person. They realised themselves not only by reinforcing or subverting but also by performing, inhabiting, experiencing, aspiring to and reaching for social roles and expectations.

My ethnography has shown that local embodiment and space are essential to the way people understand themselves and their worlds. They use both 'the global' and 'the local' to make and remake themselves as the persons they want and feel they ought to be, to make things happen for themselves and to maintain, challenge and redefine 'the local' as well as 'the global'. I have explore how young adults constructed their parents' world as the *traditional* past dominated by austerity and social constraint. This past was imagined to differ greatly from their own world of consumerism, freedom and independence. The young adults thus intended to transcend the local and domesticate the global. They presented themselves as savvy citizens of the world. In the café culture world "contingent [global] encounters constitute and situate that which in momentary figurations we might call 'globalization'" (Rofel 2007:25).

In the café culture world in Pune in 2008 these figurations included: wearing jeans; speaking fluent English apart from one's mother tongue; embracing equality between sexes, generations, castes, religions and regions of origin within the *middle class;* being open to premarital relationships, sex and love marriage; indulging in conspicuous consumption; living and letting live (e.g. drinking alcohol does not mean one is a bad person); liberating oneself and living life on one's own terms. At the same time they involved that the person continued to be primarily valued as a socially connected self, namely as defined by his relationships to others. Individual freedom was subordinated to the ideal of generational reciprocity within the family. Family constituted the highest value and self-realisation was achieved through fulfilling expected family roles.

Since the 1990s scholars of different disciplines have shown increased interest in the purported rise of a "global middle class" (Jeffrey 2010:172). Recent studies of the middle classes in postcolonial countries have concluded that these classes reinforce their privileges and power through social and cultural strategies (Baviskar/Ray 2011, Fernandes 2006, Fuller/Narasimhan 2007, 2008, Jeffrey 2010, Joshi 2010). Many have argued that these strategies lean towards events, processes, ideas, images and consumer goods from outside their country, and especially towards 'western' influences. Fernandes (2006) indeed proposes that the idea of being part of a "new middle class", which is global in

orientation and style, dominates the Indian middle class and serves as a model for other middle class strata. Taking inspiration from Jeffrey's book (2010) about young lower middle class men in Meerut, I argue that the café culture crowd in Pune in 2008 slightly corrects this picture of a global middle class. 'The west' did not unconditionally represent the successful model of development for these young people. Broader visions of globalisation certainly played an enormous role. For example, English education was favoured over vernacular education. Consumer goods associated with 'the west', such as brand jeans, served to reinforce distinctions. However, there was also a strong sense to distinguish oneself from those who were "just aping the west" and from those who were "westernised". Furthermore, though many young adults continued to go abroad, it was not considered a necessity for success anymore. More young adults wanted to stay in India and change India for the better. More young adults also returned to India after completing a degree of higher education and/ or working for a period of time abroad.

A shift seems to have taken place between the young generation and their parents. Parents tended to consider jeans, dating and drinking alcohol as 'westernisation'. They parents seemed to link 'being Indian' to external features such as clothing or arranged marriage. The young generation argued that nowadays everybody wore jeans, engaged in premarital relationships and sex. These were just superficial criteria. They understood *westernisation* as abandoning one's elders and not fulfilling the ideal of generational reciprocity. They considered *Indian culture* to refer to family values and ritual practices. In general, the young generation invoked 'being *modern*' and '*westernisation*' much more infrequently than their parents had. They seemed to criticise as their own what their elders condemned or praised as foreign. They did not consider themselves 'westernised' because they honoured family values, generational reciprocity and the family as a multigenerational whole. Hence the young generation understood 'being *Indian*' as an inner quality that could not, or did not need to, be expressed externally. Wishing to present themselves as *Indian* citizens of the world, they renegotiated local practices. They transcended 'being Indian' while 'Indianising' the global, creating momentary figurations we might call globalisation or postmodernity.

267

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