Goddesses of Consumerism:

An Interpretivist Study of Young Female Consumers

in Contemporary India

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

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October, 2010

ABSTRACT

Marketing and consumer research scholars have paid little attention to the contemporary Indian consumer landscape, with even less focus on the particular experiences of female consumers in this context. This thesis contributes to a partial redress of this parochial and Eurocentric status quo in consumer culture research by presenting the voices and critically exploring the lived experiences of consumer culture of a sample of young female Indians. A selective review of the multidisciplinary literatures on globalization, consumer culture and India is used to develop a conceptual framework for this thesis, and to situate the research aims in contemporary and relevant scholarship.

The aims of the research are to understand and describe the meanings, values and lived experience of contemporary consumer culture of a sample of young female Indian consumers; to establish the extent to which, and describe how, global flows of culture serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers; and to establish whether and how traditional belief systems and practices influence young consumers' identity projects in contemporary Indian society.

In addressing these aims, the thesis documents the design and execution of a two month multi-method interpretive research study of twenty three young urban and rural women living in New Delhi and at its fringes. Through coding and categorisation, a reading of the data presents three key findings. Firstly, that media is an important medium through which notions of urban and rural identity and difference are constructed. Secondly it demonstrates how the body, as site of consumption, becomes tempered through Vedic ideals of womanhood. Thirdly, it presents a context specific understanding of consumer culture in the East which previous research has masked. Additionally, a data-driven framework for understanding the consumer experience of the sample of respondents is also presented.

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For my Parents,

who sacrificed everything for the sake of my education.

Thank You

I love you with all my heart

For India

A country that will forever be the object of my inquisitive mind

For all that you stand for, and for all that you will become

Jai Hind

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to express sincere thanks to a truly inspirational gentleman, my supervisor, Prof. Gavin Jack without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for providing me with direction, motivation and confidence to pursue my research topic. I am fortunate to have had you as a mentor and friend over the years.

My sincere thanks to all staff at Bharati College, New Delhi, in particular Dr. Promodini Varma, Dr. Mukti Sanyal and Dr. Sonali Jain, for providing me with true Indian hospitality and tremendous support throughout my time in India. To my wonderful research respondents, thank you for opening up your lives to me and providing me with such wonderful stories which I promise to always cherish and keep alive.

To my parents, thank you for your constant support and patience during my academic journey, your love and blessings are with me always. To my partner, Arun, I thank you for always standing by me. Your support has been invaluable and I look forward to sharing the future with you.

I thank my friends, both old and new, from near and far for humouring me when I was at the end of my tether. Having you around was like a breath of fresh air, I truly value your friendship and support throughout. For those of you who have left the U.K, you are missed dearly.

Last, but not least, I would like give a special mention to those individuals who have helped and supported me throughout my time at the University of Leicester School of Management, in particular, Dr. Mark Tadajewski whom I have known since commencing my first degree in 2001. Your support, guidance and advice will not be forgotten – thank you for introducing me to the world of journals! Many thanks also to Prof. Jo Brewis, Prof. Martin Parker and Teresa Bowdrey. Finally, a thank you to Dr. Campbell Jones and Prof. Gibson Burrell for giving me the opportunity to study for a PhD at the School.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a brief explanation of the context, focus and structure of this thesis. Section 1.1 describes the focus and relevance of the research problem. Sections 1.2 and 1.3 outline the principal research aims and methods deployed in the empirical study that underpins the thesis. 1.4 provides an outline of the structure and content of the document as a whole.

1.1 *"Ghar mein Laxmi Aayi"* : The arrival of the Goddess

Traditionally upon the birth of the female child in the Indian family, a common sentiment echoed through homes can be heard shared amongst the elders - '*ghar mein Laxmi aayi hai*'. The literal translation of this Hindi phrase - *Goddess Laxmi has arrived in the home* – symbolises and positions the female child as an incarnation of the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. This eminent status bestowed upon the female places her upon a platform of responsibility where she soon becomes the social and familial embodiment of *laaj* (humility), *izzat* (respect) and *dharma* (moral duty). Indian womanhood has been characterised as an ambivalent state, wherein women are both revered and subjugated, worshiped and molested, free to express themselves in different domains and yet voiceless.

Alongside this state of ambivalence, consumerism has created a sphere of empowerment for women and this is reinforced by a change in the social position of women in contemporary Indian society where increasing numbers of women are pursuing education and entering professional careers which were once reserved for men. The emergence of a consumer culture is a key stage for women in potentially

being able to challenge, subvert or re-negotiate tradition. Increasing consumerism and affluence, individualism, demographic complexity, ideological diversity, and constant innovations in communications technology are seen to have proliferated new social identities. Material possessions, especially status goods, are seen to be contributing significantly to the individual's definition of the self and lay sources, such as newspapers, have been keen to trace this trend of late.

The portrayal of women in light of consumer culture is not as passive or invisible, but as active, assertive and visible agents having sufficient purchasing capacity, but more specifically, actively participating in consumption through their respective 'body projects' to supplement their sense of self and identity through the conscious lifestyle choices they make. Although there is an established interest amongst marketing and consumer researchers in gender, and more specifically on women and consumption, there is very little work that focuses on women located outside of the so-called 'First World'. Against this context, this thesis contributes to two interconnected gaps in the consumer research and consumer culture theory literatures: the paucity of work on consumers and consumption in non-First World locations; the paucity of work on *women* consumers and consumption in non-First World locations. The capacity for this thesis to provide a voice for the experiences of a set of young female consumers in India is a primary motivation for this work.

Amidst the changing socio-economic landscape of India, consumption has, in recent times, been viewed as central to the experience of modernity in contemporary life making the need to understand the articulation of traditional female identity within the social structures and norms associated with contemporary consumer culture in India

imperative to understanding the role of consumption and the very 'traditions' the act is criticised as eroding. Through the exertion of social, familial and peer control, notions of morality and humility become central features in the young women's negotiation of global flows from the West, in the form of media, clothing and lifestyles. Accordingly, this thesis is situated conceptually at the confluence of three distinct but interconnected literatures: globalization theory; consumer research and consumer culture theory; multidisciplinary inquiry on Indian consumer culture. To contribute in specific ways to these literatures, the thesis pursues a number of research aims.

1.2   **Research aims**

Having contextualised this research and given an indication of its guiding ethos, this section states the key aims which the thesis develops and subsequently pursues. This outline will be purposefully brief since they will be substantiated in more detail through chapter two. In short, the goal of this thesis is to present a critical investigation into the lived experience of consumer culture of a sample of female consumers within the contemporary Indian context. This goal will be pursued through three principal research aims:

- To understand and describe the meanings, values and lived experience of contemporary consumer culture of a sample of young female Indian consumers:

- To establish the extent to which, and describe how, global flows of culture serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers:

- To establish whether and how traditional belief systems and practices influence young consumers' identity projects in contemporary Indian society:

Each of these aims emanates from concerns identified in the literature reviews presented in chapter two and an expansion of these themes will be found in subsequent

sections of the thesis. I will now move on give a brief overview on the empirical investigation carried out to address these issues.

1.3   Research Study

In order to address the aims and objectives of this thesis, a two-month multi-method research study was designed and executed between November 2007 and January 2008. The study focussed on an examination of the consumption behaviours of twenty three young female consumers. The names of the thirteen urban girls are Anya, Megha, Tanya, Tanusha, Shivangini, Niti, Swati, Deepika, Shivani, Kanika, Heena, Divya and Dimple. The ten rural girls are called Rakhi, Shikha, Vineeta, Suman, Pooja, Baby, Renu, Khushboo, Asha and Anju. All of the girls attended Bharati College, Janakpuri, New Delhi. In order to capture elements of consumptive behaviour deemed most relevant to the project as a whole, I used a number of different research methods, principally unstructured interviews, audio recording, document collection and photo elicitation. The use of multiple methods was aimed at gaining a rich, in-depth insight into the lives of these young women. A full account of this study will be presented in chapter three. Finally, in closing this introductory chapter, the following section provides an overview of the structure of the thesis as a whole.

1.4   Structure of the Thesis

Following this introduction, chapter two will present the literature review. As mentioned above, this chapter will review and critique the main areas of the thesis which comprise globalization theory; consumer research and consumer culture theory;

and India as a context. It sets out to explore the ways in which these areas have been conceptualised through the extant literature and various academic domains.

Chapter three will go on to develop and justify the research design for an empirical investigation of the study of young female consumers in New Delhi. It will begin by re-iterating the key research objectives and theoretical commitments established in the preceding chapter and will advocate a broadly interpretive methodology which reflects these commitments. The chapter will also outline and rationalise the design, development and execution of this project's two-month research study into the lived experiences of consumer culture of twenty two, young urban and rural females all studying at Bharati College, New Delhi.

Chapter four will present and interpret the main findings of the research study. Specifically it will provided a detailed account of the consumption practices employed by young rural and urban women via the predominant frames - the media, the body, modernity and lifestyles - through which they negotiated and constructed their own distinct identities.

Chapter five will go on to relate the findings to the literature on globalisation and consumer culture research literatures reviewed in chapter two. Using the research questions as broad framework for organising this analysis, the chapter will tease out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for the corpi of research, showing where they undermine, support or add to the approaches or arguments of previous authors.

Chapter six will bring the thesis to a close. It will provide a summary of the thesis as a whole and draw together the main conclusions of this project, stating and assessing its perceived contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0   Introduction

This chapter situates the thesis within three principal and interconnected areas of academic literature and provides definitions and discussion of key terms used. The first area – Globalisation Theory – is the focus of section 2.1 and draws upon writings from sociology and anthropology. Its aim is to provide a definition and to review theories of globalisation, and thus to enable me to provide my own conceptual framing of the term in the context of this particular research study. Section 2.1.4 turns to work from marketing, consumer research and sociology on consumption and consumer culture, understood through the lens of globalisation. Section 2.2 intends to provide the reader with an understanding of the Indian context for this study, and in particular, work on the nature and dilemmas of the development of consumer culture and consumption practices in contemporary India. I synthesise material from all these sections in the articulation of my research questions in section 2.4.

2.1   Globalisation, Culture and Consumer Research

The objective of this section is to provide the reader with an outline and discussion of the predominant theories of globalisation in addition to locating its specific relevance for the central theoretical frame of the thesis - consumer culture research. To borrow from Guillen (2001:238), globalisation is "far from a uniform trend" and "an ideology with multiple meanings and lineages". This section aims to provide an account of the various expressions and manifestations of globalisation in the extant literature and

attempts to present a culturally specific designation for the study of globalisation in light of the current study. Synthesizing the literature on globalisation and consumer culture not only helps to posit its relevance for my project, but caters for the contemporary debates on globalisation where culture has been viewed as holding centre stage (see Scholte, 2005: 146). Thus, if globalisation is critiqued as "diffusing a single world culture centred on consumerism, mass media, Americana, and the English language" (ibid: 26), its study in the absence of the cultures in which the phenomenon circulates would fall short of understanding the focal tenet of my thesis: an understanding of the intricacies of the consumer experience at the level of the local.

2.1.1   Definitions and Domains of Globalisation

Despite the term 'global' being more than four hundred years old (OED, 1989 cited in Waters, 1995:2), 'globalisation' was not coined as a term until the middle of the twentieth century (ibid). Academics have sourced the etymological roots of the term to words such as 'globe' (Scholte, 2002) placing emphasis upon the establishment of the spherical nature of the world in western history. Not to be confused for 'globality' or 'globalism', generally viewed as conditions or states, globalisation is seen as a process of continuous development which is viewed as both "a journey and a destination" (Seraves and Lie, 2003: 7). Fuelled by increasing international flows of goods, services, money, people and culture (Held et al, 1999:16), globalisation remains to be equally "elusive" as it is "pervasive" (Scholte, 2002: 6). With no "exact definition" (Giddens, 2005: 67), MacGregor Wise (2008:3) notes how globalisation is "not a single process, happening everywhere in the same way" and asserts that the process of globalisation "is all about movement: that of people, of media images and products" (ibid).

The definition of globalisation is also heavily dependent upon field of study. For instance, sociologist, Manuel Castells (1996:92) emphasises the informational aspects of globalisation, whereas political scientist Robert Gilpin (1987) defines the concept in light of the interdependencies of nations through trade. Those concerned with post-colonialism may see globalisation as a form of neo-imperialism, and for economists, emphasis remains upon the global flows of capital, translating globalisation into a "benign force leading us to the era of converging world incomes" (Milanovic, 2003:667). The mere fact that the term globalisation is difficult to pin down through definition has made it a contested topic. Whether the term is concerned with compression of space and time (Harvey, 1989; Mittelman, 1996; Giddens, 1990) or whether it is seen as a reinforcement of a Western hegemony, two aspects of globalisation remains consistent, and those are the ideas of movement and exchange.

Table 1: <u>Key Processual Domains</u>

Arena	Areas of Consideration
ECONOMY	Social arrangements for the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services
POLITICS	Social arrangements for the concentration and application of power, including the establishment of control over territories and populations
CULTURE	Social arrangements for the production, exchange and expression of symbols that represent facts, affects, meanings beliefs, tastes and values

Source: Table compiled by author. Content, Waters, 1995: 7-8

With respect to the table above, the focus of this thesis is upon the domain of culture and the associated social arrangements and symbolic expressions within a given society

at large. The notion of culture is of central importance for my study in that it traces the contours of globalisation through *culture*. I will attempt to draw out the specifics of the theoretical frame of this thesis which attempts to draw together a way of thinking about culture which connects it to everyday consumer experiences, but also how these experiences can be connected globally. So far, the definitions of globalisation are seen to be "in motion rather than fixed" (Scholte, 2002:7), and are also relative and reflective of a given context and point in time. As noted by Steger (2003:69), a discussion of globalisation "would be woefully inadequate without an examination of its cultural dimensions". Given that language, music, and images constitute the major forms of symbolic expression, they assume special significance in the sphere of culture (ibid). Increased inter-connectedness and interdependencies has led to the suggestion that cultural practices may well lie at the heart of contemporary globalisation.

Additionally, technology and the internet have facilitated the rapid circulation of these systems of meaning which are born out of specific societies and localities, and these systems are now in the dominant position of being able to transplant images and ideas from one place to another with profound impact. The discussion of global movements of mass media is often carried out within the paradigms of cultural imperialism, electronic colonialism or dependency theory (cf. Schiller, 1976; McPhail, 1987; Mattelart et al, 1979). Although these domains make important contributions in light of understanding the political economy of media ownership, the limitation inherent in the model is its inability to illuminate how media messages are received in specific cultural contexts (see Bredin, 1996). This criticism positions the consumer at the heart of understanding the negotiation of these symbolic expressions, but more specifically, how

the global flow of these expressions manifest themselves through the consumption experience within a given culture.

Arguably, when the notion of culture is considered in light of the process of globalisation, two images, as noted by Featherstone (1995) are presented. The first image entails the "extension outwards of a particular culture to its limit, the globe" and the second points to a "compression of cultures" (p.6) As the image of culture becomes more complex, important questions are raised concerning its identifiers used within the broader spectrum of social sciences; as much as Featherstone's proposed first image suggests a unification of the global cultural landscape where everyone becomes assimilated into a common culture, the process of globalisation also presents a strong tendency to showcase 'world cultures' and where difference is the central appeal. Even if the notion of a common culture exists, "it would be better to conceive of it not as a common culture, but as a field in which differences, power struggles and cultural prestige contests are played out" (ibid: 14). Howes (1996) work on commodities and cultural borders is especially important here, as he asserts "we need to know more about the social relations of consumption – or in other words, the logic by which goods are received (acquired, understood and employed) in different societies".

Marian Bredin's (1996) work on communication technologies and cultural identity in Nishnawbe-Aski is another fitting example for the study of the cultural components of globalisation. Bredin explores communications technologies as an object of consumption which is imported, appropriated and reconstructed in a variety of cultural conditions (1996: 161). She posits that the effects of television may be less those of cultural 'replacement' and more properly those of cultural 'transformation' which

involve strategies of seizing, displacing and reworking dominant codes in reference to local contexts and meanings. It is this proposed re-working of global flows of images, media and products which help to position the predominant facet of enquiry for this thesis. So far, the definition of globalisation being developed in light of the current study is one which situates itself in the arena of culture and places significant emphasis upon the specific concern for the local negotiations of systems of meaning inherent in global flows. Additionally, the fact that consumers can creatively construct their own identities through the products they consume, as has been evidenced through the studies above, should not be taken to mean that this is without its local consequences (see also Ger and Belk, 1996). Although considered as 'mass manipulation' of third world cultures, cultural theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) and Marcuse (1964) have stressed how an inherently Western consumer culture coerces consumers into buying goods which hold no real meaning for them in light of their own cultures. However, the shift in this opinion has been to understand the processes which consumers undergo, stressing their agency in the selection and adaptation of products in accordance to their own desires, knowledge and interests (see Hannerz, 1992; Willis, 1990 and Miller, 1987). It is through these more recent approaches to understanding the consumer experience, in light of global flows, that I position my study.

Although the consumer has not always been presented as expressing an identity exclusively through the frames of products and images alone, the nation state has also featured as a potent entity which has served to provide individuals with the necessary 'indigenous props' to develop a sense of cultural identity. However, as Seraves and Lie (2003:9) note, "the nation state is not the only cultural frame that is used for the construction of a cultural identity". Featherstone (1997:1) furthers this notion by stating

how culture is a process which "transcends the state-society unit" and a mere understanding of bilateral exchanges between nation states cannot provide a complete portrait of the way in which these flows are appropriated at the level of those who consume. Featherstone goes on to note that as a "complex prism" (ibid: 2), the study of culture in light of globalisation should not be confined to the binaries of homogeneity/heterogeneity, integration/disintegration or acceptance/rejection to name but few. He goes on to argue that an inquiry into the "various generative processes, involving the formation of cultural images and traditions" is needed to comprehend culture "within the state-society which then becomes projected onto the globe" (ibid: 2). To borrow from Waters (1995:8), meaning is not inherent in any text be it in the form of images or tangible products; therefore, in light of consumption, it is produced in part by those who consume. Supporting this is Hannerz (1990, cited in Featherstone, 1997: 237) who asserts how "no total homogenisation of systems of meaning and expression has occurred…the world has become one network of social relationships [where there is also] a flow of meanings [as well as] goods".

In light of the discussion so far, the broad definition of globalisation to which I will be subscribing for the study is one which concerns the specifics of culture and the ways in which globalisation as a "hegemony of form and not content" (Wilk, 1995: 118) serves to celebrate a particular kind of diversity simultaneously suppressing others. Adding to this, the local variants of globalised symbolic forms, media, products and lifestyles serve to provide an 'inside out' analysis of the workings of consumer negotiation of identity through the maze of globalised imagery. It is my intention in this thesis to draw attention to the reception of these symbolic forms through the experiences of consumption amongst a specific sample of female consumers in North India. Having

introduced the inter-connectedness and importance of culture for the study of globalisation, the remaining sub-sections will attempt to outline the predominant dimensions through which globalisation has commonly been viewed in the extant literature.

2.1.1.1 Globalisation as Internationalization

As already mentioned, Scholte's (2005) work on globalisation presents a number of conceptualisations through which globalisation is viewed: internationalization, liberalization, universalization and Westernization/ Modernization. From the perspective of internationalization, "global is simply another adjective to describe cross-border relations between countries, and 'globalization' designates a growth of international exchange and interdependence" (ibid: 16). In a similar vein, Hirst and Thompson (1996) identify globalisation through flows of trade and capital investment between countries. The notion of internationalization, however, falls under what Scholte believes to be a redundant definition of globalisation. He argues that such research fails to generate new understanding and is attainable through other concepts; the definition of globalisation as internationalization, therefore, refers primarily to a growth of transactions and interdependence between countries yet is classified, for certain authors (see Hirst and Thompson, 1999) as nothing more than an intense form of internationalization, so that the "global is a particular subset of the international" (ibid, 1999: 7). Scholte raises the following debate regarding his consideration of globalisation as internationalization:

> "Ideas of globalization-as-internationalization are attractive
> insofar as they entail a minimum of intellectual and political

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adjustments. Global relations of this kind can be examined on the same ontological and methodological grounds as international relations. Global economics can be the same sort of enquiry as international economics…Global culture would be considered equivalent to international culture. Globalization-as-internationalization gives the comforting message that the new can be wholly understood in terms of the familiar". (2005: 55).

Scholte contends that this definition merely reiterates what is already known through alternative definitions and is of the belief that "no one needed a concept of globalisation to make sense of earlier experiences of greater international interaction and interdependence" (p.55) ultimately, making the notion of globalisation as internationalization seemingly redundant. Scholte's rejection of internationalization as a valid defining frame through which globalisation could be viewed rests predominantly through his scepticism that a number of the accounts of internationalization have stressed that contemporary trends are replaying earlier historical scenarios. In addition to this, the vocabulary of internationality, he notes, tends to "ignore, marginalise and silence other modes of organisation, governance and identity that exist and are highly valued by, for example, indigenous peoples, regionalists, and various kinds of cosmopolitans" (p. 56).

This facet brings to view an interesting observation made by Robertson (1995, cited in Featherstone et al, 1997:26) who asserts that the discussions on globalisation have "tended to assume that it is a process which overrides locality". Critical of Giddens' (1991) action-reaction relationship regarding events in one place having contrary occurrences in another, Robertson exposes the limitations of this concept which he

believes "does not fully capture the complexities of the global-local theme" (ibid: 27). The interrelatedness of culture could be understood as a "global ecumene" (Featherstone, 1005:6) defined as a "region of persistent culture interaction and exchange" (Kopytoff, 1987; Hannerz, 1989). This cultural interaction, as highlighted by Featherstone, serves to promote homogeneity and cultural disorder helping to form a 'third culture' which becomes one of a transnational nature and lacking in rootedness to the confines of a nation state. Guillen (2001: 246) adds to this notion by asserting that some sociologists reject the idea of convergence by arguing that "globalisation homogenises without destroying the local and the particularistic", where others, such as Robertson (1995) view globalisation as the "linking of localities".

2.1.1.2   Globalisation as De-Territorialization

Termed as a form of respatialization, globalisation has seen the reconfiguration of social geography through increased "transplanetary connections between people" (ibid: 16). Burawoy (2000) identifies this theme as a common characteristic to the major sociological treaties on globalisation over the last two decades which have "signified the recomposition of time and space – displacement, compression, distanciation, and even dissolution" (Jack and Westwood, 2009: 204). In a similar vein, Held and McGrew (1999), Massey (1994) and Rosenau (2003) have all held true the general principle that globalisation is a set of processes which 'involves a form of transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions'. O Tuathail (2000), for example takes this notion further and has associated contemporary globalization with a strong tendency towards deterritorialization – eliminating the

traditional notion of territorial places, distances and borders. Scholte's inception of the term 'supraterritoriality' merits some explanation here; these relations, he suggests, are "social connections that substantially transcend territorial geography and are relatively delinked from territory, that is, spatial domains that are mapped on the land surface of the earth". The emphasis remains upon transplanetary flows, and more importantly, the simultaneity of these flows. The rise of supraterritoriality, therefore, is qualitatively different in nature from internationalisation and Scholte asserts that it entails a deeper structural change of geography which transcends the more traditional understanding of a shrinking world *within* territorial geography (p.62).

There has been opposition towards the overall notion of globalisation by some critics (Hewison, 1999; Hines, 2000) who call for more importance to be placed upon localization, however, this binary of global/local has also prompted much debate in the sense that it "resurrects in new form the misguided domestic/international dichotomy of old" (Scholte, 2005: 79). What becomes apparent from this distinction is the way in which the local, as immediate and 'here', is considered as concrete, grounded, authentic and meaningful whereas the global is seemingly abstract, unconnected, artificial and meaningless. What I understand from this and support in light of the criticisms raised regarding this definition, is that the global constitutes, in essence, a multiplicity of 'localities' with each bearing their own forms of grounded, authenticity.

2.1.1.3   Globalisation as Scapes

Due to the multifaceted complexity surrounding the concept of globalisation, Appadurai's (2000) consideration of the globe as a metaphorical anthology of 'scapes'

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which are constantly shifting and moving, helps to provide insight into the ways in which global flows can potentially be categorised as disjunctures between the economy, culture and politics. He notes that the "suffix 'scape' allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" and furthermore, these 'scapes' "are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (ibid: 33). In light of the current debates, I would like to concentrate on one of Appadurai's dimensions, namely the *mediascape*. This dimension is closely related to the 'landscape' of images which are often complicated and provide "large… repertoires of images [and] narratives to viewers throughout the world [where the audiences] experience the media themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens and billboards" (ibid: 35). Appadurai emphasises the fetishised component of the *mediascape* when asserting that the farther away the audience is to the direct experience of metropolitan society, the more likely they are to "construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic [and] even fantastic objects." The barriers between reality and fiction become blurred and images serve to fuel the many fetishised facets of this imaginary world.

To provide a balanced view of Appadurai's seminal work on global flows, the critique offered by Heyman and Campbell (2009) offers merit and an alternative insight into the way in which Appadurai's theory presents a number of theoretical limitations. Firstly, the authors note that despite recognising continuities in history, Appadurai insists that the present is radically different from the past, with the present being placeless and having flows, and the past being placed as localistic. This is seen to be problematic as the authors note how his argument takes the form of an epochal change from a simple, static, localistic past to a radically mobile, complex, global present (p.135). Although

there is consensus regarding the point that mobility of people, ideas etc is much faster now than in the past, this approach seems to "obscure and simplify the past" (p.136), neglecting how intersecting flows have helped constitute human cultural settings all along. In light of this, globalisation and flows are not considered as a new phenomenon per se, but the content, intensity and consequences of the movements are constantly evolving. "Motion is not new; rather, flows build on flows build on flows" (ibid).

Taking account of the criticisms posed of Appadurai's scapes, I would like to maintain that this notion of globalisation presents an interesting lens which could potentially be weaved into a cultural inquiry of globalisation. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, my intention for the research is to address the reception of global flows in constructing identities at the level of the local; utilising Appadurai's notion scapes, or *mediascapes* in particular, could potentially add weight to the understanding of how these flows can be appropriated, but more importantly how they serve to fit into the wider spheres of the economy, culture and politics. Following on from this, the next section continues with the discussion of the domains of globalisation in the form of notions of 'sameness' and the relevant theorists who have further developed this conceptualisation.

2.1.2   Cultural Homogenisation Theory

The notion of standardisation has been a consistent theme within the homogenisation literature, with one of the key theorists on this aspect of globalisation being George Ritzer (1993). The term 'McDonaldization', coined by Ritzer (1993) was used to describe the way in which the processes of the fast food industry were increasingly

coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world. Ritzer's popularisation of Weber's theory of rationalisation and its application to the study of the processes of a McDonaldized system provides a concrete example of "sociology in action" (Alfino et al, 1998). The surface level rationality of the McDonaldization principles boast efficiency, calculability, predictability and control which, in sum, "represents a reordering of consumption, as well as production, a rationalisation of previously informal and domestic practices [pushing] the world in the direction of greater conformity" (Waters, 1995: 144). McDonaldization is not merely about products, the principles "embrace workers and consumers in a mesh of McDonaldized relationships" (Aldridge, 2004: 111). Unknown to the majority of consumers when entering a McDonaldized system, they automatically become an integral facet of the process and become docile conformists.

Ultimately, the McDonaldization thesis describes an imposition of uniform standards and reduces human creativity whilst dehumanising social relations which are, in turn, reduced to pseudo-politeness and scripted conversation. Max Weber's theory of rationality has often been viewed as the precursor to Ritzer's theory; Weber described how the modern Western world managed to become increasingly rational and dominated by efficiency, predictability, calculability and control of people (Ritzer, 2010). The distinction which should be made between the the inter-connected theories is that Ritzer's proposal rests largely in the belief that the fast-food restaurant is the paradigm for McDonaldization, where for Weber, this model of rationalization was the bureaucracy. Crossing over into the realm of globalisation and consumption, Ritzer's work with Elizabeth Malone (2000:100) on globalization, McDonaldization and the new means of consumption addresses the relevance of the McDonaldization thesis to

the issues of globalisation. They note that it implicitly and explicitly asserts that "social systems in contemporary society are becoming increasingly McDonaldized" and the adoption of the basic principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control are rapidly becoming defining features of institutions in other nations. Ultimately, this Western rationalised and rationalising organisational form is being exported into other nations.

Ritzer's thesis has received critique which positions his theory into the bracket of cultural imperialism, and although he does not deny the element of 'sameness' that globalization and McDonaldization may have, Ritzer does note that the 'new' means of consumption "succeeded in entrenching themselves in many other countries [and] have also given rise to indigenous versions that have adopted most of their underlying principles". However, these 'new' means of consumption are, as he later notes, leading to a worldwide movement in the direction of American styles of consumption making "consumption and McDonaldization point much more to cultural imperialism and homogeneity than they do to localism and heterogeneity".

Adding to this idea of convergence is Levitt (1983) who utilised the term globalisation to depict an emerging cultural homogeneity caused by an increase in convergences, specifically of technology and communication (Asgary and Walle, 2002: 60), and emphasised the way in which standardisation of products could become a strategic response in wake of this global contraction. Believing it to be one of the optimum strategies for organisations, Levitt proposed that a limitation in variety could ultimately be imposed upon the world's consumers who, no doubt, are becoming more homogenised through technology and communication. Critical of those firms that

respond to regional or national differences, Levitt believed that they would ultimately lose their competitive edge in the global marketplace. In light of this strategy-centric view, the idea of reaping benefits through economies of scale could, in theory, be appealing to a number of organisations competing within this global bazaar; however, the question of whether homogenisation is, as Levitt states, merely a consequence of convergence exposes the limitation of his theory and serves to overlook the intricacies of the homogenisation process in practice.

2.1.2.2 Barber's 'Jihad vs. McWorld'

So far, the work of Ritzer presents the understanding of globalisation through the prism of rationalization as cultural imperialism. Extending this line of thought, the commodity thesis posits that it is brands and goods which have become the agents of imperialism within this new global system. One prominent conceptualisation of homogenisation and the cultural imperialism thesis has also been presented by Howes (1996) as *coca-colonization* (see also Hannerz, 1992) which, simply put, is the process of colonization of the non-Western world through the institution of new regimes of consumption. The usage of the brand Coca-Cola represents an amalgam of symbolic meanings associated with the US which have been circulated around the world through a uniform marketing strategy to sell a packaged, consumable symbol of the American dream. In a similar vein Thompson's (2004) work on *brandscapes* is particularly relevant here as it refers to "consumers' active constructions of personal meanings and lifestyle orientations from symbolic resources provided by an array of brands" (p.632), making the

brandscape a cultural system which shapes consumer lifestyles and identities by functioning as a cultural model that consumers act, think and feel through.

Barber (1995) in his thought provoking text 'Jihad vs. McWorld' talks of the way in which standardisation is transforming the world into a uniform market; bland and undifferentiated. He goes on to note how "a busy portrait of onrushing economic, technological, and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity…fast music, fast computers, and fast food [are] pressing nations into one homogenous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment and commerce" (Barber, 1995, cited in Lechner and Boli, 2000:21). For Barber, McWorld is a product of Americanised popular culture which has infiltrated itself into many other cultures of the world; however, Barber borrows the Islamic term *Jihad* to explain how the colonising tendencies of the processes of McWorld have served to provoke cultural and political resistance. Seen as operating with equal strengths in opposite directions, McWorld and Jihad "produce their contraries and need one another" (ibid: 22). Barber uses the term Jihad to express a form of resistance which is designed to repel the homogenising forces of the west, however, both of the concepts, as Barber notes, work against a participatory form of democracy.

2.1.2.3 Critiques of Homogenisation Views

Just as Appadurai notes that there is an occurrence of deterritorialization, it is equally valid to imply the process of re-territorialization, where mobilities may reproduce spaces. The central point that Heyman and Campbell's (2009) criticism raises is that

"mobility does not obliterate geography but rather forms an ineluctable element of constitutive and processual geography" (p.138). Their second most prominent critique raised is in relation to the tension between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation in the contemporary world. The two concepts, it is argued, are not opposed tendencies as such, but are simultaneous, mutually reinforcing tendencies. What, at the outset, may seem to be a flow of 'sameness', the reception of this flow, be it in the form of capital or media, may aid the development of micro-level difference. In light of what has already been discussed so far, globalisation of culture, as Appadurai states, is not the same as its homogenisation, however, the processes of globalisation utilises many of the homogenising techniques which "are absorbed into local political and cultural economies" (ibid: 42). The dynamic of local and global is important for understanding how globalisation actually works; Iwabuchi (2002:44) writes of how "the unevenness of global interconnectedness should go beyond global-local binary opposition [and] the operation of global cultural power can only be found in local practice". A significant proportion of literature has concentrated upon diasporic cultures and identity as an integral facet of the movements associated with global flows. However, I would like to concentrate upon Appadurai's process of absorption within local cultures as a form of 'glocalisation', a "complex interaction of the global and the local characterised by cultural borrowing" (Steger, 2003: 75) resulting in a form of cultural hybridity.

Cultures are borrowing, diversifying and connecting (MacGregor Wise, 2008: 27). There have been a plethora of examples which have traced this phenomenon, for example: Indians enjoying Chinese cuisine, Japan and China's love of pizza, Amazonian Indians wearing Nike shoes and Palestinian youth sporting the latest

Chicago Bulls t-shirts (Pidd, 2007; Steger, 2003). Steger (2003: 70) uses the term "pessimistic hyperglobalisers" to categorise those advocates of world sameness; he goes on to describe that this homogenised culture is that of popular culture which has been "underwritten by a Western culture industry based in New York, Hollywood, London and Milan" (ibid). The proponents of the cultural homogenisation thesis argue that it is the hegemony of the western world through mass media and consumer products which is seen to be overwhelming to more "vulnerable cultures" (ibid: 71). This idea is further fuelled by Sklair (1991: 75-81) who writes of a culture of consumerism which is fast becoming driven by symbols, images, aesthetics of lifestyles and self-image, ultimately standardising tastes and desires.

Cultural imperialism, as noted by McGregor Wise (2008:34), argues that while the old political empires have crumbled, "the western nations still control the symbolic and cultural world by controlling the mass media". The cultural imperialism thesis assumes that due to the western domination of media it is almost inevitable that the world will become homogenised and will begin to look the same wherever one goes. Typical examples of this include international tourist hotels, fast food outlets and popular media channels such as CNN and MTV. The threat to local culture and sovereignty through the creation of new symbolic expressions has been a point of contention amongst many theorists who talk of globalisation as homogenisation; however, the notion that these flows are unidirectional and flow predominantly from the 'west to the rest' raises doubts amongst those sceptical of the homogenisation debate. As noted by Liebes and Katz (1990:v), "theorists of cultural imperialism assume that hegemony is pre-packaged in Los Angeles, shipped out to the global village, and unwrapped in innocent minds". This somewhat naïve portrait ignores the possibility of flows moving in other parts of

the world, for example, the surge in popularity for Japanese soap operas in mainland China (termed J- dramas) (McGregor Wise, 2008: 40) and the popularity of Bollywood films amongst the Fiji Indian and African communities.

2.1.3   Cultural Heterogenisation / Hybridisation Theory

Zelizer (1999) writes of how consumer differentiation should not be confused with segregation and posits that "the same consumer products can have at the same moment universal and local meaning". It is this very notion of the global at the level of the local which has been overlooked by those theorists termed 'hyperglobalisers'. Anthropologist Richard Wilk (1995) argues how cultural hegemony has changed. He notes how global capitalism is no longer promoting homogeneity or trying to produce one product to cater for all markets. He believes that the objective of global capitalism today is to promote difference, however, only those differences which can be packaged and sold and are not looked upon as a threat. By promoting a limited range of difference, it limits the range of actions available to people; Wilk refers to this as *structures of common difference*. These structures are ones imposed upon activities which standardise their execution. One of Wilk's primary examples of this was the use of beauty pageants in Belize as a platform for politics, where "local differences in culture, aesthetics, and politics are exhibited (and compete) through a series of local, regional, and national contests.

Appadurai (2000) reinforces a notion of difference with regard to the heterogenisation thesis; he asserts that many of the classic arguments concerning homogenisation and

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heterogenisation fall short of providing a fuller explanation of how global flows are indigenised, for example, through music, clothing or housing styles. He rejects the notion that there is one cultural nucleus such as the USA, which becomes a centre to a periphery of 'other' countries, and instead, talks of the multiplicity of centres and how each periphery also becomes the centre of yet another periphery. Adding to this idea are Sinclair *et al* (1996, cited in Lechner and Boli, 2000), who instead of being concerned with the image of the west at the centre dominating the peripheral 'third world', place emphasis upon the world as distinct regions which each house their own dynamics and global ties. To borrow from Roland Robertson (1992), global cultural flows can also be seen as helping to reinvigorate local cultural niches, and in light of this, Sinclair *et al*'s discovery that USA imports in Latin America were short lived and soon replaced by local products (Sinclair et al, 1996: 301) firmly replaces the 'local' back into globalisation. They go on to note how "the western optic through which the cultural imperialism thesis was developed literally did not see these non-western systems of regional exchange, nor understand what they represented" (ibid: 302-303).

As a complex interaction of the global and the local (Steger, 2003), the process of *glocalisation* is characterised by forms of cultural borrowing which, arguably, translate themselves into various forms of hybridity. The term '*glocalisation*', Robertson (1995) notes, has been linked to the Japanese term *dochakuka,* the agricultural principle of adapting one's farming techniques to local conditions. This form of adaptation or localisation involves the construction of differentiated consumers as well as the invention of consumer traditions. As noted above, it seems problematic to posit hybridity into binary categories of 'sameness' or 'difference'; this point is supported further by Robertson (1995: 29) when noting that there is a widespread tendency, with

regard to the relationship between the global and the local, which assumes that "we live in a world of local assertions against globalising trends, a world in which the very idea of locality is sometimes cast as a form of opposition or resistance to the hegemonic global".

In sum, this section aimed to provide a review of the extant literature on globalisation. Based on the above discussions, it could be concluded that globalisation is a multi-faceted concept with definitions emanating from various academic arenas: marketing, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. The dimensions of globalisation are seen to span over socio-cultural and political domains respectively. Consumer behaviour in light of globalisation requires an understanding of how these interconnected elements affect an individual's identity and consumption choices. Having drawn, in part, a theoretical framework for this thesis, the following section will discuss the impact of globalisation and its subsequent effects on culture and identity.

2.1.4   Consumer Culture Theory

Many consumer culture theory studies have highlighted how practices of consumption play a significant role in consumers' negotiation of role and identity transitions (Bonsu and Belk, 2003; McAlexander et al, 1993; McCracken, 1986; Ozanne, 1992 and Schouten, 1991), however, as Arnould and Thompson (2005) note, consumer culture theory research has emphasised productive aspects of consumption and "explores how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meaning encoded in advertisements, brands, retail...to manifest their particular personal and social circumstances [furthering] their identity and lifestyle goals" (p.871) (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Mick

and Buhl, 1992). Having worked through the various definitions of globalisation and situating culture's importance for the study of global flows, this sub-section will aim to present a definition of the notion of consumption and consumer culture which I will employ in my study. As will be demonstrated, I wish to situate this thesis within the domain of consumer culture theory (CCT) as articulated by Arnould and Thompson (2005). CCT has been defined by the American scholars Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson as "referring to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning" (Ibid: 868), where heterogeneity and the conceptualisation of culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning and action (Geertz, 1983) is of central importance.

An emphasis on interdisciplinary research and the pursuit of exploring how consumers actively rework and transform symbolic meaning positions CCT as helping to illuminate the embodied and experiential aspects of the consumption. More specifically, then, CCT is "an emergent theoretical program that addresses the complex dynamics between consumer identity projects; popular culture; marketplace structures; emergent socio-historic patterning of consumption; and marketplace ideologies" (Arnould, 2006: 605). Consumer research inspired by this construct generally addresses the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption and has been, by the authors, segmented into four predominant research 'domains': consumer identity projects; marketplace cultures; Sociohistoric patterns of consumption and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers interpretive strategies.

As a brief overview of the definitions of the central terms, consumption, as noted by Slater (2006) is always and everywhere a cultural process; at its most fundamental level, in consuming we do not simply reproduce our physical existence, but also reproduce culturally specific, meaningful ways of life. "In mundane consumption we construct social identities and relations out of social resources with which we engage as skilled social agents" (ibid:4). Consumer culture, on the other hand – or a culture *of* consumption – is unique and specific and "is in important respects the culture of the modern West" (ibid: 8). In light of this, consumer culture presents a social arrangement which binds the relationship between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend. Consumer culture, therefore, "is not the only way which consumption is carried out and everyday life produced; but it is certainly the dominant way and possesses a practical scope and ideological depth" (ibid: 9). The table below traces a number of the precursors of CCT:

Table 2: A Brief History towards CCT

PERIODS	NOTABLE AUTHORS
1980 – 1990: Paradigm Shift	Anderson, Belk, Hirschman, Holbrook, Holman, Levy, O'Guinn, Olsen, Peter, Rook, Sherry, Solomon, Wallendorf, Zaltman
1990 - 2000: Exploration	Askegaard, Bouchet, Elliot, Ger, Heisley, Holt, Joy, McAlexander, Mick,Murray, Ozanne, Otnes, Penaloza, Price, Schouten, Scott, Stern, Thompson
2000 – current: Theoretical and Strategic Codification	Allen, Baker, Crockett, Fournier, Geisler, Grayson, Kates, Kozinets, Maclaran, Muniz, Schau, Schroeder

Source: Arnould (2004) ACR Doctoral Consortium – Lecture Slides

From the table, it is fair to say that CCT falls primarily within the field of consumer research that addresses the sociocultural, experimental, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption where much of the theoretical foundations of CCT find their roots in Europe, for example, through the work of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Foucault and De Certeau. In addition to these, other notable sources of CCT have been evidenced through the work of McCracken, Turner, Simmel and Baudrillard. Through a predominantly post-structuralist approach, Baudrillard's work concerning the 'semiotic field' concerns itself with the system of signs and meaning in the form of images of objects, words and signs, and how the interplay of these systems are constituted within a complex web of meaning. This notion of meaning holds significant weight in light of the discussions presented earlier in the chapter and for the focus of the study. As the thesis attempts to draw attention to the reception of these symbolic forms through the experiences of consumption, an examination of the webs of meaning, constructed by the consumers through utilising multitudes of signs and symbols embedded within the very products, images and lifestyles they consume, is an important lens through which the practices of consumption can be seen to aid the development of unique identities.

Following from this, a second notable precursor to CCT is the work of McCracken (1990) and the *movement of meaning*. In his influential essay on the 'Meaning Manufacture and Movement in the World of Goods', McCracken notes that one of the great limitations of a number of approaches to the study of cultural meaning of consumer goods is the failure to observe that this meaning is constantly in transit. He notes specifically that "the mobile quality of cultural meaning in a consumer society should help to illuminate certain aspects of goods, consumption and modern society.

This perspective asks us to see consumers and consumer goods as the way-stations of meaning" (p.72), and suggests that meaning resides in the culturally constituted world, the consumer good and the individual consumer. Although McCracken's analysis is important in light of it being a precursor theory to contemporary notions of CCT, this trajectory of the movement of cultural meaning has been attributed to "modern developed societies" (p.89).

A final addition to the current discussion is the work of anthropologist Victor Turner (1953, 1957, 1969) and his theory of 'ritual action'. Developed from Turner's doctoral dissertation amongst the Ndembu tribe in Africa, his work was initially the study of the mechanisms of resolving social conflicts in Ndembu society which soon became transplanted into a wider sphere of culture. Turner (1969:19) defined ritual as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers." The symbol became the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the properties of ritual behaviour (Deflem, 1991), where symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events or spatial units (Turner, 1967). What made Turner's work so distinctive was his emphasis on religion as still exercising influence within 'modern' societies; ritual, religious beliefs, and symbols are in Turner's perspective, essentially related and in sum, his definition of ritual "refers to ritual performances involving manipulation of symbols that refer to religious beliefs" (Deflem, 1991: 5). Deploying his ideas in to 'modern societies', Turner argued that rituals in modern industrial society are "about matters of ultimate concern and about those entities believed to have emunicated, clarified and mediated a culture's bonding axioms to its present members" (Turner, 1976: 504-505). His work

continues to stimulate research on ritual to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of ritual's role in contemporary society today.

Why, then, is an account of the precursors of CCT important for the study? What these particular writers show is the dominance of inter-disciplinarity of theories which have been used to prop up contemporary CCT studies. The emphasis of the studies above has been upon signs, meanings and the notion of ritual which, taken as one, produces a unique frame through which individuals lives can be examined in light of consumption. Specifically, it is the work of Turner who, in my view, makes a unique contribution but whose approach towards the development of his theory has been lost in transition. Turner's theory of ritual action was born out of his context of study with the Ndembu tribe and introduced, with amendments, back into the modern, industrial world. Studies of globalisation, as was noted earlier in the section, have been highly criticised for being theories of consumer culture as lived in the US/UK and subsequently placed as grand narratives upon the Eastern consumer experience. I urge a revision of Turner's important contribution utilising his context of study to develop culturally-grounded, context specific versions of ritual. Mirroring this approach, it is my intention in the research to utilise the rich context of India to provide context specific versions of the consumer experience as unique and not merely a projection of consumer culture in the West. This is by no means an exhaustive account of the full spectrum of the possible precursors of CCT, yet the constraints of this review means that a full historical analysis would be beyond the scope of the research enquiry. The following sub-section will move to presenting a more detailed account of recent studies in the field of CCT and its central theoretical identifiers.

2.1.5 Definitions of Consumption and Consumer Culture

Consumption is seen to be "a member of a family of essentially contested topics including 'the' consumer, consumer society, consumer culture, and consumerism" (Aldridge, 2003: 5), therefore, definitions are multifaceted and many "nebulous epithets" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 868) have come to characterise consumer culture theory. Arnould and Thompson (2005) reject notions of consumer culture theory becoming a grand narrative, stating that "it [should] refer to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meaning." Extending this line of thought is Lury (2001) who purports that the "use or appropriation of an object is more often than not both a monument of consumption and production, of undoing, of destruction and construction" (p.1). These linkages between the cycles of production and consumption help to place consumer culture within the realm of conversion, or more specifically "the manner in which people convert things to ends of their own" (Strathern, 1994). Consumption has traditionally been viewed as a completion of the process of production, marginalising the importance of other forms of exchange; consumer culture, on the other hand, explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and "conceptualises an inter-connected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that groups use" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 869) to help make collective sense of their selves, their identities and their lives.

Alan Aldridge (2003:2) notes how Raymond Williams' (1976) work, '*Keywords*' helps to explain the way in which the term *consumption* gained its contemporary meaning. The term 'customer' implied a continuing personal relationship with a supplier which,

Williams (ibid) argued, was gradually replaced by 'consumer', an abstract figure in an impersonal market. This consumer, purports Aldridge, has needs that are created by people who then allege to satisfy them; the world which is then inhabited by the consumer is inevitably one which is "saturated with advertising" (2003: 2). Consumers and consumption have become terms through which human relationships to all manner of goods and services have become conceptualised. In addition to this, Aldridge notes how through these associations, consumers and consumerism have become "ammunition for cultural critics".

One notable critic, Bauman (1990), brings to light the concept of the 'consumer attitude' and identifies five core elements as helping to define its meaning. Amongst these defining characteristics, the notion that consumption becomes a form of work where the consumer is seen to participate in 'project self' places consumption firmly within the sphere of identity construction, or to further this notion, the possibility of being able to construct multiple identities. These possibilities translate themselves into commodified choices whereby "the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences" (Bocock, 1993: 50). In light of this, the consumer attitude, therefore, is a way in which consumers can acquire, by exchanging money and through the process of shopping, the solutions to life's "problems" (Bauman, 1990). Ultimately, the transition highlighted here is one where individuals do not merely consume, but have become consumers. Consumerism, therefore, embodies the collection of practices which could be deemed as value laden and sacred, where the undercurrents of the practice mimic those of a religious order. Within the context of my study, the notion of purchasing for life's problems is seemingly at a stark contrast to a culture, where historically, problems were seen to be 'prayed away'. What could potentially be of

interest here is how far, if at all, the 'becoming' of consumers in the Indian context produces a literal overlap of the sacred into the sphere of consumer goods.

So far, for a number of scholars, consumption is viewed as a culture through its association with a variety of socio-cultural, economic and political arenas as well as through various frames, such as symbols, identity, society and power. However, consumption has also been deemed as an act which replaces the collective with a notion of the individualistic leading to an erosion of community. A shift from the collective to the individual has meant that "consumption is endemically and irredeemably lonely, even at such moments as it is conducted in company with others" (Bauman, 2000:165). Consumer society is now seen to be regulated by aesthetics, not ethics (Aldridge, 2003: 30) and instead of adhering to the Protestant ethic of planning for long-term prospects; consumers are now seen to seize opportunities as they arise. Elliot's (2001) notion of the 'modern' self characterises the way in which individuals have been characterised by disciplined long-term planning (p.144-151), however, this "self mastery" according to Aldridge (2003:30) is all part of a larger illusion. It would be fair to pose the question of how far this idea of the erosion of community holds true for the Indian context. For a country built upon notions and strengths of collectivity, has consumer culture become a pervasive catalyst for the rupture in the collective fabric of the sub continent? Or has consumer culture merely featured as a scapegoat of an inevitable social shift in contemporary Indian society?

Lury's (2001) seminal text on consumer culture, demonstrated how "the circulation of things and culture are inextricably interconnected in society, and that the nature of these interconnections is both complex and historically changing" (p.10). Douglas and

Isherwood (1979) support this notion by suggesting that the utility and value of goods can almost always be framed within a cultural context, making them the "visible part of culture" (1979:66), further illustrating how the functional value of goods is now overridden by its social performance, turning them into markers of social identity. Within this culture of consumption, consumers are, to paraphrase Douglas and Isherwood (1979), striving not only to access but also control cultural meanings through the system of symbolic exchange.

In light of this, the marketplace provides consumers with a plethora of possibilities through which they are able to construct individual identities (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995), however, Firat (1999) speaks of a detachment between individuality and creativity causing a disenchantment of individuals' lives (p.290). According to Firat, the options available to individuals through which they 'pick and mix' their identities, merely helps individuals fulfil their roles as consumers, making consumption a socially controlled "break from creative activity" (ibid). In contrast, Colin Campbell (1989) developed an alternative view of consumption; his belief stemmed from the idea that whilst people were fulfilling their individual desires and pleasures, consumption becomes a self-directed, creative process which involves shared cultural values which have evolved historically. The debate between consumption and agency has been documented widely, yet the 'contemporary condition' is that human lives have been moulded into spheres of consumption in the private domain, and production in the public (Firat, 1999: 292). Agency, therefore, is seen to exist in the presentation of the new and not in that which has already been produced. Ultimately, consumers, according to Firat, become increasingly reliant upon the market to produce goods which cater to

their desires- desires which may or may not have been acknowledged or even conceived of.

The work of Howes (1996) merits comment here. His seminal text entitled *Cross Cultural Consumption* presents a number of studies which trace the local cultural dimensions of global flows. For example, the work of Allison James is especially important in light of the current study. Although her examination centres on the global and local identities in contemporary British food culture, at its core the study examines the consumption, appropriation and indigenization of foreign cuisine in addition to observing the production of its local variants. Through the lens of creolization, James posits that shared patterns of consumption mark our difference from others and map on to other signs of difference; food consumption practices provides just one example through which there is a confirmation of the wider differences between cultural orders. Also in support of this view is Hannerz (1990) who suggests that the world of global culture should be understood through organisation of diversity as opposed to a mere replication of uniformity. In sum, James' study noted how in "embodying identities in a multiplex fashion, they offer ways of embracing Otherness, of confronting the global through the localized, even personal, food styles and, conversely, a way of living a local life with and through global imagery" (p.92). Globalisation, studied in this light, is not just a matter of the movement of goods between nations, but incorporates a complex interplay of meanings which individuals employ to make statements about who they are and how they want to be placed in the world. The relevance of James' work in light of this thesis presents one representation of the cultural appropriation of global flows in the form of food consumption, yet more specifically, the interest lies in the construction

of identities and difference *within* group associations and how the global resources are utilised at the level of the local to re-create meaning and, at times, cultural advantages.

To take lead from the work of Arnould and Thompson (2005), the remainder of this section will focus upon what they believe to be the four predominant domains through which consumer culture research has been illuminated: consumer identity projects; marketplace cultures; the sociohistoric patterning of consumption and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies. It should be noted, however, that over the past two decades many of the strategies adopted by a number of consumer researchers who have published within leading journals (JCR, CMC, EJM, Research in Consumer Behaviour) bare a thread of commonality where the experiential, socio-cultural and symbolic facets of consumption remain at the forefront.

2.1.6 **Domains of CCT**

Although consumer culture research addresses various issues concerned with each of these named facets, a neat typology is not always conceivable and nor could it cover the vast array of topics covered by CCT researchers. However, identification in part needs to be made in order to, as Arnould and Thompson (2005) note, help bring theoretical perspectives into the foreground. It should be stressed that the four domains emphasised in their 2005 article "are broad and can be applied in a very flexible way that should be able to encompass a wide spectrum of theoretical questions and concerns" (Arnould and Thompson, 2007: 9). It may be so that a given study could consider all four of these

domains, however, the primary focus for a given CCT study may centre upon one of these alone. In the subsequent sub-sections, an examination of each of these domains will be presented in addition to compiling and summarising a number of relevant CCT research studies over the past two decades which have been read and summarised to help illustrate the nature of research conducted within each respective domain.

2.1.6.1   <u>Consumer Identity Projects</u>

Consumer identity projects highlight the co-constitutive, co-productive elements of consumption where consumers are seen to build a sense of self through utilising marketer-generated materials. The marketplace has become "a preeminent source of mythic and symbolic resources through which people...participate in the market as full-fledged consumers" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871) where they in turn, construct their own individual narratives of identity. Within this domain, the consumer is generally viewed as a *maker* and *seeker* of identity where the role of objects and possessions, as a contributing entity towards the construction and preservation of identity, is powerful and pervasive (Mehta and Belk, 1991). To illustrate, Belk (1988) introduced the notion of the 'extended self' where an individual's identity becomes shaped by, yet not exclusively, the objects which they possess. Belk later noted how concepts of the self differ cross-culturally (1991) and in his paper examining the possessions of Indian immigrants in the United States notes how "...compared with the Western self, the Indian self is thought to be less individualistic and susceptible to the Cartesan dualism of self as both subject and object" (p.399).

Schau and Gilly (2003) took this notion of self presentation into the realm of the internet, or alternatively termed, the consumer- mediated environment. They suggest that consumers can now present themselves using digital rather than physical referents (p.385). They also note that although some consumer researchers have incorporated symbols and signs in the set of materiality they study (see Mick, 1986) these symbols and signs almost always refer to physical objects or places. This form of self-expression through these inherently "discursive places" (Kozinets, 2002) transcends the seemingly more traditional studies of tangible possessions. Supporting this, Drucker (1996) proclaims that consumer-mediated environments "collapse the border between material and immaterial, the real and the possible" (p.12) rendering these distinctions irrelevant. Possessions and the 'making of one's own' has been documented through a more domestic lens by Buckley (1971), he describes the way in which possessions help individuals fuse house to self concept and familiarity with possessions and placing these objects within the home has become a consumer ritual.

McCracken's (1986) notion of movement, as the figure below depicts, helps to underpin much of what this domain of consumer identity projects is concerned with.

41
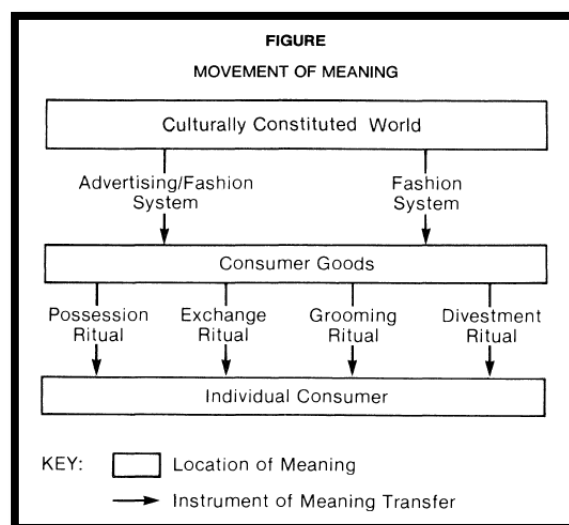
Although, and as noted earlier, consumer culture theory research has focused upon a plethora of various aspects associated with each of Arnould and Thompson's categorisation of domains, the movement of meaning helps to develop a cohesion of concepts and how they collectively form an overall understanding of the process of meaning and identity. The table below provides a summary of key consumer culture research studies which predominantly fall within the domain of consumer identity projects. The reference to 'context' in the tables highlights which part of the world the study has been grounded in:

Table 3 : CCT Research: *Consumer Identity Projects*

AUTHOR(S)	DATE	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH	CONTEXT	JOURNAL
Russell Belk	1988	Introducing the notion of the 'extended self' and how an individual's identity is co-constructed through the material possessions, people and places which surround them.	USA	JCR
Grant McCracken	1986	A theoretical analysis of the movement of cultural meaning and how meaning is transferred from one location in the system to another.	USA/WEST	JCR
Raj Mehta & Russell Belk	1991	Focus on identity transitions amongst Indian immigrants into the USA. An examination of the meanings of favourite possessions in helping to secure identity	USA/ DIASPORA	JCR
Hope Schau & Mary Gilly	2003	The role of web spaces and consumer mediated environments in the construction of identities. The issue of why consumers create personal web pages and the strategies they have deployed in achieving a specific type of 'virtual' self presentation.	WEST	JCR
Elizabeth Hirschman	1983	Focus upon fantasy and escapism where consumption has become a	USA	Journal of social

		realm where consumers are able to escape from their 'real' lives and engage in hedonic behaviour.		Psychology
Robert Schindler & Morris Holbrook	2003	An examination into the early experiences of nostalgia. Focus upon how popular fashions, music and films during a consumer's youth can influence their preference for certain goods. The choice of purchase illustrates a re-construction of nostalgic memory through the act of consumption.	USA	Psychology and Marketing
Elizabeth Hirschman & Morris Holbrook	1982	Focus on the multisensory, emotive and hedonic aspects of product usage. An examination into the emotional arousal generated through the usage of products and how the hedonic response helps to develop a sense of consumer self-actualisation.	USA	JCR
Albert Muniz & Thomas O'Guinn	2001	Focus upon brand communities as non-geographically bound and based on structured sets of social relations. An examination into the ways in which identities are constructed and marked by a shared consciousness of rituals, traditions and ideas where the brand forms the hub.	USA	JCR
Ronald Hill	1991	An examination into the material possessions of the homeless. Through the loss of material possessions, homeless women are seen to keep/acquire certain objects to help construct their own sense of self.	USA	JCR
Douglas Holt	2002	An examination of 'postmodern' consumer culture which is seen to be premised upon the pursuit of personal sovereignty through brands. Brands now provide individuals with the means of expressing their identities as 'citizen-artists'	WEST	JCR
Elizabeth Hirschman	1980	Consumers are seen to use products as a way of pursuing creativity in everyday life. Functionality becomes secondary to novelty seeking and consumer creativity.	WEST	JCR

This particular domain links directly the cultural facet of globalisation discussed earlier in the section; although the studies presented do not speak of global flows per se, the underlying assumption of the identity component constructed through the meaning of goods, images and lifestyles is one such area which will be developed throughout this project. The addition of globalisation into the CCT domain of identity projects is an interesting one in that it can potentially produce a more nuanced representation of how the products and images developed in one country have profound impacts in others. This raises the central question of what happens when the culture in which a product or image is formed, is no longer the culture in which it circulates. I believe this domain of CCT is important in helping to provide insightful answers to this enquiry.

2.1.6.2 Marketplace Cultures

An examination of marketplace cultures helps to illuminate some of the more distinctive features of cultures and the marketplace traversing. Here, consumers are seen as producers of culture and the predominant concern within this domain is how consumption is helping to reconfigure these cultural blueprints (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Within this domain of consumer culture theory, the predominant focus of investigation has been upon the collective understanding of symbolic meanings of goods within a given subculture or community and how these consumers 'practice' the art of consuming within their respective factions. This particular domain has been built upon Maffesoli's (1996) initial ideas of 'neo-tribalism' to understand the ways in which the forces of globalisation and socioeconomic transformation have eroded the

traditional notion of sociality and have become replaced with a form of autonomy in lifestyle choices and individualism fuelled by the pursuit for personal distinctiveness.

As observed by Thornton (1996) much of the existing research conducted on marketplace cultures has focussed upon youth subcultures and the pervasiveness of the 'tribal' form within consumer culture theory. Examples of this include fandom (Kozinets, 2001), alternative and counterculture lifestyles (Kates, 2000) and temporary consumption communities (Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa, 1998). In Britain some of the most influential work on the study of sub-cultures to date has emanated from the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies established in the 1970's at Birmingham University. As noted by Goulding et al (2002), much of this work is seen to be heavily grounded in the Chicago School of critical analysis and the position adopted by these scholars was to locate these sub-cultural movements in a frame of social resistance and as a reaction against the dominant hierarchies of control. Notable examples of these studies include the "Teddy Boys" (Fyvel, 1963), Punk rockers (Frith, 1980) and drug culture (Willis, 1990; 1996); the commonality amongst these studies is that they "identify social class, in particular the powerless of the working class, as catalysts for the development of these sub-cultures" (Goulding et al, 2002: 262).

As sub-cultures are becoming increasingly complex sites where consumers are able to perform their own creativity and self-expression (see Bennett, 1999), the notion that it is mere resistance or revolt from societal norms which have provoked an emergence of sub-cultures is insufficient. The pluralistic, shifting sensibilities of style need to be accounted for (Goulding et al, 2002) to grasp a fuller understanding of sub-cultures in the contemporary setting. The work of McAlexander and Schouten (1995) concerning

biker behaviour, for example, has helped to bring the notion of sub-cultural forms into the contemporary setting and more importantly into contemporary marketing thought. Sub-cultures of consumption facilitate the consumer in defining "their symbolic boundaries through an ongoing opposition to dominant lifestyle norms and mainstream consumer sensibilities" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 874). The table below outlines some of the key research conducted within this domain as well as providing a brief summary of the nature of each of the studies:

Table 4 : CCT Research: *Marketplace Cultures*

AUTHOR(S)	DATE	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH	CONTEXT	JOURNAL
John Schouten & James McAlexander	1995	An ethnography of sub-cultural consumption as a basis for interaction and social cohesion amongst Harley Davidson motorcycle owners. Emphasis is placed upon the use of objects and shared meaning amongst the owners (subculture)	USA	JCR
Richard Celsi Randall Rose Thomas Leigh	1993	A sociocultural approach exploring high risk consumption, in particular, skydiving. The risk-taking behaviour of these consumers becomes 'normalised' and intrinsic to their identity construction.	USA	JCR
Christina Goulding Avi Shankar Richard Elliot	2002	Focus on rave culture and the examination of the consumer experience which is seen to be linked to a series of behaviours relating to fragmentation and identity. These behaviours include narcissistic identity, the emergence of new communities and the need for escape and prolonged hedonism – which all help to construct a specific identity.	UK	CMC
Robert Kozinets	2001	The meanings associated with Star Trek's culture of consumption. An examination of the cultural and sub-cultural construction of meanings and practices as they are negotiated	USA	JCR

		from mass media images and objects. Individuals find solace in fantasy worlds as a form of utopia where they are able to construct their own realities.		
Craig Thompson Maura Troester	2002	Focus on natural health microculture- an analysis of the natural health value system and the micro cultural meanings through which it is constructed. Developing the traditional Rokeachian view, this conventional theory of consumer value system does not provide sufficient explanation for consumer's value systems. The analysis follows the narratives that natural health consumers use to articulate the value manifest in their wellness oriented consumption	USA	JCR
Robert Kozinets	2002	An ethnography exploring the emancipator dynamics of the Burning Man project. This event brings together communities of people who practice gift-giving and volunteering as signs of avoiding commercialised lifestyles as an anti-market collective. The Burning Man project has become a hypercommunity where divergent social logics are practiced through a temporary 'escape' from the market.	USA	JCR
Steven Kates	2002	Focus on gay subcultures. Emphasis is upon the deeper elements embedded within subcultures and the socio-cultural, ideological and political implications associated within them.	Canada	JCR
Russell Belk Jannen costa	1998	Mountain Men: the construction of temporary consumption enclaves focussed upon re-enacting the American West. Traditions are invented to create a mythic and alternate reality where participation in this transformative play reinforces a set of romanticised beliefs.	USA	JCR

I feel this domain of CCT is especially important in light of the literature on globalisation and for the research study. The development of difference was discussed extensively in relation to the work of Howes (1996), Hannerz and James (1996) in the earlier section of the chapter. Although this domain concerns itself with formations of distinct 'subcultures' and 'tribes', at its most fundamental level, what I wish to utilise from these studies is the *intra*-country notion of distinction and difference. The central question which could be raised from integrating this domain into the work on globalisation concerns the extent to which global flows serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze, if at all, current markers of distinction within a given society.

2.1.6.3 The Sociohistoric Patterns of Consumption

This third dimension which concerns itself with the socio-historic patterning of consumption, addresses the institutional and social structures which are seen to influence consumption, for example, hierarchies, class, gender, family and community. One of the major enquiries of this dimension is '*what is consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained*?' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 874). Consumer culture theory researchers examine the relationship between consumers' experiences, belief systems, and practices within these social structures; examples of this has included the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2000) on brand communities where some of the more traditional markers of community are retained yet these same communities formulate explicit attempts to build community through the consumption of commercial brands.

Arnould and Thompson (2005) also stress postassimilationist consumer research as being another central 'genre' which falls within this domain; they note in particular the

work of Askegaard et al (2005) and hypercultural ethnic identities as well as the work of Oswald (1999) as being characteristic of Sociohistoric patterning of consumption. Coupled with the notion of globalisation, the dynamics associated within this domain have made this area of enquiry not only more appealing for consumer culture research (Arnould and Thompson, 2007), but has also placed further nuances regarding the implications upon micro and macro environments. The table below illustrates some of the key research conducted within this domain:

Table 5 : CCT Research: *The Sociohistoric Patterning of Consumption*

AUTHOR(S)	DATE	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH	CONTEXT	JOURNAL
Melanie Wallendorf & Eric Arnould	1999	Consumption rituals on Thanksgiving: the day marks and proves to participants their ability to meet basic needs abundantly through consumption. This day also helps Americans to construct a social culture which encompasses a cultural discourse which brings together a negotiation of micro (domestic) and macro (national) issues.	USA	JCR
Eileen Fischer & Stephen Arnold	1990	Focus on gender roles and Christmas gift shopping. Women are seen to be more involved regarding the task of gift-shopping than men who view this activity more as 'play' than work.	USA	JCR
Julia Bristor Eileen Fischer	1993	An application of three distinct feminist perspectives to critique scientific objectivity.	Lit Review	JCR
Lisa Penaloza	1994	Focus on consumer acculturation amongst Mexican immigrants. A critical examination of the consumption experiences of this group of individuals. Through drawing attention to the ways in which international movements of people, companies and products intersect within existing sub-cultural relations, this research highlights the complex dynamic	USA	JCR

		processes through which Mexican immigrants have adapted to the consumer environment in America.		
Michael Reilly & Melanie Wallendorf	1987	Focus on comparisons within food consumption and the differences between ethnicity, national identity, religion, income and minority status.	USA	JCR
Craig Thompson Diana Haytko	1997	Consumer's use of fashion discourses: research focussed on the way in which consumers, through fashion, inscribe their consumption behaviours. Consumers are able to generate personalised fashion narratives i.e. women become more involved in the 'fashioning' project, their appearance and physical attractiveness whereas men were found to have a relatively limited relationship with their identities and appearance.	USA	JCR
Raj Mehta & Russell Belk	1991	Focus on identity transitions amongst Indian immigrants into the USA. An examination of the meanings of favourite possessions in helping to secure identity	USA	JCR
Dannie Kjeldgaard Eric Arnould Sven Askegaard	2006	An analysis of global youth cultural consumption based upon an empirical study in Denmark and Greenland. Focus upon the structures of common difference which help to frame the data: identity, center-periphery, and reference to youth cultural consumption styles. Youth are seen to reconstruct their 'authentic' culture through a form of culture commodification.	Greenland & Denmark	JCR

An examination of the social structures which are seen to influence consumption is one of the central tenets of this thesis. Tracing through the context specific associations of consumption in the Indian context and the relationships formed with 'foreign' inflows of media, imagery and lifestyles, the position of women as consumers coupled with their consumer association with the 'immoral West' can potentially bring an insightful addition into the current debates within this domain of CCT. So far, there is a palpable

absence of the study of Indian consumers in the Indian context within the domains so far, making my study an important addition to the understanding of CCT and its workings in the East.

2.1.6.4 Mass-mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumer's Interpretive Strategies

Within this domain research centres upon the examination of consumer ideology and "systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend dominate interests in society" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Here, consumers are viewed as interpretive agents who participate in meaning-creating activities and may subscribe to the market-generated ideologies, as depicted in advertising and the mass media, or alternatively may decide to deviate away from this ideological imagery and seek alternative markers of identity. Consumers, in this vein, are viewed as active participants who are able to critically examine these ideologies as well as participate in their formation and maintenance. To illustrate this notion further, Murray (2002) brings to light two perspectives on symbolic consumption; one of these perspectives addresses 'sign experimentation' which purports consumption to be what Levy (1981) notes, as an "expressive movement". Through this movement, consumers are seen to construct a symbolic montage of desired statements or images with the aim of distinguishing themselves from alternative values and meanings (Murray, 2002:428).

Moving from the individual to society at large, consumer culture theory research within this domain sheds light upon the ways in which economic and cultural globalization

may impact consumer identity projects and the patterns of social interaction (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Through an in-depth reading of popular texts in the form of advertisements, films, and television programmes, consumer culture researchers have taken these texts as conveyors of marketplace ideologies where the consumer is fed emotionally-charged images which become unadulterated and fixed. What becomes coveted is the image of the idealised consumer living a particular lifestyle, all amidst the backdrop of popular commodities (ibid). Contrary to this, some of the consumer research conducted on the resistance regarding the reading of these popular texts considers the way in which "consumers bend advertisements to fit their life circumstances rather than feel a pressure to conform to a specific ideological representation" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 875). Elliot (1999) highlights how advertisements become a social resource where consumers collectively critique its meanings and Mick and Buhl (1992) have profiled the way in which consumers' life themes have shaped their readings of the advertisements. Characteristic of this domain, the notion of complete autonomy from the marketplace is not only viewed as illusory, but is also transitory. Escapism may become a technique utilised by the consumer to facilitate their temporary and localised need for detachment. The table below illustrates some of the key research conducted within this domain:

Table 6: CCT Research: *Mass-Mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers' Interpretive Strategies*

AUTHOR(S)	DATE	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH	CONTEXT	JOURNAL
Craig Thompson & Diana Haytko	1997	Consumer's use of fashion discourses: research focussed on the way in which consumers, through fashion, inscribe their consumption behaviours. Consumers are able to generate personalised fashion narratives	USA	JCR

		i.e. women become more involved in the 'fashioning' project, their appearance and physical attractiveness whereas men were found to have a relatively limited relationship with their identities and appearance.		
Jeff Murray	2002	Focus on the interpretation of fashion discourses through consumers' use of objects as signs.	USA	JCR
Douglas Holt	2002	An examination of 'postmodern' consumer culture which is seen to be premised upon the pursuit of personal sovereignty through brands. Brands now provide individuals with the means of expressing their identities as 'citizen-artists'	West	JCR
Robert Kozinets & Jay Handelman	2004	Consumer movements that seek ideological and cultural change: focus upon the anti-advertising, anti-Nike and anti-GE foods activist movements. Individuals utilise consumption to express their forms of resistance and ideological positions.	USA	JCR
David Crockett & Menalie Wallendorf	2004	The role of normative political ideology in consumer behaviour. A study of African American consumers living in a racially segregated area. The consumption experience of this group expresses their own social and political positions.	USA	JCR
Douglas Holt & Craig Thompson	2004	The pursuit of heroic masculinity through everyday consumption. American mass culture is seen to idealise the man-of-action hero and by using commodities to act out their emancipatory fantasies, men are able to symbolically rebel against identities tied to work and to family.	USA	JCR
Craig Thompson	2004	Marketplace mythology: an analysis of narratives that circulate in the natural health marketplace. Advertising is viewed as emancipatory for patients who feel the need to break the authoritarian dynamics of the traditional medical environment.	USA	JCR

Robin Coulter Linda Price Lawrence Feick	2003	Brand commitment in postsocialist central Europe. Prominent political-cultural discourses, cultural intermediaries, social influences, and life themes and projects collectively prompt product involvement. Within societies which are seen to shift from socialism to capitalism, consumption becomes a way in which women reconstruct their identities through access to alternative cosmetics etc.	Romania & Hungary	JCR
Lisa Penaloza	2001	Focus on cultural production at cattle trade show and rodeo. Consumers are seen to recreate western cultural meanings through their interactions with ranchers, animals and artefacts of western history. The use of the marketplace for creating and recreating cultural meaning.	USA	JCR
Eric Arnould	1989	Examination of the diffusion of innovation in consumer behaviour within the Niger republic. Consumption is seen to impact upon individuals perception of 'self' and in turn impacts upon the socio-cultural and political arenas of society.	Niger	JCR
Samuel Bonsu & Russell Belk	2003	Death ritual consumption in Ghana. An examination of the identity construction project post death; people in Ghana engaged in conspicuous ritual consumption in pursuit of newer social identities for the deceased and for themselves.	Ghana	JCR

2.1.7   Where Now? : Critique and Theoretical Positioning

Drawing heavily from the work of Arnould and Thompson (2005), and having reviewed

and summarised a selection of key consumer culture theory research within each of the

key domains, consumption is seen to be a historically bound mode of socio-cultural

practice which operates within the dynamics of various marketplaces. To reiterate the fundamentals of CCT research in light of my thesis, cultural meanings, consumer experiences and social dynamics have been held at the forefront of studies, where the investigation into how consumers consume (Holt, 1995) have provided a wealth of insight into the everyday consumption practices of individuals within various social settings. Although Arnould and Thompson refer to work of a community of mainly North American "interpretive" scholars, the contributions to the tradition have been limited in terms of Eastern focus. As interpretive scholars mature as an epistemic community, note Moisander et al (2009), it is important to allow for variation of geographical contexts to supplement existing theoretical advances in the field. Ultimately, my contribution to the theory of CCT aims to fill the clear absence of context-specific studies grounded in the East.

CCT research has, as noted by LaTour (1988), emerged in the liberatory glow of the sociology of scientific knowledge, and exposes the diversity between consumers as well as a shift away from any unified meaning of the practice of consumption. However, it is a concern, nonetheless, that cultural consumer research has been carried out, cited, and extended in such a way that "props up the universalizing treatments of consumer behaviour based on studies of US, white, upper-middle-class, college-educated consumers" (Moisander et al, 2009: 22). These universals are particularly problematic as they set a benchmark for what is deemed as 'normal' and exclude consumption phenomena which can be grounded in a number of localities across the globe. Additionally, a more subtle problem lies in "research conventions that extend North American constructs to other countries to show cultural differences, rather than begin with different consumption/market phenomena in developing theoretical constructs that

challenge the universal constructs" (ibid: 22; see also Venkatesh, 1995). My thesis centres upon the Indian consumer, situated in an Indian context and framed through socio-historic patterns of Indian culture.

Additionally, existing CCT research has stressed consumer agency and focussed much attention on those who are able to access consumer culture. Consumers at the periphery of consumer culture, who are able to access elements of it yet, are not able to fully participate in it, have rarely been incorporated into CCT studies. It is here that I wish to make it a point that as much as participation in consumer culture is vital for a fuller understanding of the workings of the phenomena, non-participation or limited participation should be regarded as equally insightful in light of the broader socio-cultural and socio-historic elements CCT claims to incorporate. Additionally, Arnould's paper in response to what he believes were misconceptions of CCT by other scholars also raises a number of key critiques of the theory, in particular the criticism that the primary differences between CCT and other traditions of research are methodological.

Whilst Arnould and Thompson (2005) recognise that CCT's methodological inclinations lean away from more positivistic approaches, they make the case that what differentiates CCT lies in "… terms of topics and phenomena examined rather than by the research methods used" (Arnould, 2006: 606). A further limitation that the authors raise is that CCT may inadvertently exclude some postmodern research topics as the CCT label does not emphasise "epistemological and paradigmatic issues" which are emphasised under the postmodern label. Similarly, the postmodern label also emphasises a critical stance towards the field, which, the authors note, is not the case with the label of CCT. The emphasis on criticism surrounding CCT research has also addressed the issue of

'academic branding' and the concerns of legitimising and institutionalising the domains presented by Arnould and Thompson (2005) or whether CCT researchers present a fascination for context at the expense of theory.

As can be conferred from the literature, extant research on CCT highlights the importance of how multiple realities help consumers construct their respective identities, yet Arnould and Thompson (2005) highlight a limitation within the broad spectrum of CCT research where the notion of the *moral constitution* of consumption is still within its theoretical infancy. Borrowing from Moisander et al, new forms of theoretical consumer research fashioned from multiple positions, such as religion, nation, race, class, gender and so on are needed to document alternative subject positions (ibid: 22). The current study on Indian consumers in the Indian context aims to address these shortcomings of the current CCT literature in bringing forward well-needed, non US/Euro-centric innovations in ontologies and epistemologies in addressing the nexus of social and market relations. The following section will now present to the reader a discussion of the context of study – India.

2.2   India: Women in an Emerging Consumer Culture

Having so far reviewed two of the central facets of the research, Globalisation and Consumer Culture Theory, this final section endeavours to provide the reader with an in-depth analysis of the contextual frame through which the study will be conducted. The objective of this section is to provide the reader with a critical review of the contemporary consumer landscape in India and will incorporate relevant conceptual and theoretical issues.

Section 2.2.1 will attempt to provide a historical account of India and its changing landscape in light of Brahmanical influences in the sub-continent. Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.2.1 introduces the key historical texts associated with India, the Atharva Veda and Dharmasūtra; with particular reference to women, the effects of these texts as a form of control will be examined. Subsequently, section 2.2.2.2 provides the reader with a summary of the historical texts and places control, surveillance and limited autonomy into the central frame. Section 2.2.3 is intended to provide the reader with an understanding of the diversity of India, in particular, providing a case for region specific consumer research studies as opposed to homogenising the nation. Following on from this section 2.2.4.1 provides an account of the current consumer market in India, incorporating statistical evidence and key trends. Section 2.2.4.2 goes on to tease out the core themes which emerge from the extant studies concerned with India in light of the literature from the fields of marketing and consumption, sociology, anthropology and media studies. The consumer focus of the research – women – becomes the focus of section 2.2.4.3 and moves on to the penultimate section in 2.2.5 to outline the research motivation in light of the theoretical shortcomings highlighted from previous sub-

sections. The final section, 2.4 presents will conclude the chapter with the specific research aims.

2.2.1   <u>India: The Question of History</u>

> "India is the cradle of human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only"
>
> Mark Twain

Commentators have often denoted the year 1947 as the 'birth' of India, a country where the end of British rule set the wheels in motion towards a new sense of nationalism and unity between the many states of the nation. Prior to the British Raj, the country now known as India was once a collection of kingdoms and presidencies which each imposed their own administrative divisions upon their respective regions [see Figure 1 below].

Figure 1: The Changing Landscape of the Sub-Continent
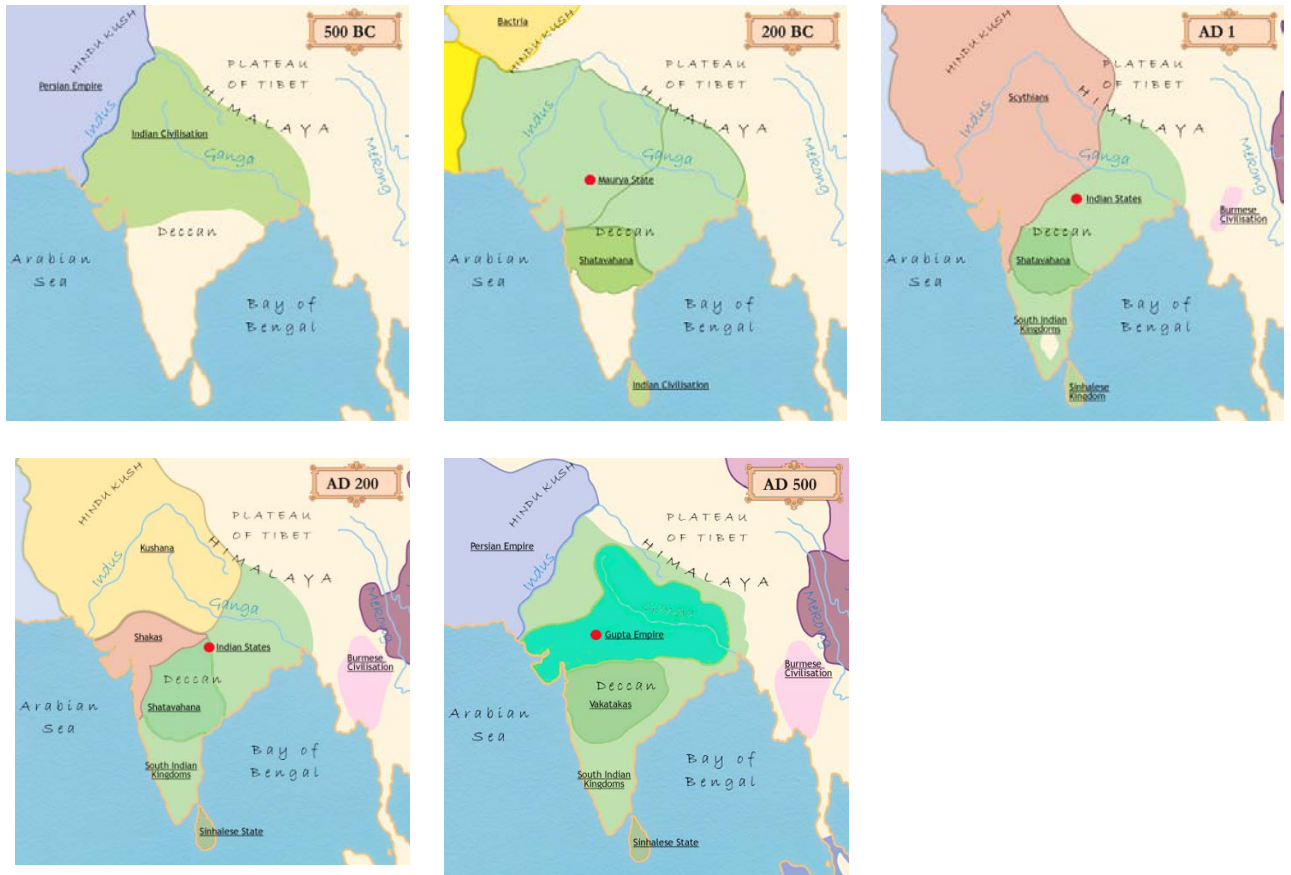
Source: Worldhistory.timemaps.com

What now stands of India is a pluralistic, multilingual and multi-ethnic society where the administrative divisions are recent amendments originally developed during British occupancy. A complete historical analysis is beyond the scope of the present study; however, I feel it necessary to draw attention to one relevant and noteworthy era within the complex history of the sub-continent, termed, the Vedic period. Spanning from circa 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, this epoch of "Indian" history is one of great intellectual ferment where the foundations of Hindu and Buddhist thought were being compiled orally in the form of the Vedas. Not only were these 'texts' laying the foundations of what is now classified as Indian philosophical thought, the Vedas also incorporated a potent cultural dimension which infiltrated society at large. As Hamilton (2001: 18)

states, the milieu of north India at this period, as dominated by the Brahmanical tradition, remained the only tradition to secure a lasting hegemonic grip on the country's socio-economic structure. What is particularly insightful about the historic texts is the way in which they have constructed the moral fibre of the sub-continent, and more specifically, how the rules of conduct which span across a striking array of socio-economic and cultural veins are still seen to exert their influence to varying degrees at the present day.

More specifically, and in light of the current research, women have featured within these numerous texts as passive observers and recipients of stalwart Brahmanical systems of control and surveillance. Why the inclusion of these texts within the current frame of research is important stems, in part, from the discussion of CCT in section 2.2; to document an alternative subject position for the study of young female consumers in India, I felt it necessary to trace the subject position of women *within* the context of the sub-continent. As the tracing of history has remained absent in the body of work concerning consumer culture in India, its inclusion should provide an alternative socio-cultural lens through which a unique ontology of a specific group of consumers can be developed. The following sub-sections will attempt to briefly introduce some of the relevant texts for the study, as well as providing an original source of socio-cultural insight which has remained an absent element within consumer culture research. The three predominant pillars which I will attempt to address here are a direct consequence of the broad research areas: women, moral conduct and control.

The motivation for incorporating the texts below is to sensitise the reader into understanding the importance of morality and the historical position of women within

Indian culture and society. Although the Vedic text in particular can also be considered as 'religious', the emphasis in light of this thesis is to utilise the content which specifically speaks of women in terms of moral obligations and duty. Collectively these texts present moral codes and norms which are important frameworks for understanding Indian moral culture which, in turn, regulates cultural behaviour. To use Geertz's (1973) notion of the semiotic concept of culture "…man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, [Geertz takes] culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning." It is this interpretative search for meaning which can prompt the use of the texts, and act as a moral cultural resource for the normative shaping of everyday practice.

As morality is seen to be a shared framework, notions of collectivity are an important facet within India where collective moral policing helps to put in place a "set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions for the governing of behaviour" (Geertz, 2000: 25). There has, however, been a shift in considering India as a strictly 'collectivist culture' (see Kapoor et al, 2003; Sinha, et al). For instance, Kapoor et al (2003: 696) assert that "India seems to be a culture that ranks high on both dimensions of both culture – and individual-level variables". The construction of the self and the collective self can often be considered as paradoxical in light of Indian culture; the latter is seen to be a self constructed through the rules, norms and morality inherent in cultural discourse where the former detaches one from their culture into the domain of the individualistic which is often looked down upon within nations deemed as collectivist.

2.2.2 <u>The Atharva Veda: Charms of Control</u>

The Sanskrit term 'Veda' is commonly translated as meaning 'knowledge', and is a collection of four seminal texts - the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Artharva Veda. These texts, as mentioned previously, are among some of the oldest texts of ancient India and provide a wealth of insight into the developments of religious and cultural thought. In light of Vedic tradition, the Vedas were considered as being without authorship, *apauruseya*, and communicated through what is heard, termed *sruti*. As the Vedas have generally been grouped into four predominant texts, my focus for the remainder of this section will be upon the Artharva Veda, a text which has been regarded as synonymous with "holy charms" and "blessings", and according to some, "curses" (Bloomfield, 1908: 39). Below are a number of specific excerpts, translated by Maurice Bloomfield (1896), of specific charms pertaining to women:

VI, 81. A bracelet as an amulet to ensure conception

"A holder art thou, holdest both hands, drivest off the Rakshas.
An acquirer of offspring and wealth this bracelet hath become!
O bracelet, open up the womb, that the embryo be put (into it)!
Do thou, O limit, furnish a son, bring him here...
Tvashtar shall fasten upon this woman, intending that she shall
beget a son."

III, 23; VI, 11. Charm for obtaining a son (pumsavanam)

"Into thy womb shall enter a male germ, as an arrow into a
quiver! May a man be born there, a son ten months old!
A male son do thou produce, and after him a male shall be
born! Thou shalt be the mother of sons, of those who are born,
and those whom thou shalt bear!
Obtain thou, woman, a son who shall bring prosperity to thee!"
"...may he elsewhere afford the birth of a female, but here he
shall bestow a man!"

VI, 17. Charm to prevent miscarriage

" ...As this great earth holds the mountains and the peaks, thus
shall thy embryo be held fast, to produce a child after
pregnancy"

I, 11. Charm for easy parturition

"...May this woman, herself begotten in the proper way, be delivered, may her joints relax, that she shall bring forth!"

VII, 35. An incantation to make a woman sterile

" ...Of these hundred entrails of thine, as well as of the thousand canals, of all these have i closed the openings with a stone"

As can be seen, the charms above pertain specifically to the image of the woman as bearer of children with importance placed upon conceiving a male child. Within Bloomfield's translated text of the Artharva Veda, it is evident that the essence of a woman has been captured within her role as mother and wife and her 'traditional' duties throughout this text do not span beyond this. All stages to ensure successful conception and childbirth have been circumspectly considered, however, eradicating the ability for a woman to bear children, in light of the verses in the text, further emphasises one of the predominant 'functions' of women in society during this period. The inability to produce offspring seems to denote a woman as 'unfit' or outcast; the incantation in itself helps the reader to understand, in totality, how highly revered the notion of bearing children actually was and still remains to be.

I, 18. Charm to remove evil bodily characteristics from a woman

"The fierceness that is in thy self, in thy body, or in thy look, all that do we strike away with our charm. May God Savitar prosper thee!
The goat-footed, the bull-toothed, her who scares the cattle, the snorting one, the drivelling one...these do we drive from us"

Charm I, 18 above talks specific about negative bodily characteristics; the underlying assumption here is that women were expected to oppose those characteristics which

were deemed as negative, for example, she was expected to be docile, avoid any form of overt aggression and was expected to use her femininity to ward off those attributes which would otherwise deem her as impertinent. These excerpts of the Artharva Veda highlight some important social and cultural dynamics which were particularly relevant for women at the time. Additionally, tracing these developments, it would be interesting to see how far, if at all, these texts present themselves in various manifestations within present Indian society. To develop a fuller understanding of the ancient rules, or codes of conduct, pertaining to women during this period, it is necessary to take into account the contributions made through the Dharmasūtra texts. Collectively these texts, written in a pithy and aphoristic style (Olivelle, 1999), document intense disputes and divergent views on a variety of social categories. Dharma itself includes "all aspects of proper individual and social behaviour as deemed by one's role in society and in keeping with one's social identity according to age, gender, marital status, status and order of life" (Olivelle, 1999: xxi). The following section will attempt to examine some of the relevant passages from the four surviving works of the Dharmasūtra texts.

2.2.2.1   The Dharmasūtras: Laws of Control

The Dharmasūtras belong to the same literary tradition that produced the works comprising the scriptural corpus of the Veda (Olivelle, 1999: xxi). The term Dharma can be translated as meaning 'law' yet incorporates "all rules of behaviour, including moral and religious behaviour that a community recognises as binding on its members" (ibid). As the title of the collection of texts indicates, *Dharma* is arguably one of the most central concepts within Indian civilisation; difficult to translate, the concept of Dharma (an empirical description) "provides the guidelines for proper and productive

living and for social organisation and interaction." (ibid: xxxix). What must be emphasised regarding the reading of these texts is that the Dharmasūtras are in essence normative, and while they do not describe the actual acts of all individuals they undoubtedly provide a wealth of information regarding the dictates of society during this period.

As with the previous sub-section, the remainder of this section will present relevant excerpts from each of the Dharmasūtra texts:

Gautama - Duties of a Wife
18.1 – a wife cannot act independently in matters relating to the law. She should never go against her husband and keep her speech, eyes, and actions under strict control.

Baudhayana – Women
Inheritance - 2.3.43- Daughters should take their mother's jewellery and anything else customarily given to her. It is not possible for women to act independently. Her father takes care of her in childhood; her husband takes care of her in youth; and her son takes care of her in old age. A woman is not fit to act independently
2.3.47 – If women strive to do what is beneficial to their husbands, they will win the heavenly world.

Vaisistha – Women
5.1 – a woman cannot act independently; she is under the authority of the man

Menstruation – 5.6 – a menstruating woman remains impure for three days. She should not apply collyrilum on her eyes or oil on her body, or bathe in water; she should sleep on the floor and not sleep during the day...she should not laugh, do any work, or run

The excerpts above relate specifically to the social position of women during this period and as can be seen, the three texts bear striking similarities regarding the ways in which women were considered as dependents upon their fathers, husbands or sons. The text of Gautama goes as far as outlining the type of behaviour which was deemed as impertinent for women; this description seems to be in concurrence with the Vedic charm (I, 18) noted earlier which also draws attention to the specific negative traits of a

woman which should be eliminated at best if not suppressed. This lack of autonomy placed upon women during this period is further fuelled by the fact that most of the social institutions were also seen as unaccommodating to a single woman. Altekar (1987: 173) had also noted this form of surveillance over women within the social sphere; he goes on to describe the particular restrictions on the movements of women during this period:

> "They [women] could go out to visit their friends and relations, but decorum required that they should not stay at their houses for the night, or when their business was over. They were to observe a certain amount of reserve in the presence of strangers. They could speak with merchants and doctors and transact the necessary business, but they were to be circumspect while dealing with unknown persons. They could receive male guests, but they were relieved of this duty if there were male relatives in the family to discharge it."

Expressed in the *Laws of Manu* (also termed the Manu Smriti), one of the best known legal texts from ancient India, the need to control women was of primary importance "because of their passion for men, their mutable temper, and their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands...man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them" (Buhler, 2008: 327-30). Submission, therefore, is seen to be one of the dominant expectations of women where "nothing must be done independently, even in her own house... if she violates her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in this world; (after death) she enters the womb of a jackal, and is tormented by diseases (as punishment) of her sin" (ibid: 195-97).

Although the tone of negativity here seems to posit that women's roles were insignificant and few, Aryans, for example, during the Vedic period were extremely reliant upon the co-operation of women to help sustain their agricultural activities as well as participate in the manufacture of bows, arrows and other war materials (Altekar, 1987: 179). In light of these texts, Indian women's existence was highly paradoxical and subject to various forms of reverence and contempt. Women were not only seen through their 'mortal', physical selves, they were also worshiped and highly revered in their immortal form as Goddesses, or *Devis* where "in times of prosperity [the woman] is indeed Lakshmi who bestows prosperity in the homes of men; and in times of misfortune, she herself becomes the Goddess of misfortune, and brings about ruin" (Wadley, 1977:113). Women are revealed in the sacred scriptures as presenting a duality of being benevolent and malevolent; Susan Wadley's (1977) seminal work on women in the Hindu tradition indicates how the two facets of femaleness reflect this duality and perhaps provide the cultural logic for it.

Wadley goes on to note how the female is, foremost, *sakti* (energy/power), however, "[a] woman is also *prakriti*, Nature, the active female counterpart of the Cosmic Person, *purusa*, the inactive or male aspect", the unity of both *purusa* and *prakriti* underlies the notion of biological conception, where the male contributes the hard substances and the woman contributes the soft. In other words, the woman is seen to be the soil in which the seed is planted, where the seed is "declared...to be the more important. Women, then, automatically partake more of Nature than men, who symbolize Culture" (ibid: 115). Uncultured power, however, is dangerous and helps to represent one of the more essential visions of women in Vedic India. As the woman is the receptor of the seed, she is simultaneously the benevolent, fertile bestower representing growth and prosperity.

The source of this benevolence, according to Wadley (1977), is that "the male controls the female; that Nature is controlled by Culture". The reference to dismissing a woman who is seen as being "sharp tongued" is, once again, a regular feature within the Vedic and Dharmasūtra texts where specific negative attributes of a woman are explicitly identified as cause for concern and would inevitably result in 'loss of face'. Keith (1971) has noted that proof of brutal morality can be adduced in the position assigned to women, "woman in India has always suffered much from all religions, but by none has she been so thoroughly despised as by the Brahmans of the period of the Brahmanas..." (p. 475).

As already noted, the notion of the subordination of women was not confined to the Dharmasūtra texts alone; The Law Code of Manu, or the Manusmriti, is an ancient legal text of India and was essentially a discourse given by the sage, Manu. Considerably influenced by the Dharmasūtra texts which had preceded it, the date of the Manusmriti, once again, is contested, however the dates ascribed by Olivelle (2004) and Flood (1996) have been between 200 BCE and 200 CE. According to Patrick Olivelle (2004), Manu had become a "lightening rod for both the conservative elements of the Hindu tradition and the liberal movements intent on alleviating the plight of women and low-caste and outcaste individuals" (p. xvii). Manu had become a symbol of oppression and was noted as text that legitimised this subjugation and had, inevitably, become the source of it. More recent events, such as the one recounted by women's rights activist Madhu Kishwar of the burning of copies of the Manu in the precincts of the Rajasthan High Court in 2000, noted how the protestors believed that the ancient text is the defining document of Brahmanical Hinduism, and also the key source of gender and caste oppression in India.

Excerpts of the specific laws with reference to women are outlined below; interestingly the fundamental ideas of these laws bear striking similarities to the collection of Dharmasūtra texts before them, however, the descriptions of the laws seem meticulous in comparison.

5.149 – she must never want to separate herself from her father, husband or sons; for by separating herself from them, a woman brings disgrace upon both families.

5.165 – a woman who controls her mind, speech, and body and is never unfaithful to her husband attains the world of her husband, and virtuous people call her a 'good woman'.

9.5 – women in particular should be guarded against even the slightest evil inclination, for when they are left unguarded, they bring grief to both the families.

9.10 –He [the husband] *should employ her in the collection and the disbursement of his wealth, in cleaning, in meritorious activity, in cooking food, and in looking after household goods.*

9.13 – drinking, associating with bad people, living away from the husband, travel, sleep and staying in the houses of others – these are the six things that corrupt women.

Collectively, the passages above are a mere glimpse of the laws and social codes of moral conduct which surrounded women during this period. Simply put, Manu's interests lay not in the lower ranks of society, which he considered as a threat to the upper classes, but with the preservation of high caste, predominantly male, sovereignty. It should be noted here, however, that the notion of control was not exerted upon women by men alone; women were also expected to implement control upon themselves and their own, thus reinforcing restriction upon expression through thought, speech and also at the level of the body. Despite the evident unpopularity of women noted so far, an interesting observation made by Ursula King (1987) points to the superiority of the position of women during the earlier centuries of Vedic India; however, the position of women and their access to education, religious knowledge and practices had been

subject to a significant decline over the ages. Commentators such as King (1987) have supported the notion that to understand the position of Indian women today, one must know how relatively recently access to education was gained and how many people are still shaped by the traditional image of woman found in Hindu scriptures and traditions.

2.2.2.2   Where She Belongs, How She Belongs

Much, if not all, of what has been discussed so far has been based upon scripted sanctions through the various ancient texts collectively. Keith (1971) distinguishes between a popular and hieratic religion where Vedic priests could excogitate "rituals with little regard for popular views converting popular rites to suit themselves as far as practicable, and leaving others unnoticed or barely mentioned" (p.56). Traditions, therefore, are not merely confined to ancient texts but are also entwined with local traditions which have often moved in tandem with the hieratic practices (see King, 1987). Taking into consideration the complex landscape of India, both ancient and present day, these localised oral traditions are vast and innumerable and are generally exerted through a system of social enforcement.

In light of what has been discussed so far, the reflections above permit certain provisional conclusions regarding the socio-cultural position of women and valuable insights into the traditional fabric of the sub-continent. What existed was a marked dichotomy between their public and private selves, where on the one hand they were notably restricted in the private domain, yet on the other hand women became the embodiment of *sakti*, and were seen as highly authoritative and powerful. The profound

ambiguity about women within the ancient and religious/theological literature is, in part, a product of the intermixing of mortal and immortal selves which has helped to fuse two very distinct notions of women together. However, in the shaping of these ideals women themselves have had a small part to play; to paraphrase Wadley (1977), although women have developed a somewhat inferior religious and social body of folk, local and non-textual traditions, the idea that they are potentially dangerous has helped to provide some form of justification for not allowing them to be active participants in spheres of authority. An amalgam of patriarchal control, Brahmanical dictates (both textual and oral) and restrictions on education had aided the erosion of what was essentially a society where women were regarded with a considerable degree of reverence.

How women are positioned within the contemporary social landscape of India has been carved through a steady progression of historical re-negotiation; as influential authorities changed, so did ideals regarding the position and conduct of women, yet the role of women within these negotiations was limited, if any. The dominant themes throughout the discussion of the various historical texts places surveillance, control and limited autonomy at the forefront of historical analyses; these texts help to paint an intimate portrait of the social landscape of the sub-continent and could well be referred to as a 'traditional' ethos. Singer (1971) states that "Indian society and culture are not 'traditional' in the sense of the nineteenth-century stereotype that it is dominated by unchanging traditions and immemorial customs, nor even in the sense that many characteristic institutions, culture patterns, values and beliefs have persisted in spite of the numerous changes which have occurred. The 'traditionalism' of Indian civilisation lies elsewhere – in its capacity to incorporate innovations into an expanding and changing structure of culture and society." (p.163). India has built a series of adaptive

mechanisms and processes for dealing with the foreign and the strange, and it is through these mechanisms that its "cultural metabolism" (ibid) ingests foreign flows. The product of this is what Singer calls "cultural protoplasm" which could be seen to mirror the theories of 'glocalisation' and 'creolization', where foreign cultural bodies are broken down and segregated to be built back into the indigenous culture (the protoplasm). If the 'traditionalism' of India, therefore, is seen to be a creolized ingestion of foreign flows, this sense of 'traditionalism' could also be applied when considering inflows of foreign products and images. Just as various authorities had scribed ancient texts to determine the correct moral conduct and laws of individuals in society, the 'text' of consumption could also be presented through a similar lens, where the emergence of a new oral tradition is becoming sanctioned by a number of those in society.

This section aims to introduce the Indian context and present an analysis of the extant academic studies pertaining specifically to the sub continent. In addition to presenting the reader with a comprehensive account of the contemporary Indian landscape, the shortcomings and limitations of existing CCT research in the area will also be discussed.

2.2.3   India: Unity through Diversity

India embraces a multitude of customs and languages, is home to a number of the world's largest religions and boasts intricate histories which even the most colossal of texts find difficult to absolute. The difficulties in undertaking a project concerning India are numerous; aside from the practicalities of fieldwork, retreating to overarching generalisations concerning a nation so diverse has, at times, become difficult to avoid.
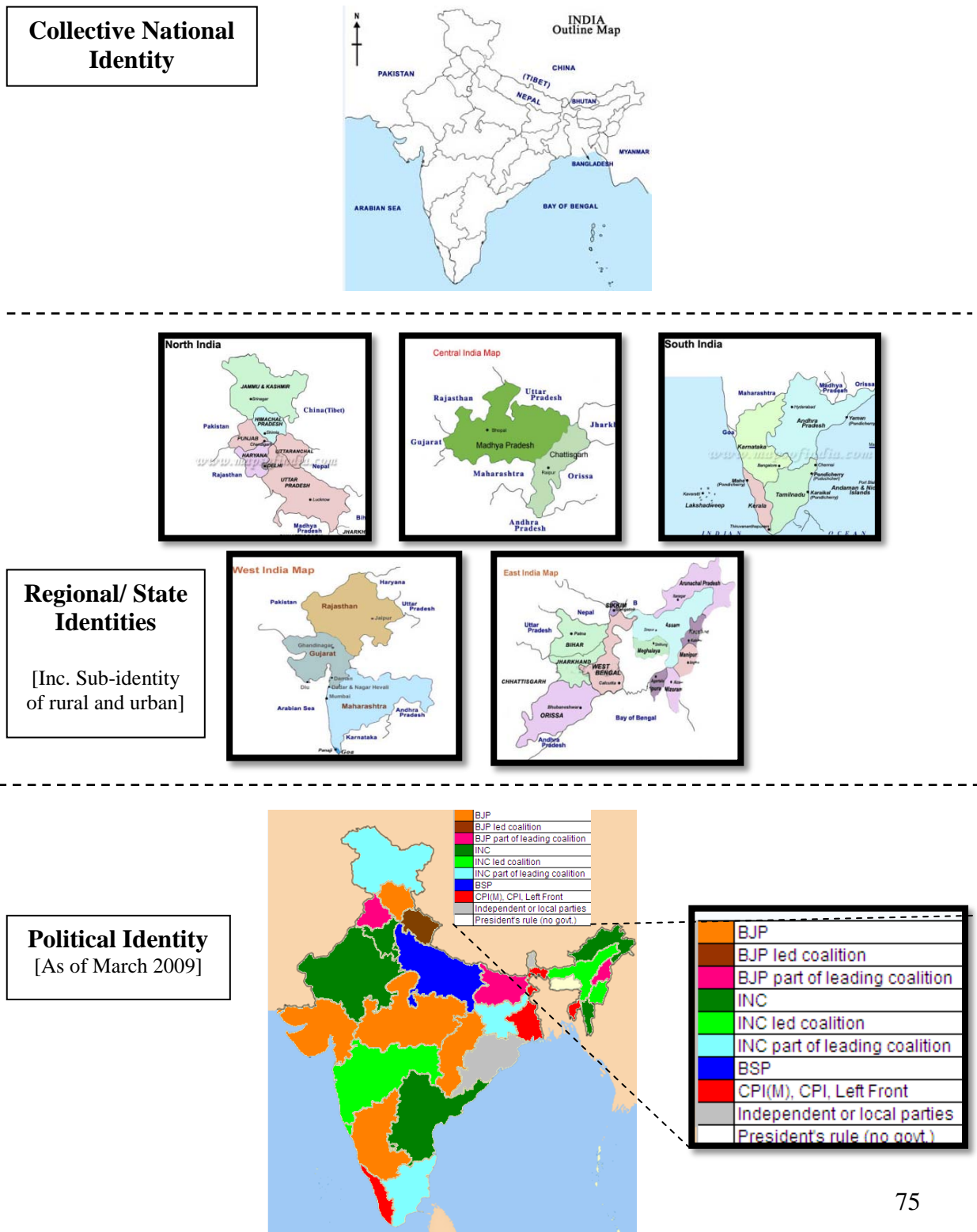
With the case of India, identities or collective behaviours become framed not only through the macro level of the country, but also through specific micro level distinctions of region, state and even political party. Figure 2 below helps to illustrate some of the predominant geographical tiers of distinction within India. The distinctions outlined in the figure below are far from a conclusive account of the multitude of identifiers throughout the sub-continent; however, the aim here is to illustrate the complexities of location concerning a country as diverse as India.

These complexities are further nuanced by an inherently Aryan culture in the north of India and a Dravidian to the south[1]; historically the Aryans were light-skinned Indo-European tribes from central Asia (Frawley, 1994: 3) and possessed traits consistent with a European self-perception, or at least what was considered "western" in South Asian culture (Shaffer & Lichtenstein, 1995: 130). The Aryans took the authority of the Vedas into what was soon translated by some as Brahmanic or Sanskrit Hinduism, however, this authority has through the ages received opposition from indigenous Dravidian tribes who, according to Elmore (1915) were considered the "aboriginal inhabitants of the land" (p.9). Although the history of the Dravidians seems to have been lost in antiquity as well as a scarcity in the body of academic work on the subject, Dravidians had inhabited the Sub Continent for a considerable period prior to Aryan inflow, however, they had preserved no literature and left no monuments which would help to shed light upon their origins. Elmore (ibid) goes on to note how Dravidians were "not a literary people and their religion [had] no literature. There are no Vedas or other writings telling of their Gods. Their history is contained in the somewhat confused legends recited by wandering singers who attend festivals...these legends and stories

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[1] This is not to imply that the Northern and Southern states are wholly exclusive to their own 'tribes' respectively. This division is generally observed through the practice of predominantly Northern or Southern 'traditions' which hold significant weight amongst the majority of state inhabitants.

[were] always recited from memory; and as usually the singers [could not] read; written stories would be of no value to them...[the legends] are jealously guarded, and any suggestion as to translating or printing them meets with strong objections." (p.vii)

Figure 2: Tiers of distinction in India

Collective National Identity

Regional/ State Identities

[Inc. Sub-identity of rural and urban]

Political Identity
[As of March 2009]

Eventually securing control over the sub-continent, the Aryans did not compel the Dravidians to give up their Gods, they did, however, adopt the policy of bringing the people with their religion into the fold of Hinduism (ibid: 11). Arguably, this could be evidence for one of the earliest forms of 'cultural metabolism' as stated earlier; although, this specific case highlights absorption of the indigenous into the new, rather than the other way around.

There is, to the present day, a seeming residuum of the Aryan/Dravidian divide through various forms of political opposition to Sanskrit Hinduism. Examples of this are the Tamil Nadu based Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [1949] (Translation: Dravidian Progress Federation), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [1972] and the Self Respect Movement [1925]. Collectively these political groups promote a distinctively Dravidian ethos whereby the underlying sentiment favours that of a non-Brahminic form of Hinduism and leadership. Singer (1971) had also noted this element through his study conducted in Madras (Chennai) where he documents the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu which sought to construct an alternative model of a 'Great Tradition'. This model, he notes, "depicts a Dravidian civilisation with a complete culture that preceded the Aryan civilisation of Sanskritic Hinduism. The Dravidian culture, in this model, is independent of the Aryan and self-sufficient, [it is also] different in language, literature, architecture, sculpture, dance, music, religion, philosophy and social structure." (p.180) Ultimately, this process has become one of restoration as well as de-Sanskritising and de-Brahmanizing south Indian culture and society through attempts at the removal of Hindi and other 'foreign' elements from Tamil language and literature.

The smashing of idols and images, simplification of rites and ceremonies by not using Brahmin priests and rituals as well as reinterpreting the Vedas to reveal "oppression and calumny of the Dravidians" (ibid) are all attempts at reconstructing and preserving the Dravidian culture, which, some proponents believe has been on a continuous path of eradication. With the case of India, micro-level distinctions should not be disregarded or classed as immaterial; there are significant socio-cultural distinctions not only between Northern and Southern India, but also amongst other individual states which are collectively categorised as belonging to the Eastern, Western and Central regions of the sub continent. As has already been noted, differences in language, literature, customs, religion and social structure have an inevitable impact upon individuals within the region making differences between tastes, preferences and trends, in some instances, very much location-specific.

Having discussed the geographical differences which are apparent across the landscape of India it would be fair to say that the present study is one which is situated within the North of the country. The discussion so far has traced, in brief, the history of the sub continent and its contemporary developments, inconsistencies and nuances. The following section aims to provide the reader with an account of a consumer landscape which will present considerations of culture, language, religion and traditionalism in light of contemporary considerations of consumer culture.

2.2.4 The Indian Consumer Landscape

Venkatesh and Swamy (1994) point at how the general theme pursued in many consumer research studies concerned with the countries of the East is how the different

counties are becoming more and more consumer oriented in the Western sense of the term (p.194). They note that "in analysing the developments across these different regions, the two approaches can be seen. The first approach points to the commonalities in these developments which warrant generalizations regarding global consumer trends. The other approach emphasises the peculiarities of each region and reminds us deep down that there are differences in the way consumer trends are unfolding, and therefore, superficial similarities may hide real cultural differences." (ibid). I would supplant this notion to describe the contemporary make-up of India, where global inflows can potentially be received, indigenised and reconstructed based upon inter-state differences; this is not to disregard, however, the commonalities which bind the various cultures of the sub-continent, but there is a need to acknowledge differences within a country which has its very essence built upon a high degree of syncretism and cultural pluralism.

Taking lead from Venkatesh and Swamy (1994), there is a need to go beyond simple economic measures of "income and material progress to other characteristics in order to explore many consumer oriented possibilities" (p.195). Borrowing from their seminal work on India as an emerging consumer society, some of the more salient aspects of Indian society which Venkatesh and Swamy believe to be both challenging and interesting for consumer research studies are briefly summarised below:

1. **Multi-lingualism**

There are 18 major languages and 11 non-comparable scripts. The Indian currency note shown to the right highlights the variation in languages. For practitioners, multilingualism presents some inevitable issues of meaning and comprehension (ibid:

196); because of this, languages of the region are used frequently in print and television advertisements.

Inset 1: Advertising in regional languages

Product: *Fairever* [English/Hindi/English]

Product: *Maggi Paste* [Hindi & Eng]   Product: *Kerala Matrimony* website [Malayalam & English]
Image also displays a tray containing traditional & symbolic South Indian matrimony '*shagun*' (luck) items.

Product: *Pepsi 'youngistan'* [Hindi in Roman script/ Tamil] television advertisement screenshot.

The emergence of 'Hinglish' is also worthy of note here; classified as a mixture of Hindi and English, it has gained increasing popularity amongst the youth segment in India. As Thussu (1999) notes, "Hinglish, whose roots are in the spoken language of North India [has] in the past five years become the standard language in serials and game and chat shows, but Zee was the first network to elevate this language by using it in a more serious genre such as news" (p.127). Words are borrowed, re-phrased and indigenised to cater for local expressions of meaning.

Inset 2: McDonalds *Hinglish* Print Advertisement/Coupon

Translation: '*Our treat. Come to McDonalds and enjoy*'

2. Multi-culturalism

India is culturally diverse, but not culturally heterogeneous (Dumont, 1986: xiv). Multicultural concerns have long formed India's history and traditions, its constitution and political arrangements (Bhattacharyya, 2003). Many of the writings, therefore, on Indian history, culture and politics are marked by some form of multicultural considerations. Various practices relating to food, clothing, the use of symbolic forms, and rituals "have regional as well as sub-cultural variations, while they also have many

common threads both at the religio-social and semantic levels" (Venkatesh and Swamy, 1994: 196). Multiculturalism is not alien to India, especially if one considers certain provisions of the constitution[2] which are intended to protect the cultural distinctness of the minorities (Ali, 2000). Ali (2000) goes on to state that "India significantly presaged later liberal concerns in the west with cultural pluralism and diversity [minority provisions were put into the constitution between 1946 and 1949]. One could argue, therefore, that multiculturalism, rather than being a concept imported from the west is, to some extent, very much Indian.

Cultural symbols can also be regionally-specific, for example, the colours for traditional bridal attire vary significantly between regions; it would be red in Punjab and white in Andhra and Kerala. In addition to this, women in the North of India would wear veils, where in the South they do not (Venkatesh and Swamy, 1994). Inset 3 below depicts some of the variations in bridal attire in India. The role of post-independence policies within India emphasising the need to embrace the diversity of the nation were certainly apparent, particularly through India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been a leading influence in giving the country's multicultural reality constitutional legitimacy (Bhattacharayya, 2003: 156). He recognised that India's essence was, in fact, emphasised through its "unity in diversity":

> "The diversity of India is tremendous, it is obvious. It lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits...Yet with all these differences, there is no mistaking the impress of India"
>
> (Nehru, 1946: 61-2)

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[2] See articles 29 and 30

Inset 3: Regional Bridal Attire
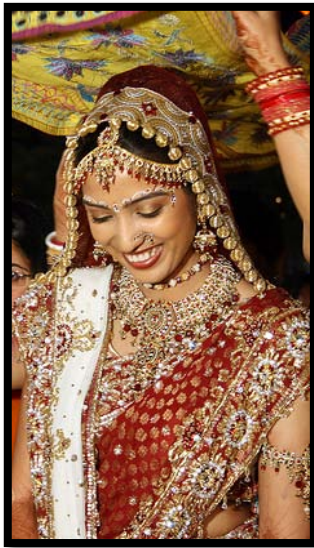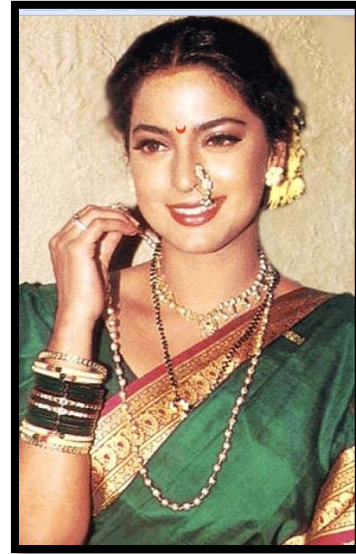
Punjab   Kerala   Maharashtra

With regard to various nation-building efforts within the country, Nehru advised chief ministers in his Letters to Chief Ministers in the 1950's not "to treat them by some single formula because they differ greatly amongst themselves. It seems obviously undesirable to deny them some kind of self-government or autonomy." (Nehru, 1986: 364). His approach on the whole showed the "acute sense of realism, accommodation and adjustment in the state approach to communities, and was an instance of how "modernity relativized" in a non-Western context" (Bhattacharayya, 2003: 158).

3. Multi-religious

As noted by Venkatesh and Swamy (1994), the majority of individuals in India (approx. 82 per cent) are Hindu, followed by Muslim (approx. 12 per cent) and Christians (approx. 4 per cent). Additional religions include, but are not limited to, Sikhism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Jainism. Religion, in the Indian context, is a considerably salient force; commentators such as Basham (1976) believe that it is this

very religious presence which has given India its vitality and essentialism – a powerful force which has refused to decline in influence.
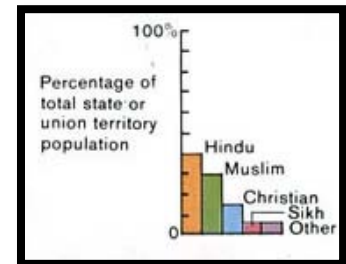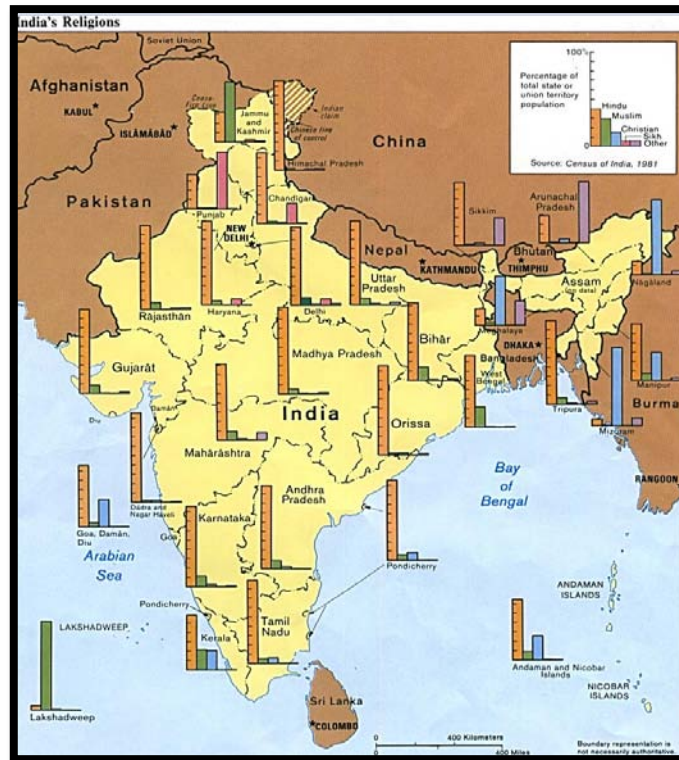
4. Views of 'Traditionalism' and 'Modernism'

The clash of between traditionalism and modernism, or the blending of the two, is a perennial theme when researching India. As stated by Chakraborty (1991) and Srinivas (1967), the etic viewpoint would be that one is able to find Indians who are traditional, modern, progressive or even Westernised; through an emic lens, various combinations of these terms are utilised by Indians describe various facets of themselves. Venkatesh and Swamy (1994) note that "among many middle class Indians this ontological tension exists regardless of age or gender, signifying the fear of a possible loss of cultural identity in moving away from their imagined notions of Indianess". Sudipta Kaviraj (2005) in his examination of modernity and politics in India notes that "at the heart of

modern institutional forms, it is unpractical to expect that later societies would blindly repeat the experiences of the West. The initial conditions of their modernity are different, and therefore they cannot imitate the West" (p.141). Adding to this, these societies may not wish to emulate the West since "the experience of Western modernity is diverse and not uniformly attractive" (ibid). Figure 6 below shows how consumers are represented through their 'modern' values in advertising print.

Inset 4: Consumer representation- modern/urban/Indian

Source: *Mudra* advertising agency – Print advertisement for Simplymarry.com

5. Power Structure

Venkatesh and Swamy (1994) describe India as a six-layered society and although characteristically, politicians have often been considered as corrupt and incapable of leading the country (ibid), it is the fourth layer of salaried and middle-class

professionals which has been given significant attention from the point of view of social change. Venkatesh and Swamy note that "the changing values within the Indian context that are having an impact on the rest of the society seem to find most resonance in this class of people...we regard this category of people most important for studying the changing consumer culture" (p.205).

So far, what has been evidenced is that India embodies a number of distinct cultural 'traditions' which vary significantly from state-to-state and region-to-region. Through the frames of culture, religion, language and politics, India is a nation where diversity has become part of the fabric of its very being and marketers have successfully been able to exploit these differences and profit from them. While these factors are not to be considered as exhaustive, they help to represent the increased consumer orientation in India. Utilising a mixture of industry reports and academic research, an examination of the contemporary market structure will now be examined in the subsequent section.

2.2.4.1   India as a Consumer Market

The aim in this section is to present the reader with an account of the extant research studies concerned primarily with the Indian consumer. In addition to presenting the central themes which have emerged from research studies, I also aim to reflect upon the limitations and shortcomings of this area of consumer culture and how my study might contribute to the development of existing knowledge. Utilising a mixture of industry reports and academic research, an examination of the contemporary consumer environment will now be presented to provide grounding for a fuller examination of the emergent trends which have developed in recent times.

Although India was initially a primary goods producing economy where most consumer outlets were small distribution centres for indigenous produce, it has always been known for its trade, exotic markets and bazaars (Subrahmanyam, 1990). Post British occupancy, elements of consumerism had begun to surface within the economy; India's change in economic policy within the 1980's saw the nation abandon its earlier perspective predicated on an ideal of self-reliance and subsequently lifted state controls on production and foreign investment (Van Wessel, 2004: 93). This opening up of the market resulted in a considerable increase in the availability of consumer goods in the Indian market – a catalyst for the generation of a collective consumer society:

> "one where the discourse and practices of consumerism enter the dominant ethos of life, where consumer products - personal, domestic and others – are marketed through a variety of organised shopping outlets, where advertising is not only an information system but becomes an active cultural medium and an agent of chance, where social status begins to be defined by one's goods and his/her standing as a consumer, where people's fantasises about possessions seem to be realizable, where consumption becomes a socially sanctioned activity, where business personalities begin to appear as celebrities in social contexts, and where branding of products becomes the means by which marketing accomplishes its goals"
>
> (Venkatesh and Swamy, 1994:206)

Consumerism, here, refers specifically to the "development of consumer-oriented tendencies which are marked by the availability of a variety of manufactured consumer goods" (Venkatesh, 1994: 323). Consumer's fulfilment and spiritual upliftment is

packaged to afford them the ability to control their destiny through accessing products from all over the world, where aspirations are also distributed over products from all over the world (see Venkatesh and Swamy,1994; Baudrillard, 1981). With substantial increases in Indian disposable incomes and consumer expenditure, there is considerable statistical evidence to support that this spending has been concentrated on lifestyle and luxury goods within many metropolitan cities[3]. The needs basket of a middle class Indian has changed sharply since 1991, where in that year 80% of the spending was mostly on eight items, predominantly consumables.

Urban India consists of 5,161 cities and towns including the major metropolitan areas such as Delhi and Mumbai[4]. Urban areas in 2000 (the last year for urban/rural output data) accounted for 52 per cent of India's net domestic product, despite having just over one-quarter of the population. The McKinsey Global Institute study on the rise of India's consumer market reveals that income levels are expected to almost triple and India will climb from its position as twelfth largest consumer market to become the world's largest by 2025[5]. Through this increase in income, the middle-class is expected to swell by over ten times from its current size of 50 million to 583 million people. In terms of spending patterns, the historical pattern in India which is also characteristic of most other emerging economies, shows that as incomes are rising consumers are spending proportionally less on basic necessities and more on discretionary items. Discretionary spending has already risen from 35 per cent of average household consumption in 1985 to 52 per cent in 2005[6].

[3] Source: India Brand Equity Foundation www.ibef.org
[4] Businessweek Marketing Whitebook (2007-2008: 37) ed. Jehangir Pocha
[5] Businessweek Marketing Whitebook (2007-2008) ed. Jehangir Pocha
[6] Businessweek Marketing Whitebook (2007-2008: 161) ed. Jehangir Pocha

Research on the 'new' Indian consumer has noted that as India's retail sector booms, customer expectations are rising much faster than the pace at which retailers are able to roll out their services. According to Business Week India, this is the conclusion drawn from the performance of companies in three segments – lifestyle and fashion stores, coffee chains and fast food outlets[7]. Findings indicate that although lifestyle and fashion stores like Shopper's Stop, Pantaloon, Lifestyle and Globus are offering a shopping experience which is markedly better than what may have been available five years ago, customers are demanding more and the segment has only been able to muster a loyalty of 36 per cent making this consumer market one which enjoys diversity and variety in the shopping experience.

Preeti Reddy, head of Technopak's consumer and market insights division, noted in her article, *Consumer 2015*, that consumers of the 'liberalisation era' (0-29 years of age) "are the self-expression generation; these consumers will not have known any other India or any other type of economy where Gandhi and Nehru will be as much in the past for them as Ashoka and Akbar."[8] Self-expression and identity beyond family (see Aaker, 1999; Phau and Lau, 2001) education and occupation are important drivers for this generation as are the more aesthetic and cognitive needs of knowledge, understanding and beauty. Other characteristic traits of this consumer segment are seen to include a rise in social consciousness and individualism, where niche is quickly becoming the new mass and consumers will be seen to demand products highly customised to suit individual needs. A thriving economy, substantial increases in disposable incomes and consequent rise in consumer expenditure, growing affluence levels and consumer sophistication have all led to a robust growth in spending and

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[7] Businessweek Marketing Whitebook (2007-2008: 185) ed. Jehangir Pocha
[8] Reddy, P. Businessweek Marketing Whitebook (2007-2008: 192) ed. Jehangir Pocha

credit cards in India[9]. This growth has been spearheaded primarily by the middle-classes in India's major cities where spending is seen to be highly concentrated on lifestyle and luxury goods. In addition to this, a large number of the young working population, with a median age of 24 years, growing numbers of nuclear families in urban areas; increasing working-women population and emerging opportunities in the services sector have increased average consumer spending on items such as branded clothing[10].

Inset 5: Shopping Malls India (Various Locations)

[9] India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF)
[10] India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), Report, Apparel Retail: Labelling the Indian Market

Overall, these changes in the Indian spending patterns have, inevitably, propelled change in the retail and service-sector landscape, however, the Indian consumer is noticeably multi-faceted as Chadha (2007) describes:

> "If the task in China was to fill a near vacuum, in India luxury brands have to find a way to blend in with the milieu of local tradition...a Chinese bride dreams of a Vera Wang gown and Cartier jewellery; and Indian bride does not dream of parting with her traditional finery – although she happily packs her trousseau in Louis Vuitton trunks...[India] is in the midst of a social revolution, a massive silent earthquake that is altering the lay of the land, putting money in new hands, changing once-rigid social structures, rewriting old value systems. The ideal setting for luxury brands to enter and do what they do best – help redefine identities."

It could be fair to assume that a significant proportion of the transformation of the consumer is due to a vast number of foreign inflows, predominantly through media, but it is also important to remember that this is not a recent occurrence of the twentieth century. Despite the terminology being somewhat 'recent', the colonial period had also evidenced a rich 'ethnoscape' (Appadurai, 1990); shifting of peoples from the East to the West and vice versa, an influx of new cultures, languages (English/British, French, Portuguese) and the introduction of new fashions and lifestyles had all impacted upon the cultural fabric of the sub-continent. To iterate what has already been noted earlier in the chapter, India's historic ability to indigenise, appropriate and make one's own is further evidenced in the country's approach towards 'contemporary invasion' in the form of foreign consumer goods and images; the very make-up of the sub-continent evidences history in repetition through a contemporary lens.

The points of interest which will be tackled in detail in the following section concern the 'new' Indian consumer and the way in which these consumers are increasingly utilising consumption to signal aspiration to membership in symbolic communities (i.e. as cosmopolitan urban youth), and more importantly how these consumers perform, affirm and transform the social meaning attributed to specific collective categories.

2.2.4.2 The 'New' Middle-Class and New Media

In recent times, much of the academic attention concerning consumer culture in India has focussed upon the 'middle-class' market, however, with limited explanation into the understanding of the term and a multitude of rather limited modes of measurement, the middle class in India not only categorises an income group, but also a political and social class and consumer market (Saxena, 2010), therefore, quantifying this demographic group can yield varying results as has been noted in the recent Deutsche Bank study: "A McKinsey Global Institute study using National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) data said 50 million people belonged to this group in 2005 if using the definition of real annual household disposable incomes between 200,000 and 1 million Rupees. At the other end of the spectrum, a study by the World Bank estimated the group at 264 million in 2005 using the median poverty line in 70 countries as a lower bound and the United States poverty line as an upper bound. Another method employed by CNN –IBN in its middle class survey utilised a consumption-based criterion. The survey looked at whether a household owned a car or scooter, colour television, or a telephone, and estimated that the middle-class equalled approx. 20% of the population, or slightly over 200 million people" (Saxena, 2010:2).

In light of these identifiers, Prieur (2008:1) presents an interesting critique to the notion of class and its measurements, positing that class is "omnipresent but rarely explicitly evoked in popular and everyday culture". The traditional class categories in the West, he notes, express the social structures of feudal or industrial societies (landowners, workers, capitalists) and new professional groups, on the other hand, are not easy to categorise into these schemes. Prieur's core arguments centre on the notion that class has more to do with disidentifications and the drawing out of boundaries than it has to do with positive identifications and secondly that class is disguised through the usage of other categories than the traditional class categories. It is his very notion of 'other categories' that is of interest for the study where my aim will be to understand, if at all, a context specific notion of class features as a influential component in the respondents understanding of themselves as consumers or whether alternative categories have developed through which the young women are able to distinguish themselves from others. Literature on India in the marketing sphere has, as will be evidenced, focussed much of the work on India to a select number of categories namely, cross-cultural comparative studies in brand positioning (Alden et al, 1999), identity and diaspora (Mehta and Belk, 1991), effects of advertising and television viewership and, of course, notions of 'middle-classess'. The literature on each of these areas will be the focus of the remainder of the chapter.

The 'middle classes' in India have, and continue to, receive considerable media and academic attention as a highly lucrative market segment, where the common sentiment has been *the need* to pay attention to the urban middle class as a social and cultural phenomenon (Wessel, 2004). Beteille (1996), for example, has noted that members of the urban middle class accord each other status by taking into consideration distinctions

of class as opposed to caste. Scholars such as Derne (1995), Osella and Osella (2000) and Puri (1999) describe, ethnographically, how cultural production amongst members of the middle classes connected to individual class position. To paraphrase Wessel (2004), through one frame there is the debate, predominantly amongst Western anthropologists, regarding the centrality of the middle-class to the imagination of the Indian nation (see Fernandes, 2000; Mankekar, 1999; Rajagopal, 1999), and on the other hand Indian observers – scholars and journalists alike – regarding the reluctance of the middle classes to take on the responsibility for the development of the nation (see Bidwai, 1984; Kothari, 1991; Varma, 1998).

In light of this work, consumption is seen to be significantly shaping the middle-class structure and identity whilst mediating the relationship of the middle-class to the nation and national culture. However, as Wessel (2004:94) states, barring the work of Osella and Osella (2000) and Mankekar (1999), "there have been few ethnographic studies of how the consumption boom among the middle classes is experienced and lived." Although Wessel's work in Baroda (West India) never intended to study consumption specifically, the topic of consumption had arisen when respondents were prompted to share their experiences of society and cultural change – "they invariably turned to consumption as central to the experience of modern life" (ibid). Wessel had found that members of the middle-class understood consumption in moral terms and introduced the idea of debased materialism to describe the way in which individuals of the middle-class are "seeking self-realisation or self-expression through goods rather than through spiritual or social pursuits, which leads to the evaluation of individuals on the basis of material possessions rather than other (higher) aspects of their person".

Wessel also noted that there was an inherent moral ambivalence associated with 'modern consumption' where individuals were seen to draw on collective ideological resources, but with the purpose of individually dislocating from society – which is taken as immoral. From the study, the act of consumption in India has become synonymous with social performance; goods need to give the right social message for individuals to acquire a middle class status identity. The reason why goods, such as refrigerators, have become a 'requirement' is due to increased status competition within society which now demands such possessions. Those who espoused Gandhian principles and claim to live accordingly to his precepts are subjected to popular scrutiny and even ridicule; such ideals are seen as standing in the way of survival in the dirty world, or as impossible to emulate given humans' lowly nature. Comments raised by middle class folk of India in Wessel's study showed the shift towards a society based upon materialist status alone "Literate or illiterate, if you have money they will invite you" (ibid: 100). The growing distance between urban and the rural sentiments as well as the belief that urban life has made individuals socially fragmented and incapable of being morally sound, both feature as assessments made by urban and rural respondents of Wessel's study. In addition to this, the older generation were seen to interpret consumer culture, and the pursuit of wealth it demands, as leading to a collapse of loyalty of children to their parents; just as materialism was seen to be morally problematic to the middle-class in Baroda, their emphasis remained upon how consumption is central to the shaping of an amoral sociality (ibid: 108).

Saadia Toor's (2000) study on Indo-chic and the cultural politics of consumption in India, notes that "the aspect [she] finds most fascinating is the...identity formation of the new young urban class in India, particularly the relationship between class habitus

and taste as it explains the construction of a new aesthete within and by this class" (p.4). She distinguishes between a generic form of the 'middle class' and a class of young professionals who are both demographically young and urban in location, yet self-consciously cosmopolitan in orientation. Although Toor's study has been framed through an analysis of three cultural artefacts (Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things and two 'Indian' films – Kamasutra and Salaam Bombay) the primary issue here was to argue a case for a new form of orientalism. Despite direct references to the cosmopolitanism of the urban, English speaking middle and upper-middle classes, there is an apparent absence of voice from this particular sect of consumer. Hybrid lifestyles – or the habitus- she found, were a natural manifestation of the essential character of Indian culture where 'ethnic; Indian artefacts are valuable to the Indian elite precisely because of the signification they embody in the 'Western' *imaginaire*.

Derné (2005), on the other hand, provides an assessment of the effect of cultural globalization in India through a comparison of noncosmopolitan Indian men's gender culture in two eras – one before Hollywood movies and cable television became widely available and one after their availability had transformed the media landscape. As with many of the extant studies on the topic of India, the notion that globalization has helped to introduce new cultural celebrations of autonomy and individual choice (Derné, 2005: 5) is discussed in detail with male respondents. The distinction between 'reel' and 'real' selves is explained through an account of the fit between a sociocentric cultural orientation (which emphasises family obligations ahead of individual desires), families structured around arranged marriages and joint-family living (which limit individual autonomy), and an emotion culture which warns of love as a potentially dangerous emotion that could disrupt family obligations, while valuing social fear that keeps

people in line (ibid: 10). The belief that what is viewed through the lens of media is a foreign entity injected into the socio-cultural fabric of India is evidenced in Derné's findings as being a widely held ideal. "Men are attracted to new media celebrations of male dominance precisely because these are consistent with the institutional reality of patriarchy in the home" (ibid: 11). Despite being excited at the prospect of independent Ally McBeals, there was a tendency to regard such figures as mere products of a foreign lifestyle which would become difficult to place in Indian reality.

Derné concluded in his analysis that the effects of cultural globalization within India are limited as long as economic and family possibilities are not simultaneously transformed. The social structures, he found, were unaccommodating to seemingly foreign ideals such as 'love marriages'. Cultural imaginations, he found, were rooted primarily in shared institutional possibilities, rather than socialisation to a common culture- hence, structures of marriage re-shaping ideas of love as opposed to being the other way around. According to Derné, an amalgamation of the rigidity of structures, emphasis on duty and remaining subordinate to the fear of elders meant that changes resulting from globalization are, then, more likely to follow from changed structural realities than the introduction of new cultural meanings. In a similar vein, the work of Crabtree and Malhotra (2000) brought to view the applicability of the cultural imperialism framework in light of Indian commercial television. The emphasis here, however, was upon the experiences not of consumers, but of Indian broadcasters who at the time were developing a new commercial television industry in India "...middle-class Indian youth are already enamoured of Levi's, Ray-Bans and Kentucky Fried Chicken, all introduced about the same time as commercial television" (ibid: 379). In a country where there has become a wide cleavage between the consumptionist middle-class and

the deprived, consumption, viewed by some commentators, is seen to deny the basic simplicity in life, typical of agricultural traditions. However, despite this, there are large numbers of middle-class, metropolitan consumers who, regardless of its dislocation from a more spiritual and culturally harmonic life, still wish to participate in the act of consumption, be it with the commodities they purchase or the lifestyles they adopt. Table 2 below highlights some recent studies which fall under the broad bracket of media and television:

Table 7 : Media Studies - India

AUTHOR(S)	DATE	SUMMARY OF RESEARCH	CONTEXT	FOCUS
Robbin Crabtree & Sheena Malhotra	2000	An assessment of the applicability of the Cultural Imperialism framework within Indian commercial television.	India	Indian broadcasters/ Television industry (production)
Steve Derne	2005	The limited effect of cultural globalization theory in India. The importance of institutions in rooting the fit between cultural orientations and institutional structures.	India	Indian Males in two eras 1991 and 2001
Vamsee Juluri	2002	Music television (MTV) and the invention of youth culture in India. Audiences construct a sense of generational, national, and global identity in a manner that calls for a deeper understanding of cultural imperialism and audience reception.	India	Audience research
Shanti Kumar	2004	Deconstruction of the representation of state-of-the art colour television sets in India through close textual analysis. Advertisements are seen to be indicative of the innovation strategies that are being used by leading manufacturers in the Indian electronics industry to promote television as a technology capable of bringing the outside world into the home.	India	Textual analysis
Divya McMillin	2001	Localising the global: Television and hybrid programming in India.	Bangalore, India	Television channels/prod

		Focus on the new emerging power in proceses of globalization: indigenous, regional television networks.		ucers
Kirk Johnson	2001	Media and social change- the modernizing influences of television in rural India. The role of mass media as positive agent for social change while impeding and obstructing change for others.	India	Rural Consumer
Prasun Sonwalker	2001	Makings of little cultural/media imperialism. Indian channels consolidating their position within the media landscape and foreign channels were left to adopt and adapt to local programming in a big way.	India	Indian Television channels
Jocelyn Cullity	2002	Cultural nationalism on MTV India. An examination of the effects of the introduction and expansion of satellite-based commercial television in India during the 1990's.	India	Media/produc ers and TV channels.
Leela Fernandes	2000	Media images, cultural politics and the middle class in India.	India	Misc
Vankatesh Iyer	2004	'Culture Cops' and the mass media. Freedom of expression and opposition to cultural imperialism	India	Magazine Article. Media critics.

Opponents of the 'new age, urban Indian' (Kaul, 2007) have examined the impact of consumerism as a postmodern trend, where "increasing affluence, individualism, demographic complexity, ideological diversity, global migration and constant innovation in communications technology – have proliferated new social identities..." (ibid: 530). Material possessions, also termed 'status goods', are now contributing significantly to the individual's definition of the self. As evidenced within a significant proportion of research studies based on India, media has accrued significant importance as being one of the most influential facets concerning 'new Indian identity'. What was viewed initially as an experiment (Dua, 1998) focused upon programming designed for community viewing with the primary purpose of providing essential information and

knowledge to the public. Butcher's (2003) seminal work on transnational television and cultural identity traces the introduction of Star TV into India post 1992 notes how "Star TV and other transnational networks like MTV, began to not only reflect but wholly represent what was commonly described by commentators as the 'post-liberalisation generation'"(p.13) The perception of a new Indian individual melded in the convergence of East and West that followed economic restructuring in 1991;   the concept of a media landscape became intrinsic to the configuration of cultural space as it lies at the intersection of cultural production, dissemination and reception "it is the provider of a symbolic universe and a marker of identity, reaffirming, reflecting and challenging boundaries in its attempts to gather communities under a constellation of images" (p.26).

Media has become central to the construction of a new transnational identity where 'liberalisation's children' are seen to be subscribing to an inherently globalised ideal of the self which, according to some, is a 'self' no longer rooted in the sub-continent. Media as a catalyst for notions of modernity and a producer of aspirations is, as the studies above indicate, redefining the contemporary social fabric of India in ways which do not merely skim surface-level ideals, but are becoming appropriated in ways which are seen to be re-shaping the fundamentals of Indian consumer behaviour. Mankekar (1999) provides a highly comprehensive and in-depth ethnography of television and womanhood in post-colonial India; she notes "[there is a] need to situate the proliferation of women-oriented narratives on *Doordarshan* (state-owned television channel) within a political context marked by the state's monopolistic control over television production and its conscious deployment of television to construct a pan-Indian culture based on hegemonic ideologies of community and identity" (p. 105-06).

These narratives worked two-fold, firstly in mirroring the status quo of women, but also becoming an intrinsic part of government's modernisation strategy where the "uplift of women became a crucial component of the state's agenda to construct a modern national culture" (ibid: 106). In light of the centrality of the role of women for the pursuit of 'Indian modernity', the following section will present some of the fundamental changes in the social position of women in India in addition to an examination of the way in which this change is being marked, in part, by increased global flows of media and consumer products.

So far, there are two notable 'gaps' in the extant literature, firstly the absence of CCT research focussed on India and secondly little to no research on rural consumers. The work which places a focus on the rural sect in India has been concerned predominantly, yet not exclusively, to the areas of agriculture (Datt and Ravallion, 1998), rural poverty (Ahluwalia, 1978) and widowhood (Dreze and Srinivasan, 1997). As consumer culture research rarely, if at all, features in light of the rural Indian market, the current research aims to eliminate this deficit in part, by providing a study of consumers based in both the urban and rural local of New Delhi. Additionally, the work is theoretically framed through CCT, making it a valid contribution to an area which at the outset ceases to exist.

2.2.4.3 Women and Change

This final and salient aspect of Venkatesh and Swamy's (1994) Indian indicators is one which requires significant attention in light of the current study. Although there is a growing interest in the position of women in consumer culture, research is scant in

female consumers outside of the so-called 'first world'; as the attitudes of Indian women regarding marriage, careers, roles in the family and society are undergoing radical changes (see Liddle and Joshi, 1986; Sharma, 1986; Wadley, 1977) this change has also been accompanied by similar changes in family structure and household systems (Saradamoni, 1992). Although the rise of industrial capitalism tended initially to favour male migration into cities, leaving women to become the icons of a 'tribal' home centred beyond the reaches of modern economy and society, consumerism, according to some commentators, has become a sphere of empowerment for women and this is reinforced by a portrayal of women not as passive or invisible, but as active, assertive and visible agents having sufficient purchasing capacity to buy innumerable commodities in the market place. This redefinition has been propelled by the very changes of the social position of women in contemporary Indian society and an increasing number of women are pursuing education as well as entering professional or career oriented jobs which were once reserved for men (Venkatesh and Swamy, 1994). Adding to this, women's income has become a significant contributor when concerning the creation of family wealth.

The Times of India recently published an article entitled "*Hey, Ms. Spender*"; taking from findings based on a BCG study, the authors noted that "Indian women work an average of 41 hours a week, which is higher than the global average of 39; they place more importance on knowledge and achievement (while overall respondents valued love the highest, followed by honesty)...when we focus the spotlight on India, the 565 million- strong female population is a magnet for products and services giants, the landscape gets even more exciting." (Singh and Zachariah, 2010) When taking into consideration the differences between working and non-working women, the authors

purport that "while both of them might be in the same family income bracket, the way they spend their money is dictated by the lifestyle they have chosen for themselves." More affluent housewives were seen to spend on high-end cosmetics, where working women preferred to spend on high-end watches. Through increased literacy, occupation levels and higher disposable income, Indian women are becoming more assertive and self-indulgent in discretionary consumption (ibid). Women's magazines, in light of these changes, have multiplied in unbelievable numbers to cater for the variations in literacy (see Inset 6 below), differences in lifestyle and tastes as well as incorporating acceptable topics of discussion for seemingly liberal 'urban yuppies' and the more conservative rural sects.

Inset 6: Women's magazines

This tension between developing a more progressive element and maintaining what is desirable and acceptable within the traditional context is never more evident than in the case of the changing women's roles (Venkatesh and Swamy, 1994). The shift towards a more nuclear family system and the emergence of career roles for women, who are now active contributors in family income, has meant that women's roles in household management and decision making, according to Venkatesh (1994), are getting stronger. Although a large proportion of employed women was evidenced as being at the lowest occupational class (see Liddle and Joshi, 1986), post independence India had widened the opportunities for middle-class women in government service and the public sector industry. Women were given a new set of possibilities enabling them to survive outside of the confines of a patriarchal caste structure.

The plight of women presented here in relation to work and social status may seem as though this is a consistent theme across the landscape of India, however, to juxtapose this view for a moment, Chako's (2003) work on the status of women in Kerala (south India) brings to the forefront an Indian state which has often been presented as a model of social development in the absence of a strong economic base. With more than 90 per cent of girls aged 6 to 17 years attending school, Kerala is one of the top-ranking Indian states for female educational achievement. In addition to this, "Kerala has [had] a long tradition of matriarchy among more than half its Hindu population [and the] matrilineal system is widely credited for the high social position that women supposedly enjoy in Kerala" (p.54), inheritance of housing and land was commonly passed on through the female line, however, this matrilineal joint system is rapidly becoming fragmented and women's rights to property are now considerably reducing.

Anthropologists have long documented the way in which economic changes are simultaneously social changes and it has become impossible to isolate notions of consumption from notions of selfhood and identity, as the two are engaged in a complex dialogical process (see Runkle, 2004; Held, 1999; Liechty, 2001; Nagel, 2003; Appadurai, 1986; Kendall, 1996). The studies highlighted above reveal how concepts such as "tradition" are increasingly negotiated through the lens of class, gender and the subscription to certain social groups which one chooses or even had chosen on his or her behalf. Using the interplay of Bollywood, beauty and the corporate construction of international standards in south Bombay (Mumbai), Susan Runkle's (2004) work illustrates the concept of "standards" as a synecdoche for ways of life and being that are "urban and largely European and American in character, and often referred to as Western". The term 'Western' in itself, she notes, is a signifier for a complex set of behaviours revolving around individual choice and independence associated with the 'West'. What is particularly insightful about Runkle's study is the way in which she examines the changing ideals of beauty within the beauty industry and how marketing experts have been able to tackle the sensitivities regarding the marketing of products to urban youth. "A major hurdle for marketing experts to urban Indian women was the fact that make-up is still highly sexualised in South Asia. A Hindustan Lever description of the new Jellip brand of colour directly addressed this problem":

> "...no more will the young and spirited teenager have to worry
>
> about parental disapproval when she wears lip colour – because
>
> she will not be wearing lipstick, she will be wearing Jellip! So
>
> young girls can go ahead and wear Jellip everyday and sport
>
> really cool lip colours!"   (ibid: 41)

Inset 7: Jellip® [television advertisement screen shot]

The focus of Runkle's paper exposes the ways in which the cosmetics industry, for instance, is not only targeting an exclusively young, urban female audience, but is also helping to alter social stigma. Not only is the product being advertised, the subliminal message here is also one of mass acceptance – enforced or otherwise. Similarly, the work of Rupal Oza (2001) examines the staging of discourses of gender, nation, sexuality and place in light of the Miss World pageant held in Bangalore in 1996 (southern India). What Oza's study traces is the way in which women's sexuality was considered by some as a threat to the nation; the right wing political objections to vulgarity and obscenity in the Miss World swimwear event resulted in moving the event outside of India's borders to the Seychelles. "The protests as well as the decision to hold the swimwear event outside of India's borders reinforced a linear logic whereby body exposure is akin to obscenity and, by extension, a threat to the nation" (ibid, 16). She notes the response to the ordeal presented by AIDWA (All India Democratic Women's Association) in their press release "we do not agree with those who are opposing the contest in the name of 'Indian culture' and 'Indian womanhood'. We reject the notion of any one definition of culture, womanhood, and tradition being

imposed on women." The ripple effect of political tension surrounding the event had meant that it was the first time in India that the police force was mobilised with such extensive detail to protect what was, in essence, a private multinational venture. Interestingly, Oza asserts that for the political right, women are used to define modernity but are not active participants in crafting India's modernity. Women, in light of the above, are seemingly caught in a political, cultural and social tug-of-war which seeks to either challenge and re-arrange, or buttress and further subordinate the more 'traditional' ideals of Indian womanhood.

2.2.5   Research Motivation

The studies discussed above on Indian women serve to present to the reader the various nuances associated with this consumer group. However, the limited studies fall short in terms of providing in-depth insight of consumerism as a lived experience and how young rural and urban Indian women are *actually* navigating through the multitude of messages which serve to restrict or liberate their own understanding of their identities. The studies themselves provide an outside-in examination of contemporary consumer culture, and much of the work presented falls under the bracket of media and televisual culture, where the emphasis is upon media imperialism and advertising agencies. Adding to this, an incorporation of Vedic ideas of women in relation to consumer culture does not exist within the corpus of research in India – to reiterate, what is particularly insightful about the historic texts is the way in which they have constructed the moral fibre of the sub-continent, and more specifically, how the rules of conduct which span across a striking array of socio-economic, political and cultural veins are

still seen to exert their influence to varying degrees in the present day. Evidence of history in repetition, I believe, warrants the use of these evocative texts to allow for a novel and fuller understanding of the phenomenon of young female consumers in North India – a location which has also been overlooked and/or dismissed in extant research. My aim for the current research is to provide and inside-out examination of consumer culture as a lived experience within contemporary Indian society, whilst tracing the relevance of social laws pertaining to women which continue to exist to varying degrees within the landscape of the sub-continent.

2.4   Statement of Research Aims and Indicative Questions

Having now reviewed the selected literature on globalisation and consumer culture theory, and having taking into account current debates concerning consumption in the Indian context, this final brief section of the chapter sets out the principal aims of the thesis. These aims are not translated into testable hypotheses. Instead, having been derived from a critical evaluation of the literatures noted above, they provide thematic foci for a critical investigation into the lived experience of consumer culture of a sample of female consumers within the contemporary Indian landscape. These aims are translated into a number of associated research questions.

Specifically, then, this thesis pursues three principal and interconnected aims:

- To understand and describe the meanings, values and lived experience of contemporary consumer culture of a sample of young female Indian consumers:
    - o What symbolic resources does contemporary consumer culture provide for consumers' identity projects?
    - o Are these symbolic resources deployed by consumers to establish status differentials between themselves? If so, how?

- To establish the extent to which, and describe how, global flows of culture serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers:

    o What kinds of culture, originating outside India, are flowing into the contemporary consumer context?
    o How are these cultural resources used? Are they indigenised or resisted?
    o Are these global resources used in the symbolic construction of difference between consumers? If so, how?

- To establish whether and how traditional belief systems and practices influence young consumers' identity projects in contemporary Indian society:

    o How do traditional belief systems interact with new values and meanings emanating from outside India in consumers' experience?
    o What are the morality issues associated with consumers' negotiation of tradition and modernity through consumption choices?

Having now outlined the research aims which form the basis for this thesis; the next chapter goes on to document the translation of this framework into an appropriate empirical research study. It will present and justify the design and execution of the two month multi-method study which was carried out as part of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0   <u>Introduction</u>

The previous chapter set out the literature and theoretical bases for this thesis. In it, I drew upon contemporary ideas from the fields of sociology, anthropology and media studies to develop a multi-disciplinary conceptual framework for my research questions. I also situated this thesis in the consumer culture theory literature and aim to make a primary contribution to scholarship in this area. This chapter moves away from the theoretical concerns presented in the previous chapter, and considers how they might be investigated in empirical terms. The objective of this third chapter, therefore, is to present and justify the development and execution of the two-month multi-method research study which was carried out in order to capture the empirical dimensions of consumer culture amongst young women in North India.

After this introduction, section 3.1 clarifies the philosophical underpinnings of the research approach adopted in this thesis with particular reference to recent methodological debatres in consumer research. Section 3.2 explains the choice and nature of the ethnographic perspective adopted throughout my empirical study, and continues some of the philosophical discussion begun in 3.1. In 3.3, I turn to questions of site selection and sampling, explaining the choice of Delhi and introducing the reader to the girls that participated in my study. section 3.4 describes and justifies the multiple research methods used in this study, including observational techniques, interviewing and photo elicitation. I then go on in 3.5 to describe how the actual research process unfolded, explaining how the methods were used in tandem and the challenges that

fieldwork posed. The chapter ends in section 3.6 with a description and discussion of my analytical procedures.

3.1   Philosophical and Methodological Debates in Consumer Research

My research approach is based on the assumption of a subjectivist ontology, a constructionist epistemology, and the pursuit of a ideographic methodology. This means, then, that I am not conducting a realist research study, in which I think I am faithfully representing an objective reality independent of my own interpretive schema. Instead, and in consonance with recent debates in ethnography (e.g. Clifford and Marcus, 1986), my insights will be selective, partial, and reflective of my own subject position as a young, female, British Indian student. In the first two sections of this chapter, I unpack these philosophical and methodological positions with regard to recent discussions of research paradigms and philosophy, notably from consumer research, the key audience for this research.

All research approaches in the social sciences make ontological assumptions about the nature of reality and social beings. Hudson and Ozanne (1987) outline positivist and interpretive approaches in their paper on ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research. They purport that positivists take a realist position and assume that a single objective reality exists independently of what individuals perceive. In contrast to this notion, the authors believe that interpretivists deny that one real world exists; that is reality is essentially mental and perceived. Reality is also seen to be socially constructed in that all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations (Berger and Luckman, 1967). It is important to remember that it is

crucial for the researcher to know the context of a behaviour or event because social beings construct reality and give it meaning based on context; therefore, the interpretivist stance rejects the notion of reducing people to variables. This notion of behaviours is furthered by Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism, where the human individual confronts a world that s/he must interpret in order to act instead of an environment to which he responds.

Underlying both the positivist and interpretivist stances are differing axiological or fundamental goals. The positivists overriding goal is *explanation* via subsumption of the behaviour under universal laws (Anderson, 1986; Hunt, 1983). Interpretivists, on the other hand, try to *understand* behaviour rather than predict it (Rubinstein, 1981). The idea behind understanding is making sure that interpretive researchers view it as a process rather than an end product, as Denzin states (1984), one never achieves *the* understanding, however, achieves *an* understanding (see also Lincon and Guba, 1985). As a contrast to positivistic, context free generalisations or nomothetic statements (Keat and Urry, 1975), interpretivists take a more historical, particularistic approach to their research which is context bound and time-specific helping inform 'thick description' (Hudson and Ozanne, 1987; Geertz, 1973). The view of causality from an interpretivist stance is somewhat complex and posits that no human action can be explained as the result of a real cause. The world-view of the interpretivist is constantly changing and simultaneous shaping occurs between entities (Lincon and Guba, 1985).

The idea of tracing this mutual relationship or blurring of cause and effect is grounded very much in the way the researcher integrates informants into the process. As is common amongst much qualitative research, the researcher and people under

investigation interact with each other, creating a cooperative enquiry (Reason and Rowan, 1981). Seeing the value placed upon behaviours, perceptions and attitudes, individuals or informants must be involved in creating the research process.

With specific regard to consumption, one of the prominent views in modernity is that the consumer is placed in opposition to the producer, where the producer creates value and the consumer destroys it. Modernity has also rendered the consumer sovereign, vilifying and glorifying the consumer, however, postmodernism elevates consumption to a level on par with production, where consuming is also viewed as a value producing activity (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Central to postmodernism are ideas of culture, language, aesthetics, narratives, symbolic modes all arguably central tenets of the interpretivist approach. Due to this continually evolving research design, perceived realities cannot be known a priori therefore making the research an emergent process meaning that as the perceived realities change, the research design adapts. This is exemplified in Denzin's (1984) project on emotions where there was an absence of hypotheses as the framework could not capture the flow of human experience.

Within the apparent binary of positivist versus interpretivist research, Arnould and Thompson (2005) criticise the rigid classification of research traditions (i.e. relativist, postmodern, interpretivist, humanistic) stating that they either place too much emphasis on methodological distinctions or they invoke overly coarse and increasingly irrelevant contrasts to a presumed dominant consumer research paradigm. The authors note further how consumer culture theory explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalisation and market capitalism. This point links

quite neatly to that of Simmel's (1971), one of the early thinkers to examine the relationship between consumption and culture, who argued that consumption cultivated individuals by allowing them to attach their own meanings and act upon the objects in their world.

As consumption turns more toward the consumption of images, the society at large becomes more and more a society of spectacle (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Consumer culture conceptualises an interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects that groups use- through this construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings- to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members' experiences and lives (Kozinets, 2001). These dimensions in consumer culture theory focuses on the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys, or database modelling (Sherry, 1991). To take lead from Geertz (1973) consumer culture theorists do not merely study consumption contexts, they study in consumption contexts to generate new constructs or extend the fabric of existing theoretical formulations. Consumer culture theory is organised around a core set of theoretical questions related to the relationships among consumers' personal and collective identities; the cultures created and embodied in the lived world of consumers; underlying experiences, processes and structures (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

To represent the variety of images sought, consumers engage in multiple consumption experiences, typifying the idea that consumers' lives are constructed around multiple realities and consumption has become a way in which consumers can engage in the experiential act (i.e. fantasy, desires, aesthetics and identity play) (Arnoud and

Thompson, 2005). As Firat and Venkatesh (1995) note, the joys of doing research must be found not in the pursuit of a holy grail of singular knowledge but in capturing many exploratory moments. The positivists focus upon truth content, however, no defensible method for establishing truth exists. Positivists presuppose that knowledge is politically and socially neutral and is achieved by following a rigid plan for gathering information. They argue that a commitment to quantitative precision and an accumulation of facts is the way in which to build a close approximation to a reality that exists independently of human perception (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In light of this Silverman (1993) states how techniques of collecting data cannot be true or false, but only more or less useful.

Qualitative research offers intricate details of phenomena difficult to convey with quantitative methods and makes the world of life experience directly accessible to the reader (Denzin and Lincon, 2000). Through comparative analysis of qualitative data, researchers allow conceptual categories to emerge from evidence (Chen and Isa, 2003). As Rubin and Rubin (2005) note, within the critical theory model, knowledge does not exist outside the perceiver, waiting to be discovered by every researcher as an identical and universal truth.

In light of the discussion then, the key characteristics of my philosophical position are based upon an *understanding* of consumer behaviour. Capturing many exploratory moments which are framed around core theoretical questions relating to the relationship among consumers' personal and collective identities and the cultures created and embodied in the lived world of consumers, is at the focus of the research. In sum, this section has outlined the research approach which has been adopted during the course of this research. As noted, the approach I employed is structured around the idea of

selective and partial insights into the consumption behaviour of a select group of consumers in North India. Additionally, the predominant debates surrounding interpretivist and positivist research were explored, emphasising the choice of qualitative method as best able to help provide insight for my research aims and objectives as presented in chapter two. The following section will outline the potential of ethnographic approaches for addressing the kinds of research questions I have set myself. The interpretive methodology I employ is, thus, underpinned by specific ethnographic sensibilities.

3.2 <u>Ethnography</u>

The nature of my research aims and questions incorporate elements which I felt could be explored effectively through the use of ethnographic methods. Although the research is not an absolute ethnography per se, my interpretive consumer research is framed heavily through ethnographic sensibilities. As Maanen (1988: xiii-xiv) states "Ethnographies are portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogenous world. They display the intricate ways individuals and groups understand, accommodate, and resist a presumably shared order". I believe that the emotional and highly subjective elements embedded within my research questions can best be understood through qualitative enquiry. Culture is the basic element of ethnography; however, this definition is now also in question. Culture was once viewed as the product of human behaviours and as LeCompte (2002: 290) notes:

> "Culture was defined in terms of sets of roles that were
> appropriate for specific classes of individuals within the group. As

long as the environment remained stable, the culture changed only

incrementally from generation to generation"

This 'model' operates on the assumption that old cultures will be abandoned as new ones are adopted, and that people always have some set of appropriate and workable models from which to choose as they adapt to their new conditions. I support Eisenhart and Finkel (2000) and Levinson et at (1996) who suggest that rather than focus on what people are doing and thinking in the static 'now', ethnographers should begin to investigate what people are producing, including identities, aspirations and possible futures.

Knowledge is subjective, what you see depends upon whose perspective you take, whose eyes view it.

" …a culture or a cultural practice is as much created by the

writing as it determines the writing itself. To suggest

otherwise would reduce ethnography to method"

(Wagner, 1981 cited in Maanen, 1988: 6)

The quote above seems to indicate one of two things; firstly, ethnography is not a mere 'method' alone, and secondly, the emphasis on the word *reduce* indicates its importance as something more complex than a 'how-to' guide, or a clear cut abstract methodology used for the sole objective of gathering *data*. Ethnography is a written representation of a culture or selected aspects of culture and carries quite serious intellectual and moral

responsibilities (Maanen, 1988: 1). Ethnography does not have a distinct start or end point hence making it a *process methodology*. This is not to say that other qualitative/quantitative methodologies do not incorporate processes during data collection, however, my point is similar to that of Agar's who explicitly states that "ethnography is not simply 'data collection'; it is rich in implicit theories of culture, society and the individual" (1980: 23).

One of the earliest traditions within classic ethnography relies on an objectivist epistemology to study the culture as an object, sometimes referred to as ethnographic naturalism (Ljungberg and Greckhamer, 2005). The ethnographer must capture the true or real nature of social phenomena (Schwandt, 1997) and also become part of the ongoing action to become part of the cultural setting being studied. Ethnography as 'thick description' was for Geertz (1973) our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. Furthering Geertz's semiotic view of culture as a web of meanings is Bourdieu (1977) who referred to this circumstance as constructs of the second degree, because they are constructs of constructs made by the actors in a social scene. Clifford (1983) notes that since culture was seen as a complex whole, ethnographers tended to focus thematically on particular institutions. The aim, therefore, was not to contribute to a complete inventory or description of custom, but rather to get at the whole through one or more of its parts. He goes on further to say that participant observation serves as shorthand for a continuous tacking between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of events, on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, and on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts.

The roots of ethnography lie in cultural anthropology, with its focus on small-scale societies and a concern with the nature, construction and maintenance of a culture. Ethnographies are always informed by this concept as the researchers aim to look beyond what people say to understand a shared system of meanings we call *culture* (Goulding, 2004). An assumption is made here that there is seemingly something 'beyond' what the untrained eye would look over otherwise; pushing the ontological question of what there really is to *know*. In her review of ethnography in consumer research, Pettigrew (2000) argues that consumption represents a phenomenon that can be effectively addressed with the use of ethnographic techniques, based on the understanding that social meanings found in material possessions can be viewed as cultural communicators. Arnould furthers this notion stating that ethnography attempts to "explicate structured patterns of action that are cultural and/or social rather than merely cognitive, behavioural or affective" (1998).

A key feature of ethnography is that it is labour intensive and always involves prolonged direct contact with group members in an effort to look for rounded, holistic explanations (Goulding, 2004). The 'voices' of participants are an important source of data and should be allowed to be heard in the written end product, which should be a coherent, fluent and readable narrative (Boyle, 1994; Muecke, 1994). However, this raises significant implications with the power dynamic at play within ethnographic work; it is important to bear in mind the fact that ethnography is from beginning to end enmeshed in writing and includes a translation of experiences into textual form (Clifford, 1983). As Ljungberg and Greckhamer (2005) note, ethnographers formulate a power claim on their part, because the production of knowledge and power are interrelated, this is also something which Tierney (2002) notes, highlighting the power

and fear of qualitative research: "words have meaning; authors have power". To paraphrase Clifford, the writing of ethnography, an unruly, multisubjective activity, is given coherence in particular acts of reading, however, there are a variety of possible readings beyond the control of any single authority- namely the ethnographer. Some ethnographers have focussed upon people's and group's everyday lives (see Emerson et al, 1995), whereas others emphasise in situ observation studies that are grounded in a specific historical and cultural context (Baszanger and Dodier, 1997).

Experiential authority is based on a feel for the foreign context, a kind of accumulated savvy for a given group of people or place (Clifford, 1983) emphasising the insider's view by blending into strange culture in order to describe the subject's cultural positions. However, it has been suggested that classical ethnography frequently does not even describe cultures in their complexity, leaving out, for example, issues of power and dominance (Ljungberg and Greckhamer, 2005). In Dilthey's view understanding others arises initially from the sheer fact of coexistence in a shared world. But this experiential world, an intersubjective ground for objective forms of knowledge can be somewhat problematic for an ethnographer entering an alien culture. Experience has served as an effective guarantee of ethnographic authority, evoking a participatory presence, a sensitive contact with the world to be understood, a rapport with its people and a concreteness of perception (Clifford, 1983). Britzman (2000) noted how experience could not speak for itself but could be considered as a category that bracketed and even performed certain repetitions, problems and certain desires. It becomes necessary to conceive ethnography, not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed "other" reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects (Clifford, 1983).

Having provided an overview of ethnographic techniques, my choice was mirrored through the specific aims set out in chapter two of placing emphasis upon people producing identities. As a process methodology which incorporates directly theories of culture, society and the individual, I support and subscribed to Pettigrew's (2000) assertion that consumption is a phenomenon which can be addressed succinctly through the use of ethnographic techniques. The following section will document my choice of site selection as well as presenting my choice of sampling method and selection of respondents.

3.3   Site Selection

There are a number of reasons which propelled my interest in India as the primary site for my research. Many of the underlying reasons were through experience and previous studies; I will now provide a somewhat introspective account of my own interests and experiences which lead me to the conception of Delhi as a suitable location.

I have always been intrigued with the question of identity, particularly my own. Being the child of immigrant Indians into the UK was somewhat of a mixture, living a duality of cultures, one within the confines of the home, and the other in the public sphere, proved to be a catalyst into my ongoing investigation into the roots of my ethnicity- a British Indian female. In December 2002 and also during the second year of my undergraduate studies, I made my second visit to India after seventeen years, to my maternal grandparents' home, Delhi. This visit became a significant turning point with regards to not only absorbing the culture and people I was in some way linked to, but

also academically. My interest in marketing was further propelled by what images I was presented with throughout Delhi: the seemingly unorthodox manner in which posters advertising various products endorsed by some of the country's leading actors, actresses and sportsmen were pasted as a form of decoration on the outsides of small road-side shops/stalls where those products were not even available; the way in which a place such as McDonalds was still only accessible to wealthier middle-class youth who viewed this experience as somewhat hedonistic in nature; the sheer volume of international programs from the US on cable television; the style of clothing that the youth wore and the plethora of internationally branded stores lining the streets of Delhi's bustling city centre, Connaught Place. It occurred to me that I had been paralysed in the UK by images of extreme poverty, snake charmers and dusty looking saadhu's, and was very much unprepared for what I was about to experience.

Having absorbed many interesting elements of the culture, I was still intrigued as to how these young adults actually engaged in certain lifestyles and activities. My interest was further propelled after living with a number of native Indians during my Masters course at university. During this time, not only did I develop a deep friendship with many of my Indian peers, but met and spent a substantial amount of time with them during 2004-2005. We frequently passed time and spent many evenings over traditional Indian dinners discussing diverse topics ranging from studies, family, money, media, sex, British Indians and of course India. These numerous conversations and experiences helped to form the basis of my Masters dissertation titled '*A study of identity construction amongst First generation Indian immigrants, British-Asians and native Indians through patterns mediated by consumption practices and differential relations to place*.' The data obtained from this study shed light on many interesting areas in

relation to the question of identity but more importantly on particular consumption acts which were seen as moulding the public identities of individuals- many of which were viewed as taboo or immoral.

I was motivated by the findings which I felt were worthy of further investigation and decided to retrace my steps back to Delhi, a city now married to a seemingly 'westernised' youth yet still very much culturally distinct. I believed that this somewhat paradoxical stance and idea of morality and consumption could be best explored more fully by sharing the same environment, culture and similar experiences of my respondents. I made several enquiries through networks of friends and family regarding places to reside for the study and ultimately opted to stay with a Punjabi family in Janakpuri, a five minute walk from Delhi's District Centre, a commercial centre and cocoon for branded retailers, fast food and youth from nearby schools and colleges and a short walk to one of my chosen colleges.

3.3.1 <u>Sampling</u>

The obligation of researchers is to defend their sampling strategies as reasonable for their purpose (Sandelowski, 2000). Qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex issues and are most useful for answering humanistic *why* and *how* questions (Marshall, 1996). Researchers recognise that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher. Morse (1991) suggests that the lack of clear guidelines on principles for selection of a sample has resulted in much confusion in qualitative

research. Morse provides the example of a researcher who used random sampling for a qualitative study and points out that a small randomly selected sample:

> "Violates both the quantitative principle that requires an adequate sample size in order to ensure representativeness and the qualitative principle of appropriateness that requires purposeful sampling and a 'good' informant (one that is articulate and willing to share with the interviewer"

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his or her data and decides what data to collect next and where to find it in order to develop theory as it emerges (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A grounded theory will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with some existing ones that are clearly useful. It is important to base criteria for selecting groups on their theoretical relevance for furthering the development of emerging categories and the researcher is in a position to chose group(s) that help generate as many properties of the categories as possible. Consistency is achieved because, once a concept has 'earned' its way into a study through demonstrations of its relationship to the phenomenon under investigation (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Theoretical sampling in any category ceases when it is saturated, elaborated and integrated into the emerging theory.

Becker (1993) found that many studies have borrowed pieces of grounded theory but had not clearly adhered to the critical components, namely theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling allows for flexibility during the research process so that when the

strategies of theoretical sampling are employed, the researcher can make shifts of plan and emphasis early in the research process so that the data gathered reflects what is occurring in the field rather than speculate about what cannot or should have been observed (Glaser, 1978). There is a fine distinction between purposeful and theoretical sampling, however, this distinction is not always made clear in extant theory. To borrow from Patton (1990) the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth; Glaser (1978) builds on this and purports that selective (or purposeful) sampling refers to a calculated decision to sample a specific locale according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions which are worked out in advance for a study. However, the analyst who uses theoretical sampling cannot know in advance precisely what to sample for and where it will lead him.

This rather hazy distinction is limited and fails to clearly represent *how* theoretical sampling can be distinguished from purposeful or selective. The confusion between categories of sampling is just that- a battle between definitions. On a more practical level, Sandelowski et al (1992) suggest that selective sampling typically precedes theoretical sampling because neither ethics committees nor funding agencies are likely to approve a research project without a clear specification of the kinds of subjects desired for the study. Glaser (1978) may oppose this and purport that the researcher does not project a sampling frame in the initial stages of theoretical sampling:

> "Initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based
>
> only on a general sociological perspective and on a general
>
> subject or problem area…not on a preconceived theoretical
>
> framework"

In Patton's view (1990) all types of sampling in qualitative research may be deemed purposeful, he goes on to describe 15 different strategies for purposefully selecting information rich cases (these include deviant case sampling; intensity sampling and homogenous samples to name a few). He does not specifically define theoretical sampling or use it to differentiate between a number of viewpoints, however, he does state that in the early part of qualitative fieldwork the evaluator is exploring, gathering data and beginning to allow patterns to emerge. Over time the exploratory process gives way to confirmatory fieldwork which involves testing ideas, confirming the importance and meanings of possible patterns and checking the viability of emergent findings with new data and additional cases. As Morse (1991) notes, it would seem as though purposeful and theoretical sampling are synonymous with each other. Supporting this view is Sandelowski (1995) who notes that all types of sampling in qualitative research is purposeful, however, there are variations within this facet, namely: maximum variation, phenomenal variation and theoretical variation. Coyle (1997) also backs this view, stating that sampling is purposive and defined before data collection commences.

Having provided an overview of the various sampling techniques, my thesis has subscribed to the notion of a selective sampling, and snowballing techniques to locate my respondents. The selection of respondents will be detailed more explicitly in the following section.

3.3.2   Sample Respondents

Having decided upon the location of my study, locating suitable respondents for the data proved to be somewhat difficult. I had already decided upon the age group of my respondents having researched demographic information which highlighted that almost 54 per cent of India's population is below the age of 25, hence my sample would be chosen within this majority range. I initially decided to contact existing family and friends in India to secure respondents from the study. I decided upon a snowball sample, starting from my cousin and her friends, and subsequently their female friends and relatives. Through this method, not only was I able to gain access to a larger number of respondents in the correct age bracket (18-25), but also, advantageous to me, many of these young girls have recently left university and are in full-time employment. However, I chose not to pursue this sample of girls for reasons of practicality.

Practically this method of locating respondents was one involving a significant level of risk. One of the main issues I had was that the respondents were spread unevenly throughout Delhi, and I was only able to receive a verbal acceptance through a third party that they would be able to participate. Seeking something more formalised and practical and to avoid unnecessary travelling due to limitations on time in the field, I had decided to contact Delhi University in order to find participants for my study within two of their affiliated colleges. A number of e-mails and phone calls were made to the head of the sociology department; however, I was initially unsuccessful at gaining access due to issues of permission from central registry. It is seen that *Verstehen* is not sufficient alone for comprehensive understanding; however, having an insider's knowledge of shared meanings in this respect is advantageous. As an example, in the

UK there is a formal ranking procedure for universities and departments and a social one which, despite being highly subjective, can not be deemed completely false. My choice of academic institutions was twofold: I researched about both institutes as best I could from reliable internet sources and secondly spoke with friends of mine from Delhi studying in the UK to help develop an opinion.

After discussing suitable institutions, I decided to contact the principle of the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS) and also the principal of Bharati College which is based in Janakpuri, the area in which I was residing in Delhi. I requested a sample of female students for the purpose of the study and received positive feedback from the respective principles stating that I would be able to conduct the study within the institution/faculty. The Faculty of Management Studies in terms of courses offered, faculty, overall infrastructure, academic achievements, and student profiles were significantly different from the profiles of the medium-sized girl's college in the heart of Janakpuri, Delhi. For my research this seemed somewhat advantageous as I thought I may be able to draw comparisons between females from, at the outset, very different backgrounds.

During the first two days in Delhi I had confirmed my appointments with both institutions and travelled to meet with the principals. The Faculty of Management Studies was located in Vishwavidyalaya, North Delhi and approximately one hour by metro from my place of residence in Janakpuri. Upon reaching the institute, a number of discouraging incidents had taken place which was an immediate sign that the faculty would be unaccommodating to me as a researcher. I had experienced firsthand what I had been warned of in the UK - Indian, male, middle-aged, pompousness within an academic environment. After being told to '*do what you like, but our students have*

exams so they probably won't have time. We don't have time', it had occurred to me that as a young, female, ethnically similar researcher, this group of academics had already branded me. I was, in their words, merely '*koi ladki jo project karrne aayi hai*', translated, '*some girl who has come to do a project'*.

I had decided to place my eggs into one basket and hoped that the Bharati student body was not limited to rural groups alone. My meeting with the principal at Bharati College, Dr. Varma, on the following day was a success. I had received immense support and attention and was helped immensely by Dr. Sanyal, the English lecturer, who had read my proposal and was more than aware of the sample I was in need of. It was a shock to the system to have been received with such respect in one institution and sidelined in the other – I had already become part of the fabric of India, it seemed. Below are two tables of the names and ages of the girls, although section 3.5 will describe how I actually recruited the respondents. Images of the campus and respondents can also be found in the appendix.

URBAN GROUP

NAME	AGE	NAME	AGE
MEGHA	19	NITI	19
SHIVANGINI	19	DIMPLE	18
KANIKA	18	DIVYA	19
SWATI	19	DEEPIKA	19
TANUSHA	19	HEENA	18
TANYA	19	SHIVANI	18
ANYA	26		

RURAL GROUP

NAME	AGE	NAME	AGE
SHIKHA	18	RAKHI	18
VINEETA	18	SUMAN	19
POOJA	18	BABY	18
RENU	18	KHUSHBOO	19
ASHA	18	ANJU	19

3.4   Research Methods

So far I have outlined the broad methodological approach for the study and have explained the rationale behind my choice of research location and sample participants. In this section I outline and justify the choice of the particular research methods I used in my research study. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, my choice of methods were selected in order to capture context, identity and everyday practices of consumption amongst a group of young female consumers in Delhi. The remaining sub-sections will present the multiple-methods (observation techniques, ethnographic interviewing, focus groups and visual methods) utilised in order to capture a 'thick description' of context and consumer.

3.4.1   Observation Technique

It is the task of the social scientist to interpret the meanings and experiences that are constructed by participants in social situations; these experiences of social actors can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved (Burgess, 1984). Participant observation enables the research worker to secure their data within the mediums, symbols, and experiential worlds which have meaning to their respondents. Observation has been taken for granted in light of methodological debates, its importance in gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social worlds is overlooked by the simple notion 'we observe all the time'. However, observation facilitates the production of written ethnographic accounts and descriptions of these worlds to others. Geertz (1973) insistence on the centrality of inscription in

ethnography called attention to the fact that the ethnographer *inscribes* social discourse simultaneously being the scribe as well as the explorer. In light of my research, participant observation as well as context and location specific observation holds to be a valid method of capturing what the reader may not see otherwise. Not only was I in an environment I am not accustomed to, I was also surrounded by norms and culturally-specific patterns of behaviour and communication which, once inscribed, has added to the richness of the data.

My research is grounded in a location- India, and it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the impacts of place as a variable which is integral to the social actors' lives as they are both influenced by it, and in turn influence it. Participant observation facilitates the collection of data on social interaction on situations as they occur rather than constructs of artificial situations provided by the researcher. Furthermore, this method enabled me to obtain accounts of situations in the participants own language which gave access to the concepts that are used in everyday life (Burgess, 1984). There was ample opportunity to collect the different versions of events that were available within my surroundings in India, as my research centres upon respondents within a metropolis, and the notion of being grounded within this city is integral to my enquiry. Gold (cited in McCall, 1969; see also Burgess, 1984) has noted four ideal types of participant observer: the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant and the complete observer.

For the purpose of my research I employed the participant as observer role, this role involved situations where the researcher participated as well as observed by developing relationships with informants (Burgess, 1984). However, I would like to point out here

that the role that researchers may adopt is also dependent upon circumstance and context, and as witnessed in the field, the shifting of the mode of observation may occur. A researcher will develop several roles throughout an investigation; Olesen and Whittaker (1967) have discussed the ways in which the field roles are developed through their experiences of research on student nurses to discuss the process involved in role definition. They purport that in the course of a social research project roles are established on the basis of exchanges taking place between the researcher and the researched. Research roles are constantly negotiated and renegotiated with different informants throughout a research project (see Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). With regard to my masters research project, I found myself at different phases with each individual which was a result of the relationship which I shared with the respondent.

Gold (cited in McCall, 1969), describes the participant-as-observer as someone who develops relationships with informants through time whilst participating in certain events. The shifting between formal and informal observation is characteristic of this mode of observation as it allows my position as a researcher to integrate yet remain transparent to my informants in terms of my sole purpose within the field. However, there are always issues of 'going native', which may jeopardise the research process somewhat; the informant may become too identified with the field worker to continue functioning as merely an informant. It was extremely important for the researcher to maintain an ocular distance, and this was done through breaks in the research process-time away from respondents in order to explore my surroundings, not always being led through the process but in order to capture visually what I found relevant and interesting to the research.

Observation is an ongoing dynamic activity that is more likely than interviews to provide evidence for process- something that is continually moving and evolving (Mulhall, 2002). As Silverman (1993) notes, we have all become a little reluctant to use our eyes as well as our ears during observational work. The way that people move, dress, interact and use space is all very much a part of how particular social settings are constructed. Participant observation provides an opportunity to record what people actually do in real life, rather than what people say they do, this links somewhat significantly to the choice of site selection as Kemp (2001) has also noted. Site selection requires a degree of understanding of the situation being explored and a hunch that something of interest is happening there. The aim of participant observation is that the participants should ideally forget that they are being observed and behave naturally; however, what is deemed to be naturalistic comes under scrutiny.

3.4.2   Ethnographic Interviewing

As Spradley (1979) notes in The Ethnographic Interview, the essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. The researchers' job, therefore, is to communicate genuinely, in both suitable and direct ways that 'I want to know what you know *in the way that you know it*…will you become my teacher and help me understand?' (ibid). Research, in increasing numbers, have turned to ethnographic interviewing out of a growing recognition of the complexity of human experience, a desire to hear from people directly how they interpret their experiences (Heyl, 2001). Kvale (1996) highlights two alternative metaphors of the research interviewer: one as a miner and the other as a

traveller. In the miner metaphor the interviewer goes to the vicinity of the 'buried treasure' of new information in a specific social world, however, in contrast to this the traveller metaphor sees the interviewer as on a journey from which he or she will return with stories to tell, having engaged in conversations with those encountered along the way (Heyl, 2001).

Kvale (1996) notes that the original Latin meaning of *conversation* is 'wandering together with', however, I would like to draw upon a more appropriate word in light of the ethnographic interview which is derived from Sanskrit and this is *vartalaap*. The term literally translated means conversation, however, when broken down the first half of the word means to *talk* or *create a dialog*, but the most interesting is the latter half *alaap* which is generally associated with music and is the dialog between the musician and the raga (melodic form). This word not only illustrates how one begins to understand the language, but more importantly acknowledges the depth of the language. Put together, the etymology of both these words combine the notion of not only travelling but also gaining in-depth understanding which I believe to be extremely relevant and appropriate for ethnographic interviewing. Kvale's (1996) *InterViews* centers on the idea that interviews are first and foremost interaction, a conversation between the researcher and the informant making the knowledge that is produced out of this conversation a product of that interaction- the exchange and production of views.

With specific regard to my research, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) raise a valid point when they emphasise "the importance of acquiring background knowledge relevant to the research topic, as well as knowledge of the 'material, cultural, and interpretive circumstances to which respondents might orient." (p.77) Adopting the term 'active

interviewer' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) means that the researcher is interested in tracing how the interviewee develops a response, so that the shifts, with their attendant markers – including hesitations and expressions indicating a struggle to formulate a coherent answer – are keys to different identities and meanings constructed from these different positions. The active interview data can be analysed not only for what is said and how it was said but also for showing the ways the *what* and *how* are interrelated and what circumstances condition the meaning-making process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 79).

Another important issue within ethnographic interviewing is the level of empowerment, and the researcher should allow the informant to name the world in their own terms rather than reacting to terminology or categories introduced by the researcher (Heyl, 2001). It is important to remember that within the ethnographic interview the data obtained is a form of collaboration between the researcher and informant, the product of a dialogue between two parties. Poland and Pederson (1998) note that traditionally ethnographic interviewers are taught to keep informants talking, however, silences may also be indicators of complex reactions to questions posed by the researcher. I had been as transparent as possible with my informants; and this included an open discussion about how the data will be used, what information is being sought and what topics may help to stimulate the study.

The interviews were unstructured and open, leaving ample space for the respondents to narrate their stories in lieu of being framed by the rigidity of a set of questions. The interviews were important in that they served as a space for expression, to use movements, to bring with them paraphernalia and to have a secure environment where

they could speak their minds in the absence of teachers, parents and their urban/rural peers. The interview situation provided a discursive space, where meanings and opinions were shared and explained in detail for the researcher. This method was successful in providing substantial insight.

3.4.3 Focus Groups

An important theme that reappears in many focus groups is their ability to 'give voice' to marginalised groups (Morgan, 1996). However, others have argued that the value of focus groups goes well beyond listening to others, since they can serve as a basis for empowering informants. The reasoning behind why I opted to combine both individual and group interviews is due to the depth of the former and the breadth of the latter; this strategy has the advantage of obtaining reactions from a relatively wide range of participants in a relatively short space of time. It is worth noting here that one of the main purposes in conducting focus group interviews was because of their 'ice-breaker' effect, many of the issues central to my research were opened up for debate and a researcher I was able to take full advantage of this group situation to provide the respondents with various probes in visual or verbal form. The notion that focus groups have a synergy that makes them more productive than individual interviews has been argued by Fern (1982) who suggested that two eight person focus groups would produce as many ideas as 10 individual interviews.

For the purpose of my research, the focus groups provided a can opening effect on many sensitive topics, the issues that emerged had in some instances developed into a one-to-one interview with individuals. Despite the positives associated with depth

interviewing, it also holds its disadvantages. Lack of structure may make the results susceptible to the interviewer's influence and the quality and completeness of the results depends heavily upon the interviewer's skill (Malhotra, 2004). Data is difficult to analyse and interpret, making it susceptible to misinterpretation if not done by a skilled professional. A focus group is generally designed to provide both stimulation and synergism for any given topic; I had used focus groups as putting people together produced a wider range of information, insight and ideas; it also helped in terms efficient use of time whereby I was able to interview a greater number of individuals. As I have experienced previously, the unstructured nature of the focus group did at times become quite chaotic, and keeping control over responses and making sure all informants had their chance to air views took a great deal of patience and skill from the researcher.

3.4.4   Visual Methods

Photo elicitation is a method being increasingly used in social science research. The term was coined by John Collier (1957), and has been seen to act not only as "interview stimuli" (Wagner, 1978) but also as a medium through which new knowledge and critiques may be created (Pink, 2005). Photographs, as Harper (2002) notes, may become something like Rorschach ink blots in which people from different cultures spin out their respective worlds of meaning. An image may be universal, however, its interpretation not. Harper (2003) writes of his experiences of travelling through a busy Italian street on a bicycle simultaneously photographing street scenes. He states clearly the issue of representation within his work that "although these images

produce what I consider to be empirical data, I do not claim that these images represent "objective truth". The very act of observing is interpretive, for to observe is to choose a point of view" (p. 183)

In *Researching the Visual*, Emmison and Smith (2000) introduce the idea of 'dimensionality' as a core organising principle for thinking about different forms of visual information. They place importance upon the idea that visual data must be understood as having more than just the two-dimensional component which its representation in the photographic image suggests. To say that human action is meaningful is to claim either that it has certain intentional content that indicates the kind of action it is and/ or that what an action means can be grasped only in terms of the system of meaning to which it belongs (Fay, 1996; Outhwaite, 1975). Raising one's arm may be interpreted in numerous ways dependant upon the way in which it is interpreted, which may of course be subject to change and dependant upon context and social and cultural settings.

Pink (2005) raises an extremely valid point, stating that there has been an overplay in terms of the interpretation of images and objects and the social and cultural conditions within which they are produced rather than how images and their production form part of ethnographic practices. In agreement with Warren (2004), on one level all research practice is visual since we are in the business of describing researched worlds to our readers. Native image making, originally put forward by Wagner (1979) describes the process of researching other's worlds by asking them to make photographs that depict some aspect of their experiences. As Edwards (1997) notes, the subjective nature of photography lends itself well to certain studies since the photograph almost literally acts

as a lens through which we see what others 'see' and more importantly what others deem important to capture on camera in the first place.

However, I also feel there is a need for symbolic framing, storylines and a human spokesperson in order to acquire social lives (Pels et al, 2002). To isolate visual data from written or spoken text would be problematic and this is one of the primary reasons I had chosen to support my visual data with respondent intervention where they were to explain their photographs and highlight their importance. To paraphrase Collier (2002), photographs are complex reflections of a relationship between the maker and the subject where both of these variables help to shape the character and content.

A counter argument to the idea of representation lies with Emmison and Smith (2000), who report that consideration should be placed upon what is readily available to the naked eye rather than the representation in photographic images, all in all, not what the camera can record but what the eye can see. I would, however, raise the argument that photographic images are also part of what the eye can see, and in terms of the subject, what the eyes have seen. The importance of the visible features of the social world which are readily available to the naked eye that Emmison and Smith talk of does not address the issue of what can not be visualised or what can not be captured. Using photographs as a stimulus for unobservable or almost 'invisible' traits within different cultural settings, I believe, is as rich as any written textual data. Thinking out of the frame, I feel academic discourse is bound within the idea of what is written on paper, even a mediocre element such as journal layout reinforces the boundaries of valid academic research. Importance is being placed on looking rather than what is observed, what is heard rather than what is listened to.

John Hutnyk's (1996) book *The Rumour of Calcutta* battles through issues such as tourism, charity and the poverty of representation. He states that the construction of experience through the medium of preservable two-dimensional (moving or still) representation is one of the most important contemporary phenomena of international travel, however, in representing the 'other' I would argue that a quote by one American tourist in India was extremely empathetic in the way in which he questioned the looming eye of the camera lens, "I just froze as I was taking a photo and it hit me- I put myself in their place and could realize how I'd feel if they were taking photos of me while I was hanging out my washing in my backyard" (p.151).

However, is this really an invasion of privacy, or yet another way in which we are merely capturing our observations and what we "see". If visual ethnographers become so conscious about their photo taking, should they be just as cautious through their observing? The technicality of being able to capture an image and take it away from its source comes under the scrutiny of ethics; ethical issues in visual research are contextualised, institutionally embedded, organisationally ruled and compounded by postmodern realities that pose paradoxes in the changing visual culture (Papademas, 2004).

Battling through the variety of arguments in favour, or otherwise, of visual research methods it is important to remember the complementary nature of the text and visual to open up a possibly new way of understanding individuals, cultures and perspectives. Rather than being completely closed to these rather novel methodologies, it is important to acknowledge that the visual has implications not only for the discourses of modernity

and ethnographic practice, but also for understanding the individuals who are the subjects of ethnography. Just as actions speak louder than words, if the visual is a universal discourse it should be embraced as a foundation for further enquiry rather than being shunned as unrepresentative. Insight is just as important to understanding and the meaning one seeks in 'making sense' of a social action or text is temporal and processive and always coming into being in the specific occasion of understanding (Aylesworth, 1991). As Dell Hymes (1974) put it, scholars must reinvent their disciplines on an ongoing basis as new ideas, perspectives, and objects of enquiry, including image and the visible world move into or out of focus.

In sum, the methods which were chosen for the research were a combination of observation techniques as described by Burgess (1984), unstructured ethnographic interviews to capture the meaning and actions of the respondents as they were placed in the role of 'authority' in teaching me about who they were. These interviews were conducted in group form, as well as one-to-one, and the data was supplemented by visual additions in the form of photographs and video data.

Overview of Data Collection

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
	[Researcher and/or Respondents Participation]
PHOTOGRAPHS	RESEARCHER – Taking photographs of the college campus and whilst travelling in and around Delhi. The photographs helped to supplement diary entries and store visual 'snapshots' of places and things of interest. RESPONDENTS – During the photo elicitation project (a modern India looks like/ If money was no object)
VIDEO	RESEARCHER - Video entries helped to capture my narrative of various places visited within Delhi whilst providing 'real time' footage of my surroundings. Additionally, recordings were also taken where there were events taking place (such as the Annual Day Function at the

	college and the Diwali festival). Television advertisements were recorded as well as travels through crowds in busy marketplaces, helping to capture the essence of my experience. RESPONDENTS – The rural respondents had recorded a video message for me upon my departure.
COLLAGES	RESPONDENTS – Utilised in conjunction with the photo elicitation projects. A number of the rural respondents were limited in their mobility around the city and opted to create collages, additionally, due to the limited number of cameras for use; the collages provided an alternative representation on the part of the respondents.
MAGAZINES NEWSPAPERS	RESEARCHER – Each morning I would read and take cuttings from the newspapers delivered to my residence each morning. The newspapers not only enhances my understanding of important issues in the country, but also presented me with interesting consumer-related imagery [Brunch magazine insert on weekends and the HTC insert aimed at youth and young adults]. I was also updated of the events in the city. RESPONDENTS - During my time in India, Vogue had published their first Vogue India magazine. I had purchased a copy and had shared discussions with the urban respondents over its content as well as a number of other English language magazines. The magazines were used as prompts for discussion points.
INTERVIEWS	See 3.4.2
FOCUS GROUPS	See 3.4.3

3.5   **Research Process**

In this section I report how the research was actually done and in doing so, comment on both the requirements of the fieldwork situation and the way in which they affected my approach as well as my personal interaction with the respondents.

3.5.1   Recruiting Respondents

I completed the research for this thesis over a period of two months between November 2007 and January 2008. After more than twenty e-mails had been sent to various higher

education institutions in Delhi, access to two sites was granted by the principal of Bharati College and the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS). As described earlier in the chapter, despite confirmation and formal letter from the dean of the faculty, the data collection did not take place at the site of FMS, thereby omitting this institution from the focus of this section. Once I received confirmation that the study could take place on the Bharati College premises, I had sent out an information pack to the institution which consisted of a letter of thanks from my supervisor and I, a department handbook, an outline of the study and a participation form which was utilised by the primary gatekeeper, Dr. Mukti Sanyal, to note down names of students willing to participate in the study, ready for me to meet with them on my arrival.

The first meeting at the college took place on my third day in Delhi. The main purpose of this meeting was to begin to get a general feel for the research site, to meet with two of the prospective respondents that Dr. Sanyal had arranged for me to meet and to find out how I was to obtain access to the respondents and where the interviews could take place. Upon arriving at the college, after having convinced the security guards that the principal was aware I would be on campus, I met with Dr. Sanyal in the principal's office – come - meeting room. The principal was absent on the day of the meeting due to illness, however, Dr. Sanyal sat with me for some time re-reading my proposal and she was eager to make sure she had a grasp for the range of respondents I would need. She explained to me that I would be able to locate urban students dotted around campus, yet the rural students would be more difficult to approach without the process of the data-collection becoming integral to their studies. Without time to ponder, I was immediately granted access to her foundation level English class, where the student body consisted of girls who came from the surrounding villages.

In order for me to gain sufficient time with the girls, Dr. Sanyal integrated my study into their curriculum, where after each session the girls would need to write, in English, a brief overview of what was discussed and the experience of being able to listen to English being spoken by a 'native'[11]. In addition to this, the counselling room on campus was usually unoccupied during teaching hours and I was given the room for the purpose of interviewing respondents. At the first meeting I spent time speaking to two of the respondents in the principal's office, Shivangini and Dimple, who were intrigued about the study and were eager to meet with me. I asked them about their course of study, what they felt about participating in the study and whether they had any specific reservations about being recorded. They informed me that there were two more girls from the English honours course who also wanted to participate, to which I replied I had arranged an interview slot with both the girls for the next day.

Having gained access to my rural respondents and four urban participants, I was faced with the task of seeking out other urban students, which form the majority student body, seemed as though it would be a difficult task. On day two at the site, and during my stage of meandering around the college campus advertising my study to students, I had met with Tanya. What initially drew me to her was her style of dress and the group that she was with at the time. I made a rather rapid assessment and decided to approach her about the study in the hope that there would be a positive response. She was one of the few respondents who seemed genuinely interested at the outset; I gave her my university card and informed her that I would be in the counselling room for the remainder of the day if she wanted to sign up for the study. She had asked if she could

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[11] An example of the girl's written project can be found in the appendix.

bring some of her course mates, to which I responded positively. As the day went on, Tanya arrived at the counselling room with a few of her friends – I took this opportunity to explain the nature of the study and what would be expected of them, and I asked the girls which areas of Delhi they resided in. The group were extremely comfortable communicating in English and within a space of ten minutes I had an additional eight participants to my urban sample. Over the coming days I was inundated with requests to join the study in addition to becoming a college attraction as a 'foreigner on campus'.

Meetings were scheduled at times on the day itself and at times a day in advance. Each morning I would send a text message to the urban group for their availability for the day as much of the time they were never sure if their lecturers would arrive for classes or not. For the rural girls, I needed to schedule fixed appointments as many of them did not own a mobile phone; however, one of the respondents did have her own personal handset and she, in turn, became my first point of contact if I needed to get in touch with any of the girls during college hours. A further restriction for the rural girls was timing, to which I needed to strictly adhere to – interviews after 1:30pm were rare as the girls needed to get back home for a 'decent hour'. So that I did not cause any form of distress for any of the respondents, I organised the meetings with urban respondents around the fixed timings for the rural girls as their flexibility with time was far greater.

The data collection was not confined to the college campus alone. Twenty six year old Anya, the daughter of the family I was residing with, had wanted me to present her story. Due to the situation within the home, it was difficult to find a quiet place to interview Anya without her mother interrupting the session, this was one technicality which was difficult to overcome as the complaints started to erupt about Anya spending

too much time speaking with me when she was expected to be doing housework. I had decided to instead make conversational and observational notes of the days and time spent with her which included a range of topics we has discussed and to document her daily experiences in detail. I had recorded a number of trips with Anya to the local mall and nearby market in Tilak Nagar, and I was able to capture not only important points of conversation but also the surroundings in which these conversations had taken place.

3.5.2   Details of the Method

Having gained access to both groups of girls I made sure that all the girls knew that interviews would be recorded and subsequently transcribed. I asked all respondents if they would prefer pseudonyms in place of their real names, to which they all responded no. The interviews were conducted in both the counselling room and English foundation course classroom and were 'open' in the sense that the girls were encouraged to speak openly about topics that were raised in relation to their consumption behaviour. With the Urban group I had conducted all interviews in English, and with the rural group the interviews were conducted in Hindi.

In total, I conducted 60 interviews ranging in length from one to one and a half hours. Each day on campus, from approximately 8:30am until 2pm, I made myself available for interview sessions with the respondents. It became a routine whereby the urban group would come to see me in the morning, letting me know of their availability for the day, and I would subsequently work around the fixed timings for the rural respondents and give them a time slot.   In terms of data management, I used an

electronic dictaphone, and at the end of each day at the college I would download this onto a laptop (at my residence), with the names of the individuals who were interviewed and the date. Most evenings I would listen back to recordings from the day, make key notes of the issues raised in order to probe areas I felt were of interest or areas that needed further discussion from other respondents, and compile a list of issues ready for the next day at the college. In terms of verification, after a given 'block' of interviews I would go over interview recordings and compile sentences which I felt would help to describe the girls views and behaviour on numerous topics, such as "*what I know of you so far is…*". These sentences were shared with the respondents during breaks in interview sessions and informal talks in the canteen for the purpose of verification and to make sure I was grasping their sentiments as best as possible.

In the time outside of the interviews, I was able to travel around the city, take in the culture and participate in day-to-day activities within the home. As a 'foreigner' I was rarely permitted to cook for myself or clean, however, I spent time spent in the home during the evenings shadowing members of the family. After college hours I would make regular trips to various locations via the Metro: Tilak Nagar, Rajouri Garden, Connaught Place and my mother's place of birth, Shaadipur and had met with distant relatives and friends of distant relatives who had also let me spend time in their homes. In essence, then, the data collection and observation was a continuous process throughout my time in the field. My own identity, in some ways, was certainly advantageous. I was not immediately recognisable as a 'foreigner' as I spoke predominantly in Hindi whilst travelling around Delhi and would utilise colloquial terms which I had picked up amongst Indian friends in the UK. To be able to camouflage myself within my surroundings was certainly advantageous as those I was

observing and interacted with during my travels around the city were, on most occasions, unaware of my presence. Additionally I had collected newspapers and magazine cuttings, recorded television shows and advertisements and made visits to religious institutions which I felt were relevant for understanding the research context, adding to the 'thick description' I was eager to obtain.

3.5.3   Analysis and Conceptualisation

The chapter so far has presented and justified the two-month multi-method study of consumer culture carried out for this thesis. It has argued for the broadly Interpretivist methodology which framed the study, outlined and accounted for the choice of research site and participants, and explained the use of the multiple methods for eliciting suitable data. This section will bring the chapter to a close by detailing the ways in which I interpreted the data collected during the research study.

A process of coding, as framed by Lindlof (1995:224), where the "process in which the researcher creatively scans and samples data-texts, looks for commonalities and differences and begins to formulate categories of interest" was pursued. The actual process of data interpretation involved tiers of coding techniques in addition to complex translation. My first hurdle was to translate the Hindi recordings into English transcripts which had taken a considerable amount of time as there were terms that I was unfamiliar with, and Hindi terms which I found difficult to translate into English. With the help of a Hindi and Sanskrit scholar based in Germany, an Indian history scholar based in the US (Patrick Olivelle) and assistance from my own circle of Indian friends

and colleagues, I was able to generate the closest translation possible for certain terms which I found difficult to translate alone.

The actual process of coding involved, firstly, a generation of the overarching themes from both groups of respondents and involved the use of post-it notes and highlighting to develop a sense of some of the key consumer themes which were of central importance to the respondents. Post-it-notes were placed next to the relevant sections in the transcripts where the themes were seen to have emerged from. Secondly, I begun to construct a 'mind map' of the emergent themes and placed the post it notes from the various transcripts onto the map which stated the transcript number and page for reference. Having split this mind map into urban and rural, I began with another set of post-it-notes and weaved through the transcripts to trace the intricate sub-divisions of these overarching themes. These post-it-notes were subsequently placed onto the mind map, where I was able to distinguish in visual representation where the primary differences and similarities occurred between both groups of girls. In addition to this, I had placed codes upon the documents I had collected during my time in India and integrated these into the map to indicate where they helped to substantiate themes and sub-themes.

3.6   Summary

In sum, this chapter has presented and justified the development and execution of the two-month, multi-method ethnographic study that was carried out in order to capture some of the empirical dimensions of consumer culture amongst a group of young female consumers in New Delhi. I have covered issues of the methodological

perspective, site selection and sampling, choice of research methods, the nature of the research process and the strategy for interpreting the data. The following chapter will present the results of the data interpretations which ensued from the fieldwork documented in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.0   <u>Introduction</u>

The previous two chapters have set out the theoretical and methodological concerns of this thesis. Chapter two provided a critique of the predominant conceptualisations of globalisation and consumer culture theory in light of the extant literature in the arenas of marketing, sociology, anthropology and media in addition to presenting India-specific literature. Chapter three went on to document the translation of the theoretical framework into an appropriate research study, the objective of which was to explore a number of dimensions of the lived experiences of consumption amongst a sample of young female consumers in New Delhi. The objective of this chapter is to present and interpret the data of the empirical study of consumer culture. The data has been transcribed and translated by the author from Hindi to English where needed. Additionally, diary excerpts, photographic evidence and other supporting documents during the duration of the research are also presented as inserts throughout.

The structure of this chapter will follow the emergence of primary themes which were uncovered through the reading of the data: The media, bodies as sites of consumption, consumption and modernity and lifestyles.

Diary Entry 1: The Ethnographic Site: Bharati College [transcribed from recording]

…looking around and seeing a lot of females, actually there are a lot of females dressed in traditional clothing. You can almost see a huge split between the more affluent students and the less affluent in the college at the moment

[Pause]

It's an interesting split…with some of the girls it's not as clear cut what kind of backgrounds they are from looking at their attire, however, you can see the ones who are trying to make an effort with their traditional and westernised clothing. I'm looking around and am standing right at the entrance of the college and I am, again, seeing a lot of girls wearing a tunic top and jeans…clustered in groups. I have met four different females, and from these four females the initial two seemed to know enough English to get themselves by, however, Hindi is still spoken most predominantly here. It's a nice day, there are students sitting outside, out near the canteen. At the moment I am waiting for the principal and am looking at this huge notice board. I am assuming that this is a display of projects that the girls have undertaken…it seems to be a marketing based/promotion based project. It's quite interesting to see this as they are advertising mobile phones…assuming, and this is without knowing the details of the study, it would have been along the lines of new product development. They have designed a brand new mobile phone and have put in a lot of details with regards to what the mobile phone is…they are showing the price and special promotional offers.

[Pause background noise]

As can be heard probably from the tape, Hindi is spoken frequently in the college…but the split is quite obvious. There's a garden area in the college almost like a veranda where the girls congregate. The girls sitting along this wall are wearing traditional clothing; their hair is usually tied back. They don't seem to be making much eye contact with me as such, and when I look around to see who is walking past etcetera there doesn't seem to be that much mixing between girls that are wearing traditional clothing and girls wearing western attire. I am observing groups of girls who are dressed primarily the same. Some of the girls that I met upstairs who are doing other courses or add-on foundational courses are quite hesitant in responding to me, as when I did ask them a question they didn't seem to understand straight away. Having been here a week now I feel it's quite obvious to tell whether some girls will be able to speak English or not which is generally through their clothing which is quite strange. I found myself approaching girls wearing jeans and tunics and didn't want to start conversing in Hindi to begin with as I could assess their reactions and their comfort towards speaking in English. I'm feeling quite strange and embarrassed to be hanging around in all honesty, not really sure what to do because, again, the timings in India are quite strange and you need to work to their routines and structures …so the college will be open but the principal won't roll in until approx. 10 o'clock onwards, and I am still waiting for the principal to show.

4.1 <u>Media: A fictional reality</u>

Similar to the findings of Wessel's study discussed in chapter two, a fundamental component in much of the girls' lives centres upon the negotiation of media. Choice of programming amongst the urban girls in particular has become a determinant for the way in which they negotiate their lifestyles and patterns of consumption; what they choose to consume visually helps not only determine their social standing but also reflects elements of 'modern *soch*' (thinking) and a deviation away from what they perceive to be a very 'traditional' and somewhat stereotypical Indian ethos. The first sub-section will address the notion of media as a highly influential medium with the ability to shape consumer attitude.

4.1.1 <u>Media and Influence</u>

> **Heena**: *it's because of the media that the lifestyle is changing here*
> **Researcher**: *So media exerts a level of influence?*
> **All**: *yes definitely!*
> **Heena**: *It has matured our thinking*
> **Researcher**: *In what way?*
> **Heena**: *Earlier, going to a disc* [nightclub] *was considered very bad, but now it's ok...If you compare a child of then and now of about 14 or 15 yrs of age you'll see a major difference. They think completely differently because of the media*
> **Shivani**: *it's due to the media that our lifestyle has changed; a few years ago people weren't so conscious about what they are wearing*
> **Divya**: *we want everything to be perfect*

Heena's initial statement imbues media with properties so potent that they could potentially serve to change not only the way in which an individual wishes to live, but also helps provide a form of mental development in the way of 'maturing' one's thinking. Heena illuminates this catalytic effect of media further through changes in

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generational 'thinking', in a sense placing the blame upon media. Her suggestion that there is an inherent change between age groups could also suggest that this particular sample of girls may have also undergone such a level of transformation as compared to their preceding generation. This gradual consciousness of consumerism through the medium of television is exemplified by Shivani and Divya's comments respectively. In my opinion, Divya's assertion could suggest that 'perfection' is attainable through purchase; however, the benchmark for this echelon of perfection will be attained, unquestionably, through what is depicted in the media. Another instance regarding the influential nature of media is evidenced in the passage below by Shivangini:

> **Shivangini***:* [media] *is playing a big role in fact. Changing your state of mind, and the way you think, the way you dress up, whatever. It is through the media we came to know about BPO, otherwise what is BPO? Its become so entwined with our lives, at least one family member is now working for one. Its only through the media we get these updates.*
> **Deepika***: My father is not affected by this [smiling & laughing].He thinks it corrupts you,* [he will tell us] *don't believe in all that and we'd be saying 'we know it, we know It'. We don't watch TV around him all the time.*

Again, the idea of informing and educating the viewer is something that the young women are not entirely sceptical of, but is something they believe is beneficial for their development. It could be assumed then, that the young women feel as though media is in fact helping to dissolve some form of stereotype embedded within the country's social fabric. Heena is also of the same thinking as indicated in her statement above noting how going to nightclubs was once seen as a negative thing; this negativity was not only amongst the older generation but also amongst many young women of her own age. Until the depiction of the nightclub setting was aired and, more importantly, normalised, the girls admitted to thinking it was an act of deviance. However, it must be

noted that there are still elements and pockets of resistance to not only this 'normalisation' but television viewing in general; Deepika highlights her father's resentment of media, referring in a somewhat animated fashion, to the way in which he is seemingly unaffected by its content. Through her father's surveillance, Deepika concludes her statement by emphasising a sense of detachment at not wanting to watch television in front of him. This idea of detachment is interesting and could pose a metaphorical divide between one generation and the next; or more specifically, between parents and their children's practice of consumption. Further evidence of this divide between media consumption patterns can be seen in a later dialogue with Deepika and Shivangini

> **Shivangini**: *There is only one TV set at home and everybody is supposed to sit there and watch*
> **Deepika**: *We're not always ok with parents there, every now and then a scene comes and...*
> **Shivangini**: *yeah. Actually they are more bothered about me having a TV in my own room*
> **Researcher**: *is that considered a bad thing?*
> **Shivangini**: *it's not a bad thing but you know, my mum would be like, you'll always keep watching your MTV and all that crap that's coming up, that's not really good for your mind. You sit in the drawing room and watch...*
> **Deepika:** *I mean if you sit with your parents you can only watch decent serial, a decent film*
> **Shivangini**: *but now I am observing my mum, since I have started college she's like its ok if you are watching a smooching scene its ok, but not when your brother and sister are around because you understand what is wrong and right so there's no problem with you watching it.*

This excerpt further emphasises the notion of viewership control, Shivangini notes her mother's discomfort at the prospect of her having access to a television set in her own room, almost as a way of safeguarding her from any form of negative influence that would impact upon her 'mind'. Deepika notes that the prerequisite for group or family viewership is centred upon 'decency'.

Through these claims of influence which have been noted by all the respondents, it is interesting to draw attention to the specific consumer items which are being absorbed through viewership. When talking with Shivangini about the kind of consumer products she is purchasing at present, she immediately informed me of her primary source of reference:

> **Shivangini***: umm...in most of the movies you can see certain things that you want; you could see a t-shirt which is in rage right now. Branded stuff is really in fashion these days... My father will be saying 'why are you buying these jeans for like 1500Rs when you can get them for like 700Rs'?...When I am watching the TV with mum, she'll be watching her serials and will comment on the interiors of the home that they show, like 'oh this is nice and that is nice'.*
> **Deepika***: Yeah, you see the hairstyles, jewellery and all in the serials.*

Firstly, Shivangini's reference to media is an important one as she uses this intermediary as a way of monitoring fashions and trends which, supposedly, are being worn by celebrities on screen. As an observation, much of the emphasis within Indian cinema, or Bollywood as it is more commonly known, are usually of an aesthetic nature. Lavish sets, expensive costumes, heavy jewellery and garish make-up, all tightly framed within a musical melodrama of romance. This aesthetic experience carries on over into the Indian serials and, as Shivangini notes, becomes an arena of lavish consumption which the viewer, who in this instance is her mother, will view almost as an advertisement for lifestyle products. Deepika further supports this notion, stating through her references to hairstyle and jewellery, that the alternate appeal to these serials lies in the fact that the programmes are, in fact, produced with heavy emphasis upon aesthetic detail in mind. Secondly, Shivangini, as a consumer of branded items, notes how she is questioned by her father when purchasing a pair of jeans; this incident

implies Shivangini's preference for branded items lies in her ability to apply an element of symbolic appeal which enables her to differentiate between branded and non-branded goods. Appeal is also displayed through endorsement and product placement; Shivangini and Deepika go on to say:

> **Shivangini**: *Yeah, I remember seeing Yana Gupta advertising this eye make-up and I told my mum that I really want this particular eye shadow.*
> **Deepika**: *Advertising really helps, my boyfriend will watch a movie and he'll see that Akshay is wearing some goggles* [sunglasses]. *He doesn't care about the price he will just buy it- the exact same ones with a shirt or something; he'll buy it just because he's seen it. When he goes home he'll tear off the tag and just say it was 500 Rs or something* [laughs].

Deepika's comment is especially noteworthy; she explains the level of influence upon her boyfriend with regard to acquiring status items. She notes how merely seeing it is enough motivation for him to pursue a purchase of the actors outfit and accessory, yet will conceal the actual value of the items.

4.1.2   Identifying Difference: The *Saas Bahu* Dichotomy

A second important component introduced by the respondents upon discussing the role of media is the way in which the urban girls were keen to distinguish their viewing choices from those of the rural sect. Urban respondent Megha was quick to share with me her preference of television programming:

> **Megha**: *I'm normally watching channel 'Zoom' every day; it's about page three and is related to Bollywood, maximum style and good living*

Megha's reference to page three is a term used to describe media on India's rich and famous socialites. The coverage predominantly follows their social activities in the form of parties, events and other miscellaneous functions. When probed about the non-Indian equivalent for a channel like 'Zoom' Megha replied that it was, in fact, an Indian version of MTV where the hosts generally spoke in '*Hinglish*', a term coined by the Indian youth themselves to project a sense of hybridity within language. I pushed the group for a further explanation of this idea, to which they responded:

> **Shivani**: *It's a mixture of both Hindi and English- Hinglish*
> **Megha**: *See, at times they will speak English- just to attract you*
> **Heena**: *Yeah, they may be speaking in English but the songs and all are in Hindi, from Bollywood.*
> **Megha**: *They use a lot of slang, it's not proper English*

This idea of hybridity is further propelled by Heena's comment that despite the host speaking in English; it is still Hindi music which is being played. In light of this, it could be understood from this statement that the role of English is viewed as a stylistic element in media which could serve the purpose of fusing both Hindi music and the youth audience. Bearing in mind that the context for this comment was the use of language in media, it may be suggested that there seems to be something more significant regarding the role of English. As with accordance to Megha, it serves the function of attracting audiences for this specific type of media, which in turn makes youth and the English language conjoint. Megha indirectly asserts her knowledge and fluency of the language, criticising its use on this channel as not being proper.

As I have noted in the diary entry above, the college setting was home to a majority group predominantly from the rural setting; the urban group had many views of the

rural girls as a collective which will be discussed during the course of this chapter. However, keeping in line with the current topic, another instance regarding this notion of language and media was brought forward during a discussion with Divya. The nature of the conversation concerned the stark differences between two different groups of girls and she utilises media to differentiate between the two groups:

> **Divya:** *They* [rural girls] *watch things, everyone has a television, but they are not interested in watching English channels. They're more conservative in that sense…they just don't want to know what's going on beyond their life.*

Divya believes that this particular group of girls refused to watch English channels out of choice. Her dogmatic statement could assume here that this idea of conservatism is problematic; an indirect reference could be understood here regarding the genre or type of media shown on these channels, which in some instances could be deemed as immoral or deviant for a certain group of individuals, or in the current context, the rural group. Divya's assumption that one can go beyond one's own life through media is evidenced through her annoyance at how the rural girls do not want to discover what is beyond their own lives, making them seem rather parochial in nature. Divya went on to describe the type of programmes which the rural girls would become engrossed in to which the other girls in the discussion stoutly agreed:

> **Divya**: *They* [rural girls] *really watch these saas-bahu* [Trans: mother-in-law – daughter-in-law] *serials- these girls aren't in our class but when they are roaming around the college you hear all this "oh did you watch this serial last night? This happened and that happened".*

An animated explanation of the '*saas-bahu'* genre of television serials is given in Inset 10 below. Divya mocks the idea of watching this type of programming which she

directly associates with the rural group, yet making a clear distinction that they do not belong to her course group. There is a pattern of distancing and othering which emerges from discussion of certain types of media that both groups of girls watch. More so, it is not what Divya is overtly stating which is interesting; it is the manner in which she speaks of this type of media which suggests the apparent rejection of *saas-bahu* serials amongst the urban sect.

Inset 10: The saas-bahu saga

Kahani ghar ghar ki, Kyunki saas bhi kabhi bahu thi, Kumkum, Saat phere - the list is endless. The age-old saga of a daughter-in-law finding acceptance in her new family after marriage. Her unflinching resolve to solve each and every real and imaginary problem of her husband's entire clan. Her stoic resistance to worldly pleasures and temptations. And all the scheming, vampish obstacles in her path in the form of interfering sisters-in-law, fiendish ex-girlfriends and the all-important mother-in-law. Add to that a propensity to garish sets, pancake make-up at all hours of the day and a jamboree of all festivals. One really wonders which world these people inhabit.

Source: http://www.window2india.com/cms/admin/article.jsp?aid=5704

Another instance of *saas-bahu* ridicule is evidenced when I asked directly whether the

girls watch this type of programming. An eruption of voices filled the interview room:

> **Heena**: *we're not that interested, but at the end of the day it is a story*
> **Researcher**: *do you feel it reflects any sort of reality?*
> **Divya**: *not at all- India is not like this!*
> **Megha**: *No, India is like this! There are some families that live like this*
> *[Strong opposition from others]*
> **Heena**: *the culture and the family are real*
> **All**: *yes*
> **Divya**: *they show how rich they are! Their houses and things- see this is not true!*
> **Heena:** *the storyline is totally artificial*
> **Divya**: *they move around one storyline, someone kills someone and then someone else...*
> **Heena**: *see this is all artificial*
> **Divya**: *we know all this is not possible. See, our mothers they know the truth but they still watch it*

The group, it can be seen, displayed mixed views towards this issue and one of the

primary concerns related to what the programmes were depicting about Indian society.

A compromise is met upon Heena's assertion that the culture and family that the

programmes depict are in fact representative, yet the depiction of lavish lifestyles and

excessive wealth, as Divya notes, is not the ideal milieu and proclaims its inaccuracy.

An indication of the core viewing group, older women/mothers, is also introduced here,

suggesting a level of appeal which seems to span a particular generation of women. My

own knowledge of this type of media was essential, having been exposed to the plethora

of *saas-bahu* serials in the U.K, where they are also immensely popular, Delhi proved

to be a site where I could in fact observe the role of a housewife and the integration of

this type of programming. As a recurring pattern, upon returning from the college each

day, I would usually find the mother seated on the day bed in the drawing room

engrossed in the daily instalments of the saga. Her fixation with what was being shown

on the television was further exemplified through her sluggish responses and unflinching gaze from the television set.

In another interview, Niti raises a further concern regarding the viewing of these serials:

> **Niti**: *…you know, we are the new generation, but our mum and maybe future mother-in-laws, the serials are for them... and this is the reason why our mums are not letting us do certain things! Because they are seeing all this,* [they believe] *my daughter should be like this and my bahu [TRANS: daughter-in-law] should be like that.*

Niti raises an important point; she suggests that there is a blurring of boundaries between character roles in these fictitious serials and real life. As sinister as this seems, a benchmark is produced and Niti is convinced that women aspire for their daughters to mirror the characters on screen. Pushing this idea further, the restrictions Niti believes that are imposed upon young women are partially in response to the on-screen stimulus that mothers and older women receive through this type of media. She is specific when noting what sect of society are watching these serials yet makes a clear distinction that as she is part of a 'new generation' where, it could be assumed, the appeal for this type of programming is significantly less.

It is interesting to observe the distinctions which have been made by the urban group responses so far regarding their choice of programming. They believe themselves to be a distinct group who will mock the concept of the *saas-bahu* serials for its limited depiction of reality. Drawing on Niti's term, 'the new generation', it could be assumed that consuming this type of media is contradictory to the lifestyle of this generation as what is consumed on television has also become a significant facet of these girls' lives. Access to what the respondents view as legitimate knowledge regarding specific

lifestyle tastes, fashions and trends are all part of the important distinctions they make between themselves and others. However, questions are raised regarding the membership of this 'new generation' and one of the distinctions most commonly deployed by the young women is the content of television viewership. Divya's comment earlier in the chapter marks this divide and she alludes through her negativity a sense of exclusivity of her own group.

During my first meeting with the rural group the girls were a little apprehensive yet excited at the prospect of meeting a foreigner. Their English tutor, Dr. Sanyal, informed me that it would have been very difficult to have gathered this sample of girls outside of the classroom setting. When I asked why this was, she explained that as it takes a number of girls approximately two hours to reach the college daily, any activity which is seen as non-integral into the curriculum would be classed as a waste of time and something which their parents would firmly oppose. This lack of flexibility was apparent when I had asked one group to re-schedule a meeting for after their classes at approximately 2pm; they refused, however, explained that they should be home or have left college before this time. Dr. Sanyal integrated me into the class activities by turning the interviews into a project for the group; for the assessment the girls were required to write a few paragraphs in English to explain the nature of each session and the topics covered. Inset 4 below presents the diary entry for the first meeting with the girls.

The girls would often become excited at the prospect of having a 'chat' and, without hesitation, began telling me about their television viewing:

Renu: *Saath phere* [TRANS: Seven phases/Marriage ritual]
Rakhi: *Teen bahuraaniya* [TRANS: three daughters-in-law]

Anju: *yes, and saregamapa, dhoom machaao* [music/dance competitions]

Researcher*: So what is it specifically you like about these programmes?*

Renu*: There's a love story, which I like...they show the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law...* [Pause] *I mean no one burns their daughter-in-law in real life do they! I really like their dresses, what they wear, the jewellery ...when you see it you think, oh I really want that particular dress .This colour looks nice, that colour looks nice, we'll watch the actresses and what they wear, I like doing that.*

Vineeta*: You know those college stories, I really like those...like how they enjoy themselves, and I really wish at times I could also do those things.*

Renu*: They have been given a lot of freedom and for us this isn't allowed, so then its automatic that when we watch this* [we will think] *why can't we do all these things?*

Diary Entry 2: The Rural Girls

Today I was to attend Mukti Sanyal's English class to introduce myself to the rural group. As I entered the room all of the students immediately stood up- I was taken aback by this gesture and was overwhelmed with a chorus of "good morning mam". I immediately asked the girls to be seated. Mukti introduced me formally to the class in English and explained words such as 'data' and 'research' to the group. The authority which I had been given was a little overwhelming, I feared the 'teacher/pupil' boundary may make conversing with this group difficult and was therefore determined to break down formalities. In addition to this, I became fully aware of how my language skills would now face the ultimate test- speaking to rural natives. This was a group of intelligent, lively and talkative young women with very limited fluency in the English language. I began to think of the difficulties I would have faced had I not been able to speak or understand Hindi; although the girls were able to string together something in English on paper, their ability to express their feelings was bound in their mother tongue. The girls were all extremely friendly and very excited that a 'foreigner' had come to visit 'their India'.

Pooja, the more vocal and relatively confident speaker in English greeted me a "double welcome" once learning that I was not in fact a native of India. The class did not expect me to speak in Hindi or even understand the language, however, I explained to the girls that they could speak in whatever language they felt comfortable in. Upon completing this statement, I glanced around the classroom at the looks of surprise- including Dr. Sanyal. It was then explained to the girls, by Dr. Sanyal, that the interviews would help to form an assignment that the girls would be marked on- this would ensure their attendance and also give them a sense of motivation. I learnt that the girls seldom stayed longer than the duration of their lectures each day as the busses to and from their villages were not so frequent. I was also informed that their families would not tolerate their late arrival.

As someone who has been conditioned to work to timetables and scheduled meetings, I now needed to be extremely flexible with my time whilst on campus if I was to be able to interview all of the girls. I literally scrapped my own timetable and asked each girl in turn the days and times she would be free before having to leave for home. I needed to ensure there were no clashes with other subjects and was expected to sort out groups on the spot-literally. Dubious as to whether I would be able to follow such an irregular pattern, timings were given to each student. I made the rural groups a priority in the mornings, which would mean that I would need to manoeuvre the urban group around the fixed timings. As the urban group participants all had a mobile phone, they were easy to access and message; however, in the rural group many of the girls did not have access to one. As the girls would frequently have common classes, I allocated two key bodies who I would contact in case I needed to chase the students and remind them of meetings. This method seemed the most appropriate and the girls were more than happy to co-operate.

The lack of a 'formal' meeting schedule became a cause of anxiety for the remainder of the day, however, I quietly reminded myself- *when in Rome, do as the Romans.*

Renu and Rakhi's choice of programming support the statements made by some of the urban girls with regard to the *saas-bahu* serials they believed rural girls would be interested in. More significantly Renu's consumption of aesthetic through this type of media further accentuates media's role as providing a platform of prospects for these girls; she notes further the emotive content, particularly the depiction of a love story and the relationship between the daughter and mother-in-law. The former, arguably deemed as a closet emotion within Indian society, provides some form of appeal for viewers as it becomes the only possible lens through which this emotion can be paraded in the absence of stark opposition. Vineeta talks of consuming lifestyles by asserting how she wishes she was able to adopt this specific type of college life; her emphasis on enjoyment seems to shed light upon her own restrictions which Renu picks up on. Through questioning her own constraints with regard to freedom, Renu notes how restrictions upon their own mobility makes it a natural tendency for her group to aspire to partake in activities which have been depicted on television.

From Vineeta and Renu's responses, there appears to be a blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality; particularly through Renu's use of the word 'they' she does not question the content but refers to what is seen as a form of reality. This poses somewhat of a predicament as to whether Renu is referring to the characters as fictitious or real, or whether she believes that what is being shown is in itself is an embodiment of reality. Renu dissolves some of the naivety imposed upon her group by also ridiculing the content of the serials, exclaiming how no one would actually 'burn their daughter-in-law', however, her particular interest is concerned with the aesthetic allure in the form of elaborate clothing and jewellery; the commodities of the admired upper classes.

Another instance of television viewing amongst the rural group was evidenced during an interview with Khushboo and Asha:

> **Khushboo**: *Well, I only watch TV at night,* [there are] *three serials; Kasam se [TRANS: I swear], Saath Phere [TRANS Symbolic: Hindu marital ritual] and Betiyaan [TRANS: daughters].*
>
> **Asha**: *I watch C.I.D, I like the crime serials better. I watch Maiykaa [TRANS: maternal home] etc as well* [smiling]
>
> **Researcher**: *And what is it particularly that you like about these serials?*
>
> **Asha**: *by watching these you can tell what kind of society we are living in today*
>
> **Khushboo**: *In Betiyaan it depicts what is happening with daughters these days*
>
> **Asha**: *yeah, you can see that these days daughters have overtaken sons; they are more on par with sons...you can see from this serial how sons will betray their parents but daughters will not do this. Media depicts reality...*
>
> **Researcher**: *In what sense?*
>
> **Asha**: *The news...real cinema like a movie called Santaan [TRANS:* Sanskrit for *children] this film shows how when the children are small parents sacrifice a lot for them, however, when the children get older they leave their parents and live separately*

Viewership of this type of media amongst the rural group is strong and from this particular passage, I believe there are a number of issues worth note. Asha believes society can literally be depicted through this type of programming and through using *Betiyaan* as her frame of reference, asserts that daughters are acquiring an equivalent status of that of a son within the family unit. Through a depiction of the roles of the son and the daughter within family, Asha goes on to note how sons are 'betraying' their parents; however, she does not distinguish this representation as being fictitious but presents this type of media as something which has equally embraced, and become part of, the conventions of society.

When probed upon the depiction of reality, Asha notes specifically the separation of children and their parents which had been presented in the film *Santaan*. Her negativity

pushes forward a somewhat traditionalist view of family structure, and separation despite sacrifice, is an act deemed as immoral. Through the girls' responses, it could be assumed that Media absorbs social negativity and re-represents the idea of a social morality through the medium of cinema. What I find interesting here is how as consumers of this programming, the girls use this media to support their beliefs of how one should behave within society and how family relationships should be maintained in light of duty or *Dharma*.

4.1.3   Consuming [Im]morality: Stigmatic Viewing

Developing the idea of the love story, when asked about the non-Indian representations, the girls responded:

> **Anju***: I don't like them as much because they are too bold and you can't watch them with your family.*
> **Rakhi***: Even when these scenes do come up, mum will be like-ok I have some work to do I'll be back in two minutes [laughing]*
> **Renu***: I'll tell you this one time, when the movie Titanic had released, I was eager to watch it...I told my brother that I wanted to watch it even though he insisted no. My brother had obviously seen it, so when they slowly panned in on the car scene I thought oh no! My brother was telling me I'm mad [laugh]*

The responses suggest a dissimilarity between the western and non-western representation of 'love stories', with particular reference to their 'bold' content. Not being able to watch with the family is an issue Anju brings forward, emphasising the collective arrangement in which media is viewed in the typical Indian home. It is not clear whether her dislike stems from the fact that she does not appreciate the content, or, whether coupling this with not being able to involve the family has become the catalyst for rejection. The Integration of family, as Anju's response suggests, poses a

form of surveillance and family-specific morality which become potent forces upon the choice and consumption of specific types of media. Rakhi, in a rather animated fashion, describes the way in which her mother would begin to occupy herself with tasks through sheer embarrassment of the content.

This embarrassment, or shying away from the mention of sexual content, became a trend amongst the group who struggled to explain, through the use of 'dirty' terminology, what it was they wanted to refer to directly. Renu's description of the scene in Titanic is an example of her assumption regarding my knowledge of the film, enabling her to describe elements around the particular scene more comfortably. She explains how her brother had warned her against this film, however, was very much unprepared for some of the content. The depiction of 'bold' scenes is seen to be problematic for this group who struggle, at times, to negotiate likes and dislikes away from the collective of family viewership. When asked specifically if there is anything they would not watch in front of their parents, the girls responded:

> **Renu**: *There's a drama called Love Story, my mum would yell and say get rid of this rubbish!*
> **Rakhi**: *It's about Hindu College so it's quite real*
> **Renu**: *See, the thing is...they don't want their children to be affected by all this*
> **Rakhi**: *We don't even watch those songs, where they are drinking and all, in front of our parents*

This passage further exemplifies the point raised earlier regarding control over media consumption. What I find interesting is that despite limited viewership of the type of media the girls note as being somewhat inappropriate, their knowledge of this type of programming is still vast. This issue could, arguably, present an element of closet consumption amongst the group and as an act of deviance may endow this type of media with an element of appeal. Renu believes it to be the fear of influence upon the

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girls which compels parents to react in the way that they do, and in turn, the girls' fear of being scolded or branded as immoral deters them from explicit consumption.

There were many occasions where I found myself being questioned by the rural group about life abroad and whether I was still living with my family or had moved away from them. It occurred to me that the essence of separation was viewed upon as a negative trait, especially as an unmarried woman; I was, however, shielded from a bulk of stigmatisation as one of my many facets of identity branded me as a foreigner. It was common for the group when discussing the consumptive behaviours of women abroad to pacify themselves by terming anything deemed as immoral or deviant as an act of 'foreignness'. Similar to the responses given by Renu and Rakhi above, Khushboo and Asha also spoke of the level of surveillance over television viewing:

> **Asha***: Romantic programmes. You see the thing is they* [parents] *have the old thinking...they don't like it and they believe that we will also do the same things...so they do tend to stop us from watching it...but we'll watch them when we get the chance* [laughing].
> **Khushboo***: In our house we tend to watch Betiyaan [TRANS: Daughters] a lot because to a certain extent there is a lot of reality depicted in it. Like how the father has disregarded his daughters, but in the end it is those same daughters who bring the most respect to the father and his name.*

Asha notes a key phrase used frequently amongst the girls which is the idea of 'old thinking'. This term could be translated into generational rigidity towards certain topics or an element of shame generated by the girls themselves through the act of consuming certain types of media in front of a specific audience. Asha notes how there are restrictions imposed upon her to not watch this type of programming; however, she elevates her somewhat deviant side when informing me that she seeks opportunities to consume these programmes without the knowledge of her parents. Programming is

negotiated and consumed through its appropriateness for a shared audience; Khushboo expresses this element of moral viewing through her description of *Betiyaan* as a representation of how the 'moral' daughter performs her role within the domestic setting. She notes that how despite being treated as inferior; ultimately it is the daughters who rise to maintain the respect (*izzat*) of their father's name; this notion places further emphasis upon the moral role of the daughter within the home and how she is capable, not only through the lens of media, of upholding or destroying the respect of the family. It is precisely this level of responsibility upon the woman which when coupled with a plethora of consumption experiences brings to view an interesting manner in which the act of consumption is negotiated.

As noted earlier, this can be seen as yet another example of closet consumption which has also been raised by a third respondent, Baby.

> **Baby**: *I'll watch fashion TV alone, not when my mum is with me just in case some kharaab [TRANS: bad] clothes come on*

Through Baby's response it could be assumed that being perceived as showing an interest or participating in anything deemed as an act of deviance fuels a level of shame and embarrassment which she believes, in this instance, her mother would not approve of. She went on to speak more specifically about the type of programming she prefers to watch:

> **Researcher**: *And what kind of things do you regularly watch on TV?*
> **Baby**: *I watch Zee TV, the plays, Banoo meh teri dulhan [TRANS: I will be your bride], Maiykaa [TRANS: maternal home], Kasam se [TRANS: I swear]*
> *Researcher: What are the things you like about these serials?*
> **Baby**: *Mam, from these you get shiksha [TRANS: knowledge], like we should tell the truth and if we do something bad to*

someone else, then that will also happen to us. So if we are on the path of goodness, no matter what happens, in the end we will win.

Her assertion that the programming provides her with a legitimate form of knowledge is a significant, yet morally bound one. She is somewhat philosophical in her understanding of what is being shown within these *saas bahu* serials, namely the treatment of others and one's own fate as a result of this. She goes on to add:

> **Baby***: there's also a love story which I like* [laughing] *it's interesting how the girl and the boy meet* [and how] *they see each other…I really like it, and from this programme you can see how everyone in life is not the same and they are not all truthful. Your family can also be untrustworthy… like blackmailing the girl etc…this programme gives us knowledge [shiksha] to speak up, speaking up is a good thing, but to a limit. It gives us the knowledge to understand that parents should not have to rely on others and the importance must be upon trusting children. You see the thing is, in today's society no one is happy to see others happy…*

Baby's description is bound with idealistic images of the dutiful woman who needs to be aware of obstacles within the domestic sphere. Despite the programming acting as a form of knowledge, Baby talks of how one should speak up, however this sense of speaking up is also bound by an inherently restrictive component which was also spoken of throughout the interview process with a number of other rural and urban respondents. The repetition of the term 'limit' was used frequently, almost as a reminder of their 'moral selves'; it was acceptable to engage in certain acts of consumption, however, it was important to maintain these activities within a morally specified limit, whether this was sex before marriage, the wearing of certain types of clothing or speaking in front of elders in the family. This sense of freedom seems bound but does not seem to be an imposition upon the girls; the idea of 'limit' could arguably, be something that the girls partially generate themselves. Another instance of ethical viewing was put forward by Suman and Pooja:

> *Suman: It shows the relationship between the mother and daughter-in-law, the kind of behaviour, so…good things about it. I like everything about it…things like how you should treat your elders. There's a show called dil milgayi [TRANS: I have obtained a heart] and it's about doctors*
> **Researcher**: *so your preferences are the detective shows like C.I.D and doctor shows. It's quite professional in one sense isn't it?*
> **Both**: *yes*
> **Suman**: *it's showing us a way of moving forward, of advancing ourselves…how to make our future*
> **Pooja**: *how to face problems and obstacles in everyday life…it gives us a lot of knowledge*

Again, the relationship between a daughter and mother-in-law is an important one as well as how one should treat their elders. Through this interpretation, there seems to be a significant overlap between society and fiction; the acquirement of knowledge through consuming this type of programming acts as a form of legitimate moral capital which the girls use to substantiate their viewing choices. Suman believes that there is a motivational element for some of these fictional programmes which help to provide young women with the possibility of alternatives as well as offering an insight into different spheres of professional life. Suman talks of how they are able to consider 'moving forward' within their own lives, and watching women in these different professional roles gives the girls an opportunity to also consider their own placement within different job roles. Again, the notion of knowledge [*shiksha*] is used to describe the function of media and how it serves to prepare young women for the 'obstacles' they may face.

Urban respondent Deepika brings to light the apparent limitation in depiction of content within Indian media when asked about the type of programmes she watches:

> **Deepika**: *It's basically…umm…its limited. They* (Indian media) *don't go beyond a certain thinking…with western media we can go beyond some concepts.*
> **Researcher**: *In what ways…examples?*
> **Deepika**: *Like their handling of the basic sex issue*

From her assertion of going 'beyond', it could be assumed that the pushing of culturally accepted boundaries or a socially ascribed morality is somewhat problematic. She makes reference to the lack of 'handling' with regard to sexual content within Indian media, making the assumption that the only possibility of it being aired would be through the intervention, or intermediary, of Western programming. As it was the first formal interview session with Deepika, I had decided not to probe her on the handling of sex within Indian media but had made a note of this for a later discussion. It is precisely this 'thinking' which has been embedded within responses and becomes increasingly grappled with by the girls; it could therefore be noted that Deepika's awareness of topics of controversy and discomfort to the masses is vast. As a young woman who presented herself as rebellious in nature, she was increasingly aware and vocal about the elements of rigidity within her own life.

4.1.4   Identities in Print

Not only through television viewing but also through the girls' choice of reading material, they come to acquire information on consumer-centric lifestyles. When asked about the types of things that they regularly read, the girls replied:

> **Divya**: *Cosmopolitan*
> **Heena**: *Femina and other fashion magazines*
> **Megha**: *There's this one called Brunch, it tells you all about what's in and where to buy the best clothes like SN (Sarojini Nagar)*
> **Heena**: *Fashion tips, Bollywood etc*

> **Divya***: It's all about designer wear, what they are making for the Indian market, Indian youth…everything is mentioned in the magazines. You improve your knowledge and they are very helpful in informing us what is in and what is out…what the celebrities are doing etc*

The emphasis upon certain areas of interest such as Bollywood, designer wear and what is 'in' suggest that trends fashions and fads are of significant importance to this group. The responses suggest an implicit desirability for access to this kind of information which is translated into a legitimate form of knowledge, suggesting an empowerment of the reader through this acquirement of symbolic capital. This access serves as yet another urban identifier amongst the group, differentiating themselves from the majority group within the college. Another instance of choice of reading material is highlighted by Deepika; as noted above, Deepika's choice of reading mirrors much of what she faces in daily life. She goes on to say:

> **Deepika***: …there's one Assamese novel which deals with women's issues*
> **Researcher***: what kind of issues are these?*
> **Deepika***: its basically how women always remain dependant; first on their father, then their husbands and then it's the children…women only have to look to how they can free themselves from this basic image that has been stereotyped of them in India. I study this literature a lot, it's my favourite topic.*

It is interesting to note that that Deepika's response is somewhat analogous to the idea of dependency regarding women which has been featured in the text of the Dharmasutra. She stresses that there is a need for women to 'free' themselves from a social stereotype which, she suggests, has been imposed. As Deepika spoke to me of her interests in these issues, I sensed an air of resentment and frustration which I believed involved something more personal and possibly her own life story. I became increasingly intrigued by the role of literature in her life and during a one-to-one

interview with Deepika I probed her on these ideas, wanting to fully understand her reasoning for her love of literature:

> **Deepika**: *right from a small age I've seen a lot, my father used to drink a lot and... my mother used to be very sick...I like to hear other people's experiences, it really helps me. From the start I was very interested in reading, I started reading fairy tales and I would like to engross myself in their world...Pinocchio, Cinderella...the past three months I wanted to learn new things* [and for] *the entire three months I just immersed myself in all these books...it was a lifeguard for me to be able to stay in the home for three months... it enabled me to relax. I get answers to my questions through reading.*

To break down this excerpt Deepika makes reference to a part of her life which seems to have spurred her interest to read. Her claims that reading 'helps her' and is a 'lifeguard' seems to further suggest the difficulties and sense of struggle which Deepika had displayed throughout most of the interviews. This excerpt places emphasis upon the idea of escapism; as Deepika states, from a young age she started to 'engross' herself into these fairy tales. Deepika's reading of literature seems to serve a deeper purpose than just merely providing her with an interesting story; not only does the literature seem to pacify her emotions but, as she suggests, the empathy which she is able to display towards certain topics has enabled Deepika to analyse her current situation in a number of different ways. Ultimately, Deepika's solace is very much entwined with her consumption of different literatures.

The rural girls also expressed interest in reading material; however, they were sceptical about the content of 'modern day' magazines as can be seen in the excerpt below:

> **Asha**: *magazines are not worth reading these days! I opened a magazine in the library once and it was showing how...umm...* [laughing]
> **Khushboo**: [mumble] *sex and things...*

Asha*: it was showing how females are more ahead...umm... sexually and how males are etc...it was basically emphasising figures (statistics)...you must know what I mean. But in magazines they also have information about dresses and jewellery, occasions, parlours what creams to use etc. The magazine Greh Shobha [TRANS: pride/beauty of the home or woman] it tells you about the home*
Researcher*: and you both read this*
Both*: yes*
Asha*: it explains what married couples argue about to the extent that they get divorced*

There was a level of discomfort amongst the girls when explaining the content of these magazines, Asha's opening statement of magazines not being worth reading seems to exemplify an implicit abhorrence towards this type of content leaving Khushboo to complete Asha's description. She is quick to pull back into her comfort zone when explaining the positives of some magazine content, her specific example being Greh Shobha, a magazine which, as suggested by its name, centres upon topics within the domestic sphere as well as providing beauty tips and relationship advice. These specific magazines were extremely popular amongst the rural group who were all avid readers. The covers of these magazines, as presented below, boast a wealth of information on the topic of love and marriage.
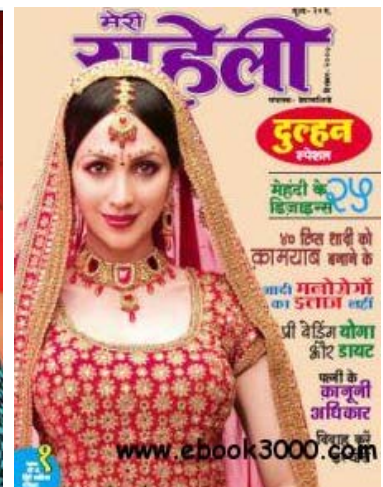
GREH SHOBHA

Cover: *'International Edition'*

GREH SHOBHA

'Young Couple Special'
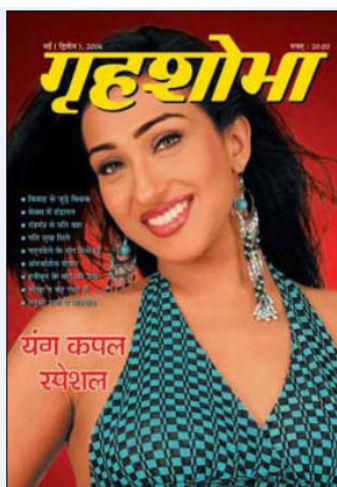
MERI SAHELI
[My Friend]

Bride Special
25 Mehendi Designs
40 Tips for a successful
   marriage
Marriage not a cure for the
   mentally challenged
The wife's legal rights

Cover Left:
Saawariya Special
The changing understanding of love with age
The hope that love doesn't become troublesome
Absence makes the heart grow fonder
Reel love and real love
Love's 10 [illegible text]
Men are also betrayed in love
Trendy Accessories
Increasing sex with age

GREH LAXMI

Inset 12: Women's Magazines in English

Diary Entry 3: The First Day

Today's day started off with complete bewilderment. A mixture of jetlag and attempting to get accustomed to the basics of the 'home'- washing, eating, sleeping etc were certainly taking their toll. I woke up in an unlit house and was informed that the electricity had gone; I was unwilling to use the 'bucket-bath room', which was home to a number of insects the last time I had checked, until the electricity had returned. I instead decided to soak in my surroundings whilst lying on a bed-come-storage trunk which I was assured had a mattress- a fact my back stalwartly disagreed with. This was, in essence, a middle class family of urban India: a few television sets, car and two scooters as well as a telephone placed on its very own table in the corner of the drawing room. They seemed comfortable. Upon the deaths of the elders of the household, this was now a home to a nuclear family- the home was large and had two levels which were identical in layout and seemed almost like two flats; the family never used the first floor except for when they had overnight guests. When asked about the home, I was told that as there were two sons, the home had been constructed with them in mind- one level would belong to each of the sons upon marriage.

The 'children' of the family: a daughter, 24 and two sons aged 26 and 18. I recall meeting these individuals approximately six years ago on a family visit to India and had never noticed a mobile phone at that time in the home- the youngest son Bhavnesh, and most carefree, would often be seen roaming around the home wearing the earphone attachment to his mobile. This device, I observed, had suddenly acquired a new place within the lives of these youths and something which they had total control over-from ringtones to customisation of graphics. The daughter, Anya, who I recall as being an extremely introverted and timid girl six years back, was now bursting with confidence. Having recently acquired a job in the finance department of a sister company of GE Money, she had spent the evening so far telling me about a fancy dress event which had recently taken place at her office. This event had opened up a Pandora's box in the sense that wearing Western clothing in the home has never been allowed by her mother, however, she spoke of how she left her home early to borrow 'English' clothes from a colleague and applied light make-up for her function. There was a particular emphasis upon the term 'light' as she believed that heavy application would have pushed her out of her comfort zone as well as suggesting that she was 'easy'.

The post function experience she spoke of was concerned primarily with the male colleagues who had begun to show an increased level of interest; Anya immediately pulled out her mobile phone from her cardigan pocket and informed me of the messages that had been sent to her by one particular male colleague. With a grin on her face she whisked through the mountain of text messages ranging from forwards of jokes to sentimental messages as well as a few deviant ones with undertones of a sexual nature. This increased sense of freedom to explore potential has radically changed the way in which the two sexes interact. She very rarely met this individual when not working, and any physical contact was predominantly within the confines of the office environment.

Diary Entry 4: The First Shopping Experience

The shopping experience was exactly that- an experience! I was surrounded by noise and was bemused by the 'no pavement' system. I found myself, at times, between a mass of traffic; people honking horns and passing by at great speeds. The uneven road surface made it extremely difficult to observe my surroundings and more importantly, watch where I was stepping. I needed a SIM activation kit for my mobile phone and the eldest son, Jeevan, accompanied me to a small cluster of road-side shops. As I stood at this stall-come-shop I observed the contents. Plastered all around the walls were posters of various mobile service providers depicting different tariffs and posters with Bollywood stars advertising new mobile phones and network providers. Scattered around the makeshift shelves were single boxes of handsets, the packaging somewhat battered and dusty. There were no displays of any mobile handsets- a sensible option as the store had no walls on two of its sides- and a few mobile phone covers which were imported and themed with Disney characters or special editions were placed on random hooks on the wall. I noticed behind the store owner's desk a small scanning machine which was used to make photocopies of identification when purchasing a SIM card or mobile phone- I realised that this was compulsory in India and as the store owner was not willing to sell to a non-resident, Jeevan kindly offered his own identification. What I found a little bizarre, yet amusing, was how the fax machine doubled up as a place for filing the day's paperwork. Once I had completed the paperwork, the shop owner placed the sheets neatly under the lid of the scanner.

I tried to organise some form of Internet access for my laptop, however, from looking at the mass of shops which lined the roads of Delhi it was daunting and not easy to establish what each of the stores was selling. It became a long-winded cycle of disappointment as the stores habitually placed posters of products outside of the store front which were not even available there. After a struggle of avoiding eunuchs and pseudo priests who offered blessing in return for a hefty sum of money, I approached the Tata showroom. Despite not having the product I was looking for, they still sat me down and I was immediately handed a telephone! I was asked to explain to the individual on the other end of the line what product I was looking for as well as providing her with the specifications of my laptop. I was a little startled and the phone was then circulated between three other people. I found this type of service a little unprofessional and ad hoc- I suppose I was still in the mindset of comparison, and in order for me to function in India at all would require a complete shut down of my conditioned western lifestyle; I felt awful to sound critical, however, my frustration had clearly gotten the better of me today.

4.2   Negotiating Consumption: The Body Project

The previous section has shown the viewing preferences of both groups of girls as well as teasing out implications of media influence amongst this group of consumers. The data contains many instances where the young women consider the role of the body within a number of different contexts. In this section it is my intention to explore the ways in which my respondents understood and negotiated consumption at the level of the body, highlighting particularly the way in which the body itself was presented as a symbol of Indian morality or *laaj.* I will present how, through pressures of a socially and traditionally inscribed morality, these young women develop a particular pattern of consumption which tempers ideas of individual expression and identity construction through purchase.

4.2.1   Clothing and Control: Securing the Body

During one of the discussions which had taken place in the first interview with the urban group, the girls were eager to speak of how they would pass time shopping and stalwartly believed that India's increasing mall culture was inspired heavily from the west. When I inquired further into their perception of western culture, the girls responded:

> **Divya***: I believe they do everything very glam, everything is so....classy*
> **Heena***: We're always bothered about what parents will think, but in like America and elsewhere, they are not at all bothered.*
> **Shivani***: Like over here our parents would stop us from wearing clothes that are very...erm...*
> **Researcher***: show too much flesh?*
> **All***: yeahh, haan* [yes]
> **Researcher***: The covering up of the body- do you feel this is still an issue in India?*
> **All***: yes*

> **Megha**: *sunno* [listen- to the others], *even if our parents allow, it's the mentality of people around*
> **Heena**: *I mean the oldest... [Pause]*
> **Researcher**: *you can say it*
> *[Laughing]*
> **Megha**: *you'll get those people on the footpath and all commenting. The mentality of people is not changing.*
> **Divya**: *you know they're pouting and making faces*
> **Researcher**: *and the men are doing this?*
> **All**: *Uncles!!*

To me this excerpt contains a number of interesting insights. The first is the way in which the girls, Heena in particular, believe that the role of the parent changes due to differences in location and culture. As 'outsiders' the girls allude to a reduction of the level of authority parents have abroad, and this in turn becomes a key component regarding the issue of surveillance which was raised in the previous section. Heena notes how the girls are 'always bothered' about parental influence and her assertion suggests an element of rejection. However, I do believe this issue is inherently more complex in relation to consumption behaviour and how densely embedded moral ideals and traditions of the family structure impose an element of rigour when these young women want to decide for themselves, which through Heena's statement, is difficult to do without consideration for either parents or society at large. Shivani notes how restrictions are placed upon their bodies through the wearing of certain types of clothing deemed as too revealing, yet Megha is quick to point out that it is not merely a stringent measure which parents have implemented as other factors are also influential and form legitimate reasons for the heightened levels of control. For the girls, the body ultimately becomes an issue of safety with regard to society. A little hesitant at first, the girls describe the type of people they, as young women, are targeted by; middle-aged men, or to use the colloquial term 'uncles'.

Societal reaction towards 'dressing' the body was a significant concern amongst the girls who spoke of wearing certain types of clothing as an issue of security. The reference to a specific age group of men further exemplifies the changes amongst women in metropolitan society through their dress, yet this issue as unfortunate as it seems, could point to the shift away from conservatism or conformity amongst women with regard to their style of dressing in recent times. The girls did not refer to young men of their own age as making derogatory gestures, but made clear that education and acceptance were two factors that contributed to an element of decency amongst youth. Again, the issue of 'normalising' certain images through media is an important one; 1992[12] was the turning point for broadcast media in India, before this period the influx of western media into the domestic sphere was limited to none. Coincidentally, the groups which caused significant concern to the girls belong to one of two categories: the males not part of the 'impressionable' generation exposed to a boom in foreign programming, or the uneducated lower classes. Megha refers to this lower class as those on the 'footpath' and emphasises this group's 'mentality' as an explanation for their problematic behaviour. The issue of safety, coupled with an imposition of parental restrictions, has a significant impact upon the girls and their purchase behaviour regarding products such as clothing as due to its direct association with the body.

The function of clothing was a prominent point of discussion throughout the interviews and this idea became the frame around which many other issues emerged, be it safety, reinvention of tradition or more importantly a key identifier of what is deemed as 'modern'. During one of the many mocking episodes of melodramatic Indian media, the

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[12] In 1992, the Indian government liberated its markets, opening them up to cable television. Five new channels belonging to the Hong Kong based STAR TV gave Indians a fresh breath of life. MTV, STAR Plus, BBC, Prime Sports and STAR Chinese Channel were the 5 channels. Zee TV was the first private owned Indian channel to broadcast over cable. A few years later CNN, The Discovery Channel, and National Geographic also made its foray into India.

conversation had shifted towards a discussion regarding display of fashion. The group were very much influenced by these serials when purchasing traditional Indian attire and I was intrigued by the girls' preferences regarding the consumption of different fashions which in turn led me to ask whether they ever wore traditional clothing, namely *salwaar kameez*, in the home:

> **Tanusha**: *It's not like with the dupatta* [scarf] *and all, it's more a fashion thing like kurrta* [Indian tunic top] *and trousers, this is what we prefer.*
> **Tanya**: *my chachis* [Aunts] *have started wearing jeans and all; even we prefer it when our parents wear western clothes. Even my cousin said once, mummy why are you wearing a salwar suit and coming to my school? [laugh] he's the first one who told his mum, look don't wear English clothes, they don't look good on you, and now he's telling his mum not to wear salwar suits. We prefer our mother to wear jeans and things.*
> **Researcher**: *Would this mean that your parents are seen as modern?*
> **Tanya**: *yeah, exactly that!*
> **Researcher**: *what's the negativity surrounding western clothing and a married woman?*
> **Tanusha**: *elders don't accept it; they even say it to us sometimes.*

To me there are some very interesting points raised in this passage. Tanusha places emphasis upon the notion that fashion is of primary importance by discarding the traditional scarf, or *dupatta*, and emphasising a hybrid style of dressing. The *dupatta*, which has long been a sign of modesty within traditional Indian dress, is discarded as something which I believe is bound more closely to the symbolic ideas of Indian tradition. The hybridised form certainly helps to provide a sound representation of the urban group and the ways in which they are able to re-invent, re-form and negotiate different aspects of tradition through their consumption of various styles of dress. Tanya provides some interesting insight regarding the representation of western fashion in relation to the ideas of modernity; she notes specifically the preference of youth to want their parents, especially mothers, to wear non-Indian clothing.

The example she uses of her cousin further exemplifies clothing's symbolic properties, however, its use in the current context almost seems as though there is a process of layering over traditional symbolism with a new form. Through a specific code of dress, Tanya's response indicates how a preference for non-Indian attire amongst the older generation, and specifically mothers, almost instantaneously infuses them with properties deemed as 'modern'. During a number of conversations off the recordings, as well as through my own observations around the city and in people's homes, it had occurred to me that there was an evident stigma held by a number of individuals attached to married women and the wearing of western clothing. When I asked the girls what they thought about this, the response given by Tanusha hints at a generational and somewhat traditional judgement that wearing western clothing, again, questions the notion of respect and morality.

> **Tanya**: *me and my sister, we are allowed to wear such things, but it really does depend on where we are going, what people we will be with. If we're with grandparents and things, they prefer us to cover up. Friends, mum and dad it's ok.*
> **Tanusha**: *Even for here* [college]*, we'd not like to wear a spaghetti top or something.*
> **Researcher**: *do men have the same problem?*
> *[Laugh]*
> **Both**: *no way!*
> **Tanusha**: *one of our friends, ok, she was wearing low waist jeans and the*[rural] *girls kept pulling her top down and saying it's too short*
> *[Laughing]*

It is interesting to note that despite an increase in consumer choice regarding the type of clothing that these young women are now able to choose from, the girls take into consideration the various tiers of surveillance not only during the pre purchase phase but consideration which spans and becomes intensified during much of the post purchase period. The mere mention of 'allowed to wear' introduces a form of approved subordination with regard to self-expression through clothing; Tanya's repetition of the

third party through key terms such as 'they' is central to her consideration of what is deemed as appropriate apparel. She describes her 'audiences' not only through a hierarchy of seniority, but also through differing levels of morality and one of the ways in which she is able display her sensitivity towards this issue is through her own consumption patterns at the level the body. From the passage, it could also be conferred that there are two distinct body projects at play between the urban and the rural group; Tanusha's example of the rural girls 'pulling down' her friends top further emphasises a schism between, what I believe to be, morality at the level of the body which has been tempered further through the consumption of non-Indian attire. The discussion of clothing with regard to rules both in the domestic and social spheres became more prominent as the interview sessions unfolded; evidenced in the excerpt below are Deepika and Shivangini's experiences and opinions regarding clothing:

> **Deepika***: … in the house my father would say you are not to wear tight clothes...you know, saying stuff like this*
> **Shivangini***: but it is changing....I mean you now see girls wearing halter necks or spaghetti tops*
> **Deepika***: When you see a girl wearing a skirt and all, boys will be trailing around them all the time*
> **Shivangini***: My mum, shes' very very...you know… this thing with me. She tells me I don't have any problems with you wearing anything you like, but if you go out wearing a short skirt you will see ten people staring at you…and that is not very good*
> **Researcher***: Do you feel they would behave differently out of India?*
> **Shivangini***: yeah, because of families there- the marriages they don't stop you. It's not like they are going to the city with people judging them, so they don't mind wearing anything. They are more free in fact*

Through the girls' responses, safety as well as societal ridicule is of central importance for parents and guardians; there seems to be an emergence of two different sites which form a micro (domestic) and macro (societal) level of surveillance over consumption. Despite Shivangini describing her mother as being rather open to the idea of wearing

non-Indian clothing in the home, the issue of keeping face and adhering to societal evaluations of decency seems to compel Shivangini's mother to promote a moral code where being 'stared' at in a certain type of clothing is deemed as 'not very good'. There is an undertone which could also suggest issues of safety as the girl child, a symbol of family respect and honour, could find herself subject to abuse or disrespect in a city branded as unsafe for women. Pushing the idea of location further, Shivangini professes, albeit indirectly, the problematic nature of societal judgement which suggests a restriction on her idea of freedom; she notes how marriage does not impose the same implications upon a woman abroad as would be the case in India, granting them an increased sense of freedom from judgement and socially imposed morality. Shivangini's initial tone of frustration regarding the topic was further heightened during the course of the interview; I felt somewhat overwhelmed with the girls' emotions and during a short coffee interval immediately noted, in brief, my feelings of the whole experience.

Diary Entry 8: Emotional Turmoil

> *If suffocation could have a voice I believed to be having a conversation with it at this very moment. I have suddenly developed a feeling of responsibility which seems rather strange. I am suddenly in fear of how much these girls have opened up to me, how they have laid their lives open to a complete stranger. They hardly need encouraging, yet each one of them is so eager to tell me their story and I now feel overwhelmed. My hand is not able to keep pace and scribe each word I feel when these young women tell me about their dreams, about how they want to express themselves, yet they are shackled by so many restrictions I question how they function at all. Am I the deviant? Should I not rock a boat which has been sailing peacefully for twenty years? Will my questions force them to question their lives or even convince them that their lives should be any different? These things are certainly not my intention. I have become consumed by the field.*

As the interview recommenced it became apparent that the topic of discussion was still something the girls had much more to speak about, the excerpt below picks on the key points raised by the girls:

> **Shivangini**: *they* [men] *would love to see girls dancing in short skirts and bikinis, but when you see your own daughter or wife wearing cut sleeves* [sleeveless] *then they have a problem with it!*
> **Deepika**: *my father, he even has a problem with short sleeves, even with the neck also if it's too deep and all. It shouldn't be overly provocative clothing, it shouldn't be so showy but...we need to be...*
> **Shivangini**: *I don't think we should be put under such a restriction that we should only wear this and not that. We're big enough to understand and know...*
> **Deepika**: *yeah, we know what we are dressing in. My father, he doesn't even allow me to put nail polish on my nails; he says this is for after your marriage. After marriage you can do anything...* [shrugs]
> **Researcher:** *do you feel you could do anything after marriage?*
> **Shivangini**: *you never know what kind of in-laws you're going to get! What if they're more restrictive than your parents...you never know.*

I believe there to be a number of important points raised in this passage. Shivangini opens the discussion airing her resentment of male hypocrisy; however, it could also be presumed from her statement that men have been placed in a position of significant authority and control. Within the domestic sphere, this male influence is seen to be exerted over wives as well as the girl child and describes a definitive form of surveillance whereby consumption is restrained specifically at the level of the body. Shivangini's aggravation is born out of what is displayed in the media, once again blurring the boundaries of fiction and reality; she asserts that men want to watch these displays of provocation yet find it problematic and unruly when styles of dress may be adopted by young women from the fictional realm into reality. Deepika supports this notion and illustrates her own experiences with her father noting specifically how she is expected to cover her body to maintain a degree of respect.

Marriage is used in this context almost as a turning point in time where Deepika is led to believe that she will be granted a level of freedom to, amongst other things, consume without restraint; the girls, however, are sceptical of this idea. Shivangini's response indicates a clear pattern of how surveillance is overwritten with new forms as the young women pass through various stages of their lives. The girls will eventually leave their parental homes which may dilute one form of surveillance, yet, on the other hand they will find themselves exposed to surveillance in the marital home in the form of in-laws as well as adding weight to their moral conduct through their transition into 'married' women.

Another instance of judgement based upon clothing alone was also evident when conversing with the rural girls. The responses provided by the rural group shared similarity to much of what the urban group had also expressed, however, the girls seemed to provide a wealth of information regarding why clothing can become problematic in society and the impacts it has upon them as young women:

> **Researcher***: What is seen to be socially acceptable and socially unacceptable for a young woman?*
> **Rakhi***: clothing and things, from these things you can tell whether the girl is good or not.*
> **Anju***: Society expects the girl not to wear small clothes, and she then needs to dress accordingly*
> **Rakhi***: people will look at the girl and say she is shameless, then they will say 'oh don't her parents know better'*
> **Researcher***: you mean showing too much flesh?*
> **All***: yes*
> **Rakhi***: Like a plunging neck, or small dress, tight things*
> **Researcher***: so, based upon these things, her impression can become soiled if she does not comply with what society expects her to be?*
> **Renu***: yes. Our parents hardly say anything in this regard, but other people do...*
> **Anju***: that girl then loses some of her respect in the eyes of these people*
> **Renu***: There is such a fear of losing face*

From the responses of the rural group, it is clear to see that there are apparent differences in the way that the rural girls understand the idea of displaying the body as compared to the urban group. The girls describe the ways in which society dictates the actions taken by young women at the level of their own individual body projects, however, unlike the urban group who seem to overtly battle against the status quo, the rural girls consider it a social compulsion to adhere to a heightened intensity of morality within the village setting. Both groups of girls are implicitly aware of the predicaments associated with the female body in society; however, I believe there to be a distinction between the reactions towards this issue which falls within one of two categories; urban acknowledgement and rural acceptance. Clothing, as a form of self-definition, is expressed as a choice and the urban girls, despite having acknowledged that social stigmas exist, still negotiate their way around wearing clothing of their preference. I recall a conversation with Megha from the urban group, who explained to me how she had a longing to wear the spaghetti tops that were in fashion but as they exposed too much flesh she was hesitant at the prospect of wearing them to college. She went on to tell me how she noticed one of her friends in college wearing a fitted t-shirt underneath the spaghetti top and immediately adopted the style the following day. The re-negotiation and re-styling of clothing to adhere to current fashions and trends as well as maintaining sensitivity to social reaction has become common practice amongst the urban women.

4.2.2   Selling the Body: Media, Sex and Depictions of Deviance

The body in media was also a point of contention amongst the group; during a conversation about the controversial television personality Rakhi Sawant, known

primarily for her roles as a flesh-bearing 'item girl' in Bollywood, Tanusha pointed out an interesting observation:

> **Tanusha**: *In Saawariya* [film], *you can see the trend amongst males as well, he's exposing and all- I think the director knew his movie is bakwaas [TRANS: rubbish/crap] so to attract people he's used this*

Inset 13: Screen-shots from the film *Saawariya* (2007)
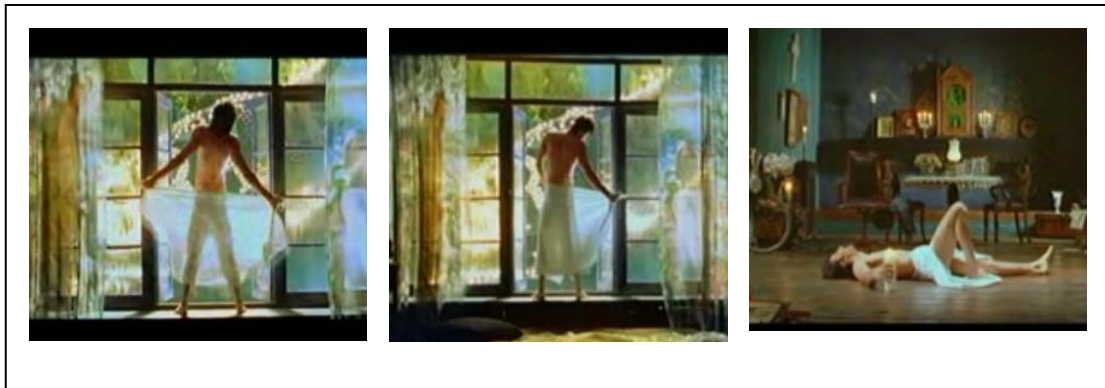
To provide some background information on this excerpt, the time that I was in Delhi also happened to coincide with the release date of the long awaited film *Saawariya*. On television, a significant amount of publicity in the form of exclusive interviews and guest appearances were taking place, all in preparation for a grand opening. Much hype had been generated due to a particular scene depicted in Inset 13 above; this 'towel drop', as it was termed, lured in many young women across the country becoming a heated point of discussion. Tanusha introduces a shift in trends despite the focus of provocation and sex appeal in Bollywood being predominantly deployed through the role of the female. She refers to the concept of *sex sells* through her assertion that the film was lacking in other areas, yet the director utilised the 'towel drop' sequence to attract viewership. Off the recordings, the girls noted how many young women went to view the film for debutant and heartthrob, Ranbir Kapoor *'in this scene'*.

> **Tanya**: *it's that concept, sex sells, for the majority it does work*

Another instance of sexual provocation within media, and with specific regard to women, was evidenced during a conversation with the urban group about Indian popular music videos:

> **Researcher**: *If you were granted a position of authority, would you change anything about these music videos?*
> **All:** *vulgarity*
> **Heena:** *most of them, this word describes most of them. [To the others] Give me one music video which doesn't incorporate this level of vulgarity? I can't think of any. They should be banned. It should be in more of a presentable manner*
> **Tanya**: *why do they have to show girls shaking their boobs and all?*
> **Heena:** *we're fine with mini-skirts and short tops and all, but it should be in a limit. This stuff gives the wrong impression about India. These producers are just concerned about profit not the cultural things*

This passage clearly represents palpable resentment towards the depiction of women as symbols of promiscuity. The issue here seems to be that the emphasis upon the female body in addition to the sexual innuendos tempers a moral and cultural ideal held by the girls. Clothing did not seem to be the predominant issue; however, distasteful presentation pushes, what Heena calls, a 'limit'. This is not the first instance of the term 'limit' being used as an unspoken and undefined benchmark against which acts of deviance have been measured. It could be construed from Heena's assertion that producers are held in a position of cultural responsibility, yet, through consuming the type of media presently being broadcast, women, according to the girls, are being presented in an unfavourable and somewhat culturally insensitive form. It is important to emphasise media's function as also being a fictional realm of consumption for these girls. As has been mentioned above, what is displayed in the media has helped to provoke thought in relation to acts deemed as deviant or immoral for a woman. The girls went on to discuss two Bollywood films, similar in genre, yet presented in two

very different ways; Inset 14 below provides a visual snapshot and synopsis of both the
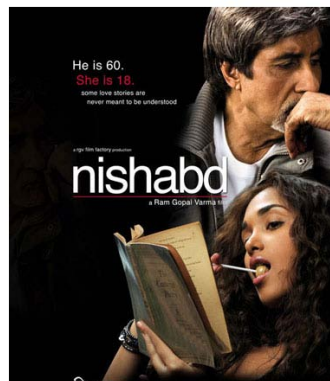
films in question:

Inset 14: Films of Controversy

Film 1: Cheeni Kum [Literal trans- *Less Sugar*] Female protagonist - *Tabu*
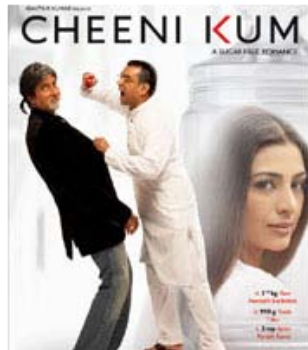
Synopsis: An unconventional, and somewhat comical, love story between a 34-year-old woman and an older man who works as a bitter head chef in a London restaurant.

Film 2: Nishabd [Trans- *Wordless*] Female protagonist – *Jiya*

Synopsis: The powerful attraction between a young girl of 18 and a 60-year-old man. The film opens with young Ritu inviting her friend Jiya to spend the holidays with her and her father Vijay (a photographer) and mother Amrita at their home in Kerala. Jiya, originally from Australia, is a free spirited girl with no attachments and no worries. She professes some affinity towards Vijay whose world is turned upside down when he takes pictures of Jiya watering herself down with the garden hose. Something innocent grows into something guilty and beyond control.

Shivangini: *The girl in Nishabd…Jiya Khan…she had different body language and was wearing very short clothing. Tabu fits in better with Indian society, that's why this was not taken into consideration.*

Researcher: *was there a heavy sexual undertone with Nishabd?*

Deepika: *yes there was*

Shivangini: *yeah! She's messing around with the water. You can see what they are trying to say, the dressing sense, her body language, and the shorts going right up there, as short as her undies you could say. This is why parents are more bothered about this; they'll be saying that she's the cheap one. Tabu is not seen as cheap, she's an older woman who has fallen in love with another man who is not yet married. It's alright...But they do show that she [Jiya Khan] was from abroad, so it's ok.*

Deepika: *So it's like... abroad they can dress like this...wear short clothes.*

Researcher: *But it's ok as long as she has the non-Indian tag?*

Shivangini: *yeah, it can be taken for granted, so it's ok if she's wearing that. You don't see any of the other daughters [native Indian] wearing these kind of dresses in that movie, so it's alright. As long as she's an NRI [non resident Indian], a foreigner it's alright. I feel that men abroad are not so provoked because they are used to seeing such things, but here because they are not used to seeing these things you can't dress up. Even if you wish to you will see ten people staring at you and you'll get embarrassed somewhat. Even at times you feel you want to, you'll just say oh well leave it, forget it.*

What is important about the passage above is the way in which both the female protagonists have been evaluated primarily at the level of their bodies. Tabu, a character who at the outset fits in well with contemporary Indian society, does not seem to temper traditional or moral ideals. On the other hand, the character of Jiya is instantly classified as a deviant through her attire, adding to her image as a promiscuous young woman. This imagery, as Shivangini points out, is problematic for parents who are described as having a fear of negative media influence over their daughters. Shivangini pacifies the fact that the character of Jiya is immoral by swathing her in a cloak of 'foreignness'; her character is expected to push the margins of morally acceptable conduct making it almost inevitable that producers will ensure she is distanced from indigenous young women. Used as a mechanism to safeguard, and possibly avoid confrontation from

infuriated members of society, the character of Jiya is consumed through viewership yet her status as a non resident Indian makes her character tolerable for viewing and ultimately reduces her association to a native Indian woman.

To paraphrase Shivangini, the character of Jiya is in some way permitted to wear 'small clothes', behave reprehensibly and seduce an older man by diluting her ethnicity and reinforcing an element of difference, which in this instance is geographical. As can be conferred from Shivangini's final statement, Jiya's fictional elements become tangled with a literal representation of a woman from a foreign locality; she goes on to express how one of the major bodily restrictions imposed on young women in India is due to limited exposure and sensitivity to overt displays of the female body in society. This aspect, in turn, has had a striking impact upon the young women's individual body projects; their consumption of clothing items is negotiated through the lens of morality, humility and safety which ultimately limits the girls' autonomy over self expression through clothing.

> **Shivangini**...*for instance the air hostesses; there's some training schools here, and my dad will see them and say 'what rubbish is this? They're wearing short skirts and heels'; I mean that's their uniform! See everyone's dad, brother, cousin whatever they will love to watch all this on the screen, but they don't want their wives, sisters or daughters wearing all this. As soon as family is involved, they will highly oppose it.*

To reiterate what has been discussed above, the controversial films became a catalyst for evaluating two very different presentations of women; one deemed as a national and the other a non resident Indian. It was interesting to note how the protagonists were assessed through two central components, clothing and place, which became distinctive features that permeated both characters with traits that either challenged moral

orthodoxy or remained within comfortable margins. This assessment through attire had also filtered through into the girls' everyday lives and had become a key identifier for the ways in which elements of difference are present at the level of the body between urban and rural girls:

> **Shivangini***: Some of them are still very backward- even if we're wearing a suit you can still make out the difference, they're not really updated with fashion...like tighter shirts*
> **Deepika***: their parents force them not to wear tight suits and to wear collared suits*
> **Shivangini***: round neck, high neck...there were some girls who would bring jeans with them, they would wear these in the college and wear suits when going home- I asked them 'why don't you just leave home wearing jeans?'*
> **Deepika***: their parents will tell them that they're not to wear jeans; you should be decent...maybe once in a year they will allow their daughters to wear jeans, and that too on their birthday. I've seen this myself. When I used to go to tuitions in my 11th and 12th standard, my father never allowed me to wear jeans- we'd fight so much because of this. He'd just tell me to stay at home.*
> **Shivangini***: I have spoken and interacted with these girls, and even wearing shorts during sports is a big thing for them*
> **Deepika***:* [Things] *like waxing and not plucking their eyebrows,* [they are] *only supposed to do this after marriage. My father wanted me to be like a typical 'behenji', and I should teach and get into a government job.*

The girls describe in detail their observations and interactions with the rural group, again with an emphasis on masking the body to draw less attention to the more prominent features of femininity. Classed as 'backward' the rural girls are almost described as longing to wear jeans, however, this item of clothing, as suggested by Deepika, denotes indecency when worn. Deepika and Shivangini's understanding of rural lifestyles pushes them to believe that the intensity of parental influence is heightened when out of the city, making it a rare occasion when western attire is allowed to be worn, and if permitted, would only be within the confines of the home. A specific identity is created upon the wearing non-Indian attire which is certainly multi-

faceted; it seems that the consumption of not the clothing per se but more so the figurative elements associated with western clothing is problematic.

Rebelliousness, as the girls describe, is also evident with regard to a number of young rural women who would change into clothing of their choice when on the college campus; in fear of what their parents may think, the girls are described as utilising the campus space as a secure cocoon for consumption of western clothing or displaying the body. The commonly used term amongst the urban group to characterise this category of young women is '*behenji*', a term which literally means 'sister' and is solemnly used by urban youth; however, the nuances associated with the term when used by young women to describe others centre upon a specific pattern of lifestyle which incorporates, amongst other things, class distinction, elements of 'ruralness', the wearing of traditional clothing and a limited fluency in English.

Diary Entry 8- 'Behenjis'

As already noted in the diary entry on my first day at the college, the split between two very distinctive types of student became ever more prominent the more time I spent with both groups of respondents. I found myself asking to take photographs of the young women Deepika and Shivangini described. I specifically recall these girls' timid nods and their hands rapidly straightening their dresses and scarves just prior to taking the shot. Not wanting to speak too much, they hesitated to ask to see the picture, however, when I offered they all huddled around the device.

During a discussion with another group of urban respondents, the topic of discussion had turned to the depiction of women in a negative role within television serials; commonly termed as 'vamps', the women are often dressed in semi-traditional clothing and tend to be the more flesh bearing of all the female characters, Inset 14 below shows two examples:

Inset 14: The 'Vamp'

The discussion proves to be a catalyst for a discussion on the topic of clothing in reality and also became an opportunity for Niti to air her views on this topic.

Niti: *I don't understand why this openness…like if you want to have a backless blouse or something, why is this always associated with the vamps* [actress in a negative role]*, why can't normal people wear this? It's not necessarily broad minded people who wear these kinds of clothes, but still…the tradition, the culture and all this blaa blaa blaa you are associated with, you are shackled by it. Right now, we didn't have a lecture today so we went to Macdonald's at D. C. and I was sitting there with my friend… there was this girl, she was in a school dress, wearing a very short skirt and she was looking damn cute. I said to my friend, look how she is wearing the skirt she is looking so sweet, sexy and all- so fantastic! And at that point, there were these two guys who started to look like this* [pulling face-gawking]. *At that point of time I told my friend I just feel like slapping them! You have to protect yourself from those eyes.*

Niti vents her frustration at the way in which young women become branded through their attire and criticises the way in which the local culture makes it difficult for women, through acts of consumption, to express an element of freedom at the level of their bodies. When coupled with village life, the issues regarding the body become more specific as noted by two rural respondents, Asha and Suman below:

> **Asha**: *yes, in villages especially. There, you should be covered with a suit. The suit should not be too fitted or deep cut*
> **Researcher**: *why is this?*
> **Suman**: *in the village to even see the girls face is enough, we shouldn't be bothered about the figure and all that. Girls that have left the village into the city, there they'll have to show their figure...you know like people from outside/foreigners* [bahar ke log].
> **Asha**: *they tell girls off for not having the dupatta* [TRANS: scarf] *they will be like* [mimic] *'do you have no shame?' There is fear for the girl...no one should look at her in a bad way or do anything in stupidity*
> **Suman**: *It's more unsafe for girls when they don't cover up. You should wear clothes that are modern, but which also cover you up.*
> **Asha**: *Delhi is an unsafe city for a woman*

From their responses, the issue of safety becomes the primary reasoning for why women are expected dress modestly and both girls do not overtly oppose the way in which women are expected to suppress their consumption choices. To help illustrate the symbolic impact of clothing, Asha notes how women who do not use the traditional scarf (*dupatta*) are branded as shameless, furthermore, what I found particularly interesting was the way in which Suman believed that highlighting the figure suddenly becomes an obligation when migrating into the city where women are suddenly bestowed with an increased level of consumption choices and bodily freedom, just like 'foreigners'. Suman demonstrates a pattern of negotiation when she notes how it is important to wear 'modern' attire, yet remain within acceptable boundaries of tradition and society. This hybridised form of consumption is not confined to the urban group,

but is also demonstrated by the rural girls, however, it is important to emphasise that the degree of hybridity is what seems to differ between the two groups. How modernity is appropriated at the level of the body and how it is then, in turn, adopted poses a conjecture regarding the ways in which the two distinct groups negotiate their acts of consumption between frames of modernity and tradition:

> **Asha**: *I can tell you about being modern. There's a girl in our college, I can't remember her name, and she puts on foundation to come to college [laugh]*
> **Suman**: *she will wear stylish tops and stuff*
> **Researcher**: *She wears glasses, right?*
> **Both**: *yes!*
> **Researcher**: *I remember seeing her when the Dabur people were here with their 'new face' campaign for their 'Gulabari' cream*
> **Asha**: *they only called her over because of her clothes, that's it…they weren't looking for actual beauty; they just saw that she was wearing fewer clothes than everyone else. This is the way these days, the fewer clothes you wear the more modern you are. She has to use make up to look good, there are so many girls in this college that are so beautiful, and don't wear make-up, but if they did, then this girl would be nothing in front of them.*

4.2.3   Consuming Fairness: Obsessions of Beauty

Following on from Asha's response, Inset 15 below shows an image of the flyer handed out by Dabur representatives during their photo session on campus. Asha and Suman are critical of the way in which the representatives selected girls for the competition based on what they felt were superficial ideals of beauty.

Inset 15 : Flyer handed out by *Dabur* representatives

The ideas of beauty and what is deemed as beautiful was a continuing topic of discussion amongst both groups of young women. Both the urban and rural respondents were highly influenced by media imagery of 'fair skinned' beauties and this topic had certainly become a point of contention. Through consuming this type of imagery, the girls had developed a characterisation of what it was to be beautiful and successful which almost always incorporated references to skin tone. I had decided to take time out to ask the girls about the issue of skin lightening, and how they were affected by the societal stigma that fairness equates beauty:

> **Heena***: in today's world it matters a lot, aesthetic*
> **Megha:** *people may not feel that they're not confident about themselves too*
> **Tanusha***: In India it is believed that people go for fairer skin; the majority of people prefer it*
> **Heena***: fairness adds to your look*
> **All***: yeah!*
> **Shivani***: it highlights your personality actually*

Heena breaks into the discussion by asserting how aesthetic appeal has become especially important in recent times. I found this point to be quite interesting as Heena's reference to aesthetic held some resemblance to a newspaper segment which I had read two days earlier. A copy of this column can be seen in Inset 16 below. The article emphasises beauty, confidence and materialism as being the characteristic traits of a Delhi woman of today; what is important here is the particular emphasis on 'having access' to a lifestyle that certain women want and this is, in this instance, a mixture of designer clothing and street food (Janpath). This particular column further emphasises the key themes of importance to this urban group, and despite it being a rather limited passage, it certainly compresses much of what urban women are concerned with and what is being spoken about. The opening sentence of this piece with the stress on 'fairer sex' could also imply a pun regarding skin tone, as North Indians are stereotypically considered to be fairer. The girls have emphasised a preference for fair skin and the way in which the personality of an individual is further accentuated through something as irrepressible as skin colour.

Inset 16: <u>Hindustan Times - HT City Supplement column</u>.

ILLUSTRATION: DURGA

Delhi's femme fatale

Kirti Mehta

The bold and beautiful fairer sex of Delhi is a force unto its own. From DTC-daring to night club-crawling, the *soni kudis* have done it all, and with finesse.

Call them snobbish, confident or gorgeous, you have to agree she's a cut above the rest. And we don't mean just the country, Delhi's women can take on the world— case in point, former Miss Universe Sushmita Sen and chess grandmaster Tania Sachdev.

So what does it take to be a perfect Delhi girl? Well, it has to be a mélange of beauty, confidence, snootiness and not to forget the bling. Swati Dua, student, 23, says, "Those of us who are earning have access to the kind of lifestyle we want. If that means designer wear and Janpath food, that's our choice."

Urban legends say that you can know where a girl is from depending on her attitude. Tuba Mirza (21), a student of mass communication says, "Girls from South Delhi are over-confident and materialistic, while those from the north are rather conservative. Those from the west, are a healthy mix of tradition and confidence."

The root cause of the obsession regarding fair skin can not be explained in its entirety within the current analysis; however, the data introduces a number of influential components in favour of fairer skin:

> **Kanika**: *when we see heroines on TV, we like them if they're pretty and they're pretty because they are fair*
> **Divya:** *even the guys prefer fair skin*
> **Researcher**: *in matrimonial ads, what is the standard fix?*
> **All**: *fair, slim, educated*

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> **Tanusha***: it's funny because we've never thought about this and we have never questioned it. We're so used to seeing all this so we've accepted it.*
> **Divya***: there's a very old saying that fairness is good*
> **Tanusha:** *yeah, but many actresses now are going for this dusky look- Aish in Dhoom 2 and Bipasha*
> **All***: yeah*
> **Tanusha:** *the dusky look is sexy*
> **Divya:** *No one wants a dusky look on their wedding; it's just for Bollywood really- if they can carry it well its fine.*

The excerpt above highlights a number of social pressures upon the girls for fairness and attractiveness through an amalgam of media representations of beauty, men's preferences and matrimonial requests. Despite the girls attempts at negotiating through the idea of skin tone, and even highlighting the recent trend for popular Bollywood actresses opting for a rather bronzed and 'dusky' look, Divya is quick to pull the group back into what she feels is problematic with the application of this dusky look in a traditional ceremony such as a wedding. Her assertion that 'no one' wants this particular look on their wedding day places a practical schism between media and reality, and despite attempts by actresses to popularise the darker toned woman, it's appeal, it seems, is merely on-screen. Listening back over the recordings, questioning the urban group about the issue of skin tone and skin lightening initially caused a number of prolonged pauses, the reason for this, as Tanusha states, was not only because the girls had never really thought about this issue, but they had also never questioned it, resulting in a sense of blind acceptance. In another interview session, Tanya and Namitha were also questioned about the status quo of skin lightening:

> **Tanya***: Indians are very conscious regarding this. I think now it's more, there's so much pressure now for people to look good. Even my cousins and friends are like 'we're darker than you, how can you understand these things'*
> **Namitha***: the girl wants to look beautiful, they don't want guys to reject them- I don't actually know why [laugh]*

> **Tanya**: *even the kid stories we used to listen to and read, fairness was beauty*
> **Namitha**: *yeah, Cinderella she's beautiful*
> **Tanya**: *in some way beauty equates to fairness. People, especially men are so concerned with their skin colour now. The bar for men has been raised a lot for me, in a news channel this discussion was going on- before it was only stars and actors and things that were seen to be good looking. Now everything is available to use on our skins for fairness. You want to look good at parties and things*
> **Namitha**: *It has always been a belief that a fair girl will look fine with a dark boy. But a dark girl will not go with a fair boy*

What is interesting is how not only through social pressure, as noted by Tanya, the belief of fairness equating beauty has been further propelled through the girls reading of children's classics, such as Cinderella. Fear of rejection by the opposite sex, as well as increased consumer sensitivity to media-generated representations of beauty, have further emphasised the need to look good in modern day metropolitan society. This pressure which has been spoken of from the quotes above seems to place a significant amount of emphasis upon the woman, making it her inevitable task to live up to social expectation. Namitha's statement that the pairing of two individuals has also been negotiated through a heightened sensitivity to skin tone is a surprising yet interesting one. This, however, is not the only case where skin tone has been discussed within this context; in another instance the girls admitted to being facilitators of this social stigma:

> **Heena**: *everyone does it*
> [Laugh]
> **Shivani**: *at first glance we do this, yes*
> **Divya:** *we will comment on that though- we'll just smile and think they're not complimenting each other*

Again, it can be seen that the idea of aesthetic is not merely developed through consumption of goods, its components lay deeper to that point that skin tone must also adhere to what is now socially favoured. This factor is further emphasised through the

plethora of products available in the market for the sole purpose of lightening skin tone, a few examples can be seen below in Inset 17.

Inset 17: *Fairness Cream*
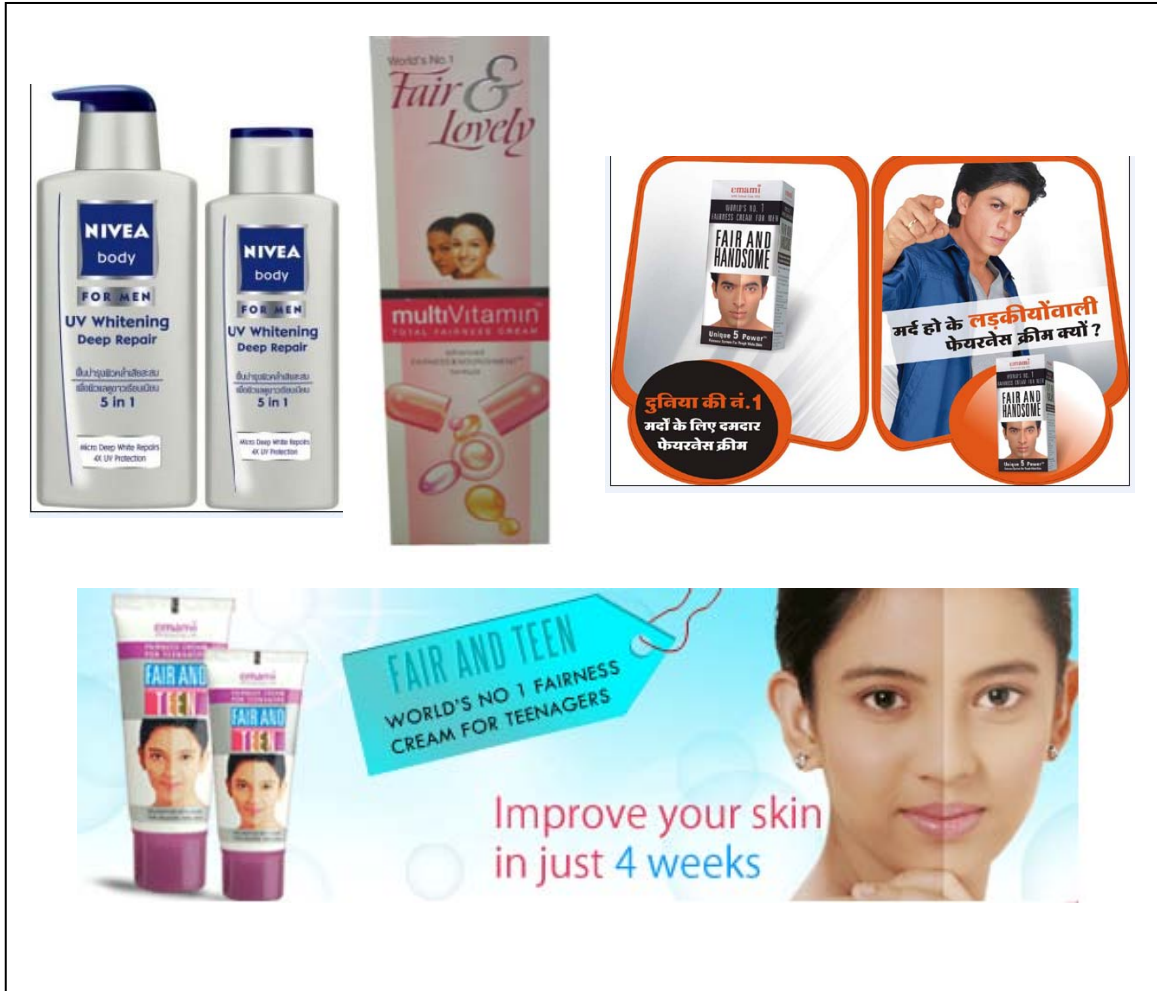
Another instance of reference to skin lightening occurred during a discussion with another of the urban respondents, Niti and Swati:

> **Niti**: *I remember once in my school there was a girl sitting with me in the bus…and that same fragrance of the cream* [fair and lovely] *I recognised because my mum also uses it. So I asked her, do you use this and she replied, yes. It can be linked all to the serials you know, I was surfing the TV and there's a new serial which has just started and it shows that the plight of this girl is that she's not able to get married because she is dark.*
> **Swati**: *there are two sisters in the serial, one is fair and one is dark*
> **Niti**: *every groom wants a fair bride*
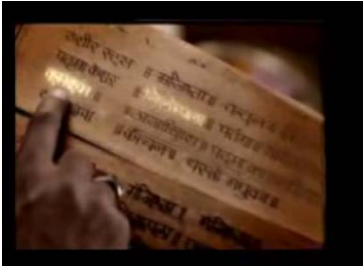> **Researcher**: *do you feel this is negative on their part?*
> **Both:** *yes it is*

> **Swati**: *every advertisement, you see girls with pimples or something and boys are not attracted to them and stuff- but then they use fair and lovely and…* [Laugh]
>
> **Niti:** *even if the boys aren't thinking about this, they will start thinking about it!*

Niti describes the way in which media serves the purpose of propagating the favourability of fair skin, reinforcing the social stigma that darker skin becomes problematic for a young woman who is of marriageable age. Swati ridicules the idea that enhanced fairness could potentially transform the life of a young woman as many of the advertisements suggest. To illustrate Swati's point further, Inset 18 below shows a series of snapshots from an Indian television advert for the fairness cream *Fair and Lovely*:

Inset 18: *Fair and Lovely television advert snapshots* [Hindi]

[1]   [2]   [3]

[4]   [5]   [6]

[7]   [8]   [9]

The advert depicts a 'traditional' young woman of dark complexion and her father trying to find the location of where a religious ceremony is taking place [1]. They accidentally enter into an agency where a pretentious assistant explains that they have come into a "*modern beauty company*" [2]; as the father and daughter leave, the assistant comments "*you can't make girls like that beautiful if you're still living in the ages of the Veda*", which inevitably angers the young woman and her father [3]. Upon reaching their home, the father opens a large chest in which the ingredients for 'beautifying' ones self are scribed in the ancient Vedic text [4]/[5]. It is this ancient Ayurvedic secret which has been used to produce the Hindustan Unilever product, Fair and Lovely [6]. Snapshot [7] depicts the young woman's phases through the skin lightening process; now beaming with confidence [8] she returns to the beauty company where she is spotted by an executive who exclaims "*what a face*" [9].

As suggested by the advert, the emphasis on success and confidence is seen to be something born out of fairness. The girls both believe that this depiction is problematic as the images serve to enforce dimensions of inferiority on a mass scale which may not have been as evident before. Niti's assertion that this type of advertising influences

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boys further illustrates advertising's potency amongst youth and the ability of imagery to sow seeds of, what seems to be, unethical favourability. The rural group were, as always, keen to air their opinions on the issue of skin lightening, however, their responses incorporated their own specific experiences as well as providing a wealth of insight regarding the perception of skin tone within a village setting.

> **Renu**: *it's a really bad thing. The boy can be as dark as he wants but the girl needs to look smart....you can see someone's smartness through their fair skin. See look, I'm dark...it happens a lot in the village*
> **Baby**: *I have a brother and sister and they are both fairer than me*
> **Renu**: *yes, people pass comments in the village when they see this*
> **Baby**: *see, my sister she can purchase anything, any colour and not much thought needs to be put into it- but for me it's like, what colour do I pick!?*
> **Renu:** *you feel it when your partner is fairer than you are- you'll think, oh why is he fairer than me! I want to be thinner than what I am right now, look at Kareena Kapoor* [actress]*, and see how thin she has become! I am very disappointed with my body- I should be taller.*
> **Baby**: *see people will pass comments on the girls figure – like' waah sexy'. Even if a girl is wearing something simple, they will look at her figure and say that she is sexy.*

As noted by Renu, there is, once again, emphasis placed upon women to maintain standards of beauty. She goes on to explain the complexities of comparison with regard to skin tone in addition to contemplating her own bodily insecurities referring specifically to popular Bollywood actress, Kareena Kapoor, whose dramatic weight loss to size zero became an influential component upon young women compelling some to re-negotiate their bodies. As highlighted in Baby's response, what I find interesting in this passage is the way in which skin tone has been tied into a specific act of consumption; Baby notes how she is unable to wear clothing of a certain colour unlike her sister of fairer complexion who does not face this difficulty. To provide a little more background information on this issue, wearing the right colour of clothing is important

to young women of darker complexion so as to avoid further emphasis of their skin tone. What had occurred to me during the discussions with both the urban and rural group was the way in which they both expressed their experiences of the issue of skin lightening; one of the major distinctions was the way in which the urban respondents rarely placed themselves as subjects when discussing the issue of fair skin. As a group they were relatively 'fairer' in skin tone than the rural group and had obviously not been on the receiving end of any form of colourism, nor were they threatened by its implications. The rural group, on the other hand, were more specific with their experiences of skin tone and highlighted the matrimonial implications associated with it:

> **Asha:** *people will look at a boy and a girl and they will comment on how nice they look as a couple...I mean, if the girl is darker than the boy then the couple doesn't look so good. If we like someone, handsome and good looking and fair we will like him, but wouldn't approach him because we have to be like him [referring to complexion] only then can we even think about having a friendship with him. For some people it's a bad thing to be dark...those people in high society will say this. My neighbour recently got married, he's so dark and everyone had commented about this. When I saw his wife, she was so beautiful and fair...we later came to know that the marriage was done for money.*
> **Researcher***: what is your preference?*
> **Asha***: he should look good, be fair...well not fairer but at least the same as me...and also his family should be good etc*
> **Suman***: My skin colour is dark; I don't expect him to be fair. He can be darker than me, which will still be ok...*

The way in which the girls describe their experiences and observations regarding the issue of skin tone makes it seem as though the girls are expressing and accepting a form of socially inscribed inferiority. Suman, having a comparatively darker skin tone to her classmates, would often become pessimistic when discussing marriage and how she would have to settle for a dark husband because of this 'social disability'. Asha notes how skin tone makes women prone to ridicule, especially when the opposite sex is

concerned; even approaching someone they find attractive incorporates a comparison of skin tone which becomes a barrier as seemingly potent as class or wealth. To be of the right aesthetic standard becomes important, and this, as I have observed, is where these young women literally buy into the skin lightening cult and ultimately become loyal consumers of product 'fair'.

Diary Entry 7: Anya

Most of my morning was spent observing Anya's pattern of household chores and activities; I spoke with her intermittently regarding her domestic duties, social life and product usage, during these topic discussions she mentioned frequently how her mother favoured her brothers. I enquired into a short biography. Originally from a village in North India, Anya's mother had married into an upper middle class family; with little to no formal education, yet 'trained' at all domestic duties, she was seen as the ideal wife and daughter-in-law. My conversations with Anya's mother were limited and I recalled the blank stares during my attempts to explain to her the nature of my work in Delhi. Uncharacteristically cold in nature for a 'Delhite', I compared my interactions with other women/mothers of her age around the city and there was certainly no similarity in attitude. I often wondered about her apparent bitterness towards her daughter which I feared was in some way also being directed towards me. I had observed that the sons were doted upon, yet a very orthodox and somewhat rural approach was taken with Anya; when at home the mother would constantly call upon Anya to do the household duties, leaving her with very little time to herself. Having limited time meant that Anya was not always able to indulge in shopping as she was almost always tied up with domestic work and her mother looked down upon her leaving the home for anything other than work.

Later in the day, and almost as routine now, I accompanied Anya to the beauty parlour; the journey provided us with time to converse freely. I asked Anya what she felt about her daily routine and activities, she expressed anger and frustration at being bound by certain rules and housework and made it a point how she could, if she wished, support herself if need be. This aspect provided her with a sense of comfort when thinking about the possibilities her income could provide. She spoke of how she felt like escaping from the routine and would often avoid leaving her workplace early due to family pressures. When wanting to go out with friends she would usually use work as an excuse to free up time for socialising at the mall or restaurants. This level of freedom was looked down upon and her mother would often check her purchases as well as the amount paid for them. I couldn't help but feel anger and sadness on her behalf.

I was on my way back from a meeting at North Campus and the Metro was, yet again, full to the brim with commuters. To my right I noticed a small group of youths, possibly in their late teens, seated. The boy had his arm placed around a teenage girl, who seemed to be his girlfriend, and a third youth sitting opposite them would, during short intervals, make phone calls to friends and speak in an extremely loud, brash manner. This overt display of affection certainly was an unusual sight, yet the couple seemed comfortable in their embrace and almost oblivious to people around them; they were anything but subtle in their movements and various postures, giggling and eager to attract attention. As the train was about to depart from the fourth stop, a young girl squeezed her way past the cluster at the doors, I observed the way in which she found a suitable place to stop. I noticed how body language was a huge element in the way that these girls presented themselves, the same way in which many of the girls I had observed within the college setting would usually behave- their hair combed back into a ponytail seemed a sign of either modesty or practicality. The twist to this 'simplistic' demeanour was the possession of the mobile phone; these young girls, I observed, would often be seen on the metro with their earpieces attached to their mobiles and tuning into the local radio stations which were continually playing the latest offering from Bollywood.

As the train pulled up at Rajouri Garden, a sudden burst of mammoth sized billboards boasting the names of these elite malls rushed before my eyes. I recalled a conversation with Anya the day before about this particular place, when I enquired further about the malls she explained how it was for 'hi-fi' youth who had money to spend. Not only this, the malls were also a place where young couples went to 'hang out' or 'make out'.

This site for consumption helped to provide a place for women to interact freely, however, Anya explained that we would have to 'dress well' when we make a visit. As I clung on to the rail and gazed out towards my surroundings passing me by at great speed, I realised how 'modern life' begun to form an intermission between very old and very new. For instance, I would see the inner city housing, houses built up high and somewhat run down from their exterior, dirty streets, street children and families all as an organised chaos until this sudden burst of the consumer dream- the intermission between monotony. There seemed to be a huge lack of synchronisation and a huge difference between the 'new' and 'old' pockets of society. I couldn't help but think that this influx of malls and consumerism into a society where so many basic problems still exist was somewhat strange. Delhi, for me, was a patchwork quilt and so difficult to speak about as a whole that I questioned whether anything really did work in unison at all.

Today I decided to make a visit to the malls at Rajouri Garden. The metro, as usual, was full to the brim; Anya and I struggled to find a small 'pocket' to place ourselves for the relatively sort journey from the home station. Upon arrival, there seemed to be a sudden change of atmosphere- bag checking and security checks were common at the elite malls, I was suddenly sucked into a pollution-free air conditioned utopia. My eyes wandered through the mass of signs, L'oreal, Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, DKNY. The mall entranced instantly opened up the consumer to a world of premium priced cosmetics. I approached an attendant at the first mall and asked about taking photographs; he called for the manager who came to meet with me and explained that the taking of pictures was not allowed on the premises.

The level of service was high with an almost 'Americanesque' feel through bouts of pseudo-pleasantry which was used, successfully, to entice the consumer further. Sales attendants would often, post purchase, point out other similar items that may be of interest to the consumer; this seemed to be an ideal opportunity for the final push of persuasiveness. Images of affluence surrounded me; well dressed/groomed families, groups of elite youths- billboards for the latest western fashions and trends were mixing freely with friends of the opposite sex. It struck me as I wandered through this maze of luxury, *where were the others?* Anya described to me the type of people that would come to visit the mall: youth that would not necessarily purchase anything yet congregate and 'hang out', enjoying the possibilities of purchases; families who were from the upper and upper middle classes and finally affluent youth who had money to spend. From her explanation, it wasn't completely surprising to me that the lower classes were suddenly the absent sect of society. These individuals were very much class conscious and certainly seemed to be living the dream [Cont…]

[Cont…] I too became submerged in the environment- a breath of fresh air literally and metaphorically from the harsh reality which surrounded me beyond these confines. India was momentarily forgotten. The attendants were extremely observant and humble to those who were willing to spend money or seriously wanted to purchase- compliments were many and persuasion, irritatingly constant. As I weaved my way past shoppers, my attention was caught by security guards, cleaners and men and women working in the changing room areas who would re-pack or replace clothing that people had tried on. I had found the lower classes. Three tops and a bra in hand, Anya pulled me towards the changing room area; I noticed how the attendant's gaze was filled with interest at the individuals who filled the changing room compartments, now and again passing compliments to customers. I patiently waited outside Anya's changing cubicle, as I glanced to my left I observed a mother also waiting outside her daughter's cubicle who was trying on a vast array of clothing items. I noted the enthusiasm on the mother's face and how, with great encouragement, she was ready with the next item of clothing. The daughter, approximately 17-18 years of age, stepped out of the cubicle sporting cropped trousers and fitted shirt, her mother immediately smiled and asked for the clothes to get packed by the attendant.

Anya had shown a little discomfort at choosing a suitable bra and had confided in me to pick an appropriate one for her. I was surprised that at her age she had not had the opportunity to purchase a bra for herself; she had explained to me that her mother would purchase ones which suppressed her 'shape' and didn't exactly do much for her confidence. I was in the awkward position of having to decide on her behalf as Anya had little to no knowledge of this type of purchase. She was satisfied with a branded push-up, however, she pondered over purchasing one which was more subtle in fear of what her mother may think of it.

4.3   Accessorising Modernity: Lifestyles and Consumption

The previous section has shown the ways in which the girls negotiated 'moralistic' consumption patterns with regard to the body, using a popular frame of reference such as the body within media as well as bringing attention to the complex nuances associated with dark skin as a form of social impairment. In this section it is my intention to explore the ways in which the girls understand and define modernity through their experiences as consumers. I will emphasise the distinct ways in which the young women negotiate what it means to be modern, and how, through negotiating dress and lifestyles, they are able to maintain traditional boundaries.

4.3.1   Photo Elicitation Projects: *A Modern India Looks Like…*

During the interview process I had conducted a small task with both groups of girls which consisted of a small photo elicitation project where I had asked both groups of girls to provide me with a visual response to the following statement: "*A modern India looks like…*" One half of my respondents had produced posters and the other half had taken photographs around the city. I will present each of the visual projects in turn with some narration beneath to explain what the girls had hoped to depict through their chosen assortment of images.

Poster - Niti [19: urban respondent]
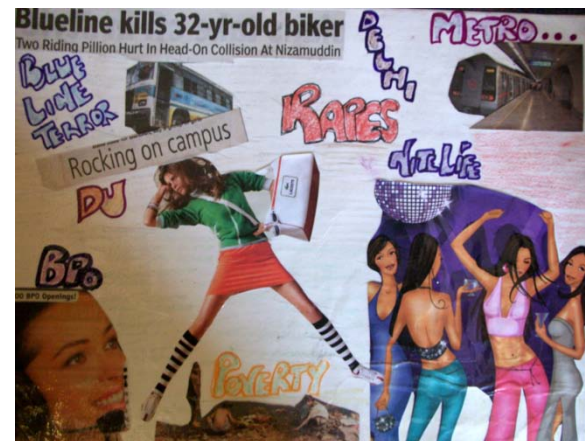
Core themes which emerged from Niti's depiction of a modern India centres upon a number of themes. From the first image, there is an apparent amalgam of the 'traditional' and the new in the form of classical dance and religious worship alongside call-centre culture, mall-culture and nightlife. She hints that the success of India is through the development of infrastructure, yet is one of the few respondents to outline some of the negativities associated with the notion of 'modern' life, for example, global warming, the rapidly increasing rape cases in the city and poverty.

[1]

[2]

[3]

[4]

[5]

"This photo **[1]** is of a residential area, it's purely residential and there's many societies…nothing commercial is here. There's a highway and a ring road and a lot of traffic, I'm trying to show the busy life and how people are busy in their daily lives. People are opting to live in societies now because it's more secure, more so than a colony. Things are more systematic in these areas. The next picture **[2]** is of Adventure Island, a theme park, and is part of the Mall, the mall ends then this adventure island starts. In the next image **[3]** I wanted to show construction and development in the area, new buildings and infrastructure is changing everything. This image includes the metro, I wanted to show the ease of access and how the metro makes it so easy to commute now and at a very reasonable price. This is our CTC Mall **[5]**, it's very popular and known for clothing, and I wanted to show that Indians are keeping up tradition in a modern sense, everything in these show rooms is so modern, and it's gorgeous, a modern mall selling traditional clothes. The final image is of a café **[4]**, it's more for our generation, it's a hang out joint and people are sitting inside this but the picture didn't come out so well."

Photo Elicitation- Shivangini [19: urban respondent]

[1]

[2]

[3]

[4]

" This image **[1]** is of the early morning, and I wanted to show that even in Delhi there's a time when there's not that much traffic [laugh]. I took this image **[2]** of CP, I wanted to show a modern Delhi; 10 years back there were hardly any cars here, so this change is interesting. Income has increased so people can afford cars now. This next image is of a jewellery shop **[3]**, even though modernisation has come in we haven't forgotten the traditional part- this is all traditional jewellery, even though the shop is more hip as you can see from the outside in the next pic **[4]**, but they are still selling this stuff. This picture **[5]** is of Dimple and I wanted to show the mixture of them doing an Indian dance wearing western clothing- I wanted to show the combination of both, they are genuinely interested in Kathak and all, the look may be western but their mindset is still Indian. There's so much youth who want to take up Bharat Natyam. South Indian girls learn it from the age of 2 or 3, it's a beautiful form of dance…the expressions are very important."
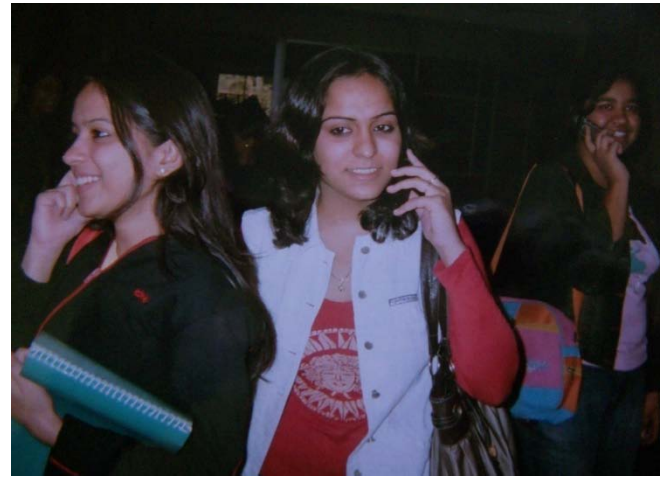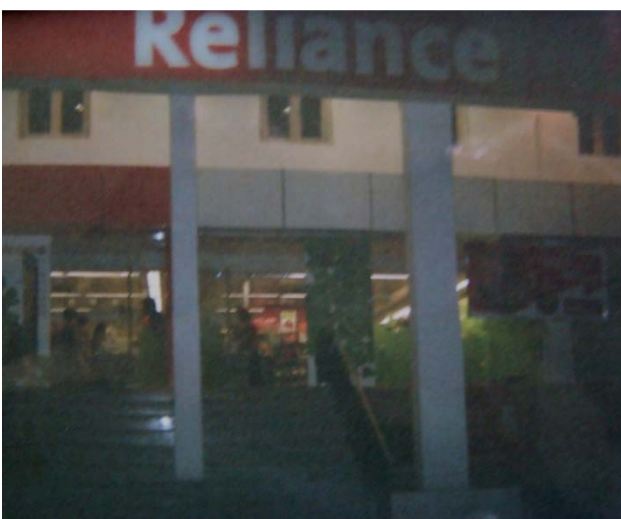
Photo Elicitation- Tanya [19: urban respondent]

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"This picture **[1]** I took in Barista but the image hasn't come out so well, I was trying to show the group of college goers sitting and chilling out, one of them was kind of a hunk and there was a music band on the left side. I wanted to show what our youth do, studying and discussion. This **[2]** is of a construction site, within the past 5 years there has been a huge boom in construction- it's the metro, buildings, malls residential areas, everything. The next **[3]** is of women studying- I was actually reading an article in the newspaper a couple of days back which was about the upcoming of metro malls and they compared the security of women and the malls. What I tried to show in this image is that the middle-class girls who were kept in four walls and the kitchen are now being sent to college to study. The next picture **[4]** is saying that mobile phones are so popular, we tried to capture the sweeper in our college with his mobile; the upcoming of trends gadgets and technology. There is contrast with the class picture and a different group here. The technology we use may be a little outdated compared to other more developed countries, but we are using it. This is **[5]** of Reliance Fresh, the retail sector, everything is under one roof."

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Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Dimple [19: urban respondent]

"It's all about how a modern India looks. So many pictures of advertisements, fashion and food and this lesbian sign as well. It's all about food, fashion, lesbianism, and media…this is modern India. It's totally westernised, like the pizza, though some elements are still Indian…the lady with the bikini top, the print is very Indian, but the actual clothing is western. Before girls were more influenced with western culture, but now I think that they are also more concerned with fashion, hairstyles and dressing sense. Western influence is here too, if women can come out [homosexuality] abroad then why not in India as well? I would prefer a westernised way of thinking, however you're living with your parents and there's also certain rules which you need to follow, so, an Indian outlook. See, I don't have any issue with women being lesbians, I mean if you have a desire you should be able to fulfil it- so I am very modern in thinking. So many changes have come into me after reading the novels in my course, and the psyche of how people think about things…whenever I used to read any novel, I would analyse the character. People use the media to find out all about these things, we're in a globalised world and people come over here and share their experiences. This is not modernity though; modernity doesn't mean that you should engage in sex or become a lesbian…a lot of people are taking the bad aspects of the western culture and calling it modernity."

Photo Elicitation- Tanusha [19: urban respondent]

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This Colgate **[1]** one was taken in City Square, Rajouri I wanted to show the way they are promoting their products. These are all youths and are paid like 500Rs, they earn good pocket money, and for 2-3 days they'll work and get good pocket money. You get attracted by all this and they will give free samples, they will play games and things- it's a good way to promote and it's quite fun. The mall **[2]** is a common basic hang-out place for everyone these days- it's convenient to stroll around in the mall than outside, it's safer. Summer as well it's so hot so the mall is nice. This image is taken inside the metro **[3]**, for youth it's a really good thing, earlier we had never used the bus because it wasn't convenient for us. See transport is why when we were in school we would never go to CP without our parents. Street food **[4],** whenever we get time in the evening, we'd go and eat tikki's and things, India won't ever get rid of this. This is an image of an Indian marriage **[5];** I think we celebrate it lavishly. Even the lower middle class will also pay so much money on weddings and they will take out many loans. They can't help it, it's about their daughter and they need to do it. We mixed everything up when taking these pictures, modernisation, westernisation, tradition, - everything"

Photo Elicitation-Deepika [19: urban respondent]

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This picture I took at a college **[1]** and there was a cultural fest there; a group of boys from Khalsa College were performing a Bhangra. Through this image I want to stress that today's modern generation still prefer to dance to their traditional songs and their regional tradition…it doesn't matter how modern they are, they still stick to their customs. In the next image **[2]**, a Punjabi singer had come, Ashok Masti- and everyone was dancing to the music, I'm trying to show how today's generation know how to enjoy themselves, they're cool, they like to follow fashion and enjoy themselves in each and every way. The next picture **[3]** is of a blood donation camp in our college, I want to show how today's youth are very aware of this idea and will actively participate in it- I'm showing the awareness of the youth. This **[4]** is of McDonalds, the most famous hang out for youngsters of all ages; hanging out at these place has become a well known thing and it is very common to have a McD burger and chill out there. This one **[5]** is of me and my friends in college, we're all from English honours all have different opinions and are modern in our own ways...I'm talking more about individualism. This is of a house in Janakpuri **[6],** I wanted to portray through this image that Indians are going to lengths to make their homes more modern, with all facilities, and the design is becoming more western; many people are opting for interior designing even upper middle classes are also doing this a lot…it used to happen more in the upper classes, but now it's becoming more common now.

[7]

[8]

[9]

[10]

The next picture is of a multiplex, Satyam **[7]**, from this I want to show that there's a lot of commercialisation there, if the movie is not good people will still go to watch it, to spend time in the place, take their girlfriend out. This is of a Chinese Thai **[8]** restaurant, college students love going to have party treats; these days people don't mind spending a few extra bucks for a treat. It's a status thing too. People have started to prefer other international cuisines; I'm a great fan of Thai, Chinese and Mexican food. This is of Archies **[9],** giving an Archies gift is a branded thing, it's a status thing. Before we used to give hand-made cards and go to a small market store and buy a small gift, but now people expect this. The next image **[10]** is of a food court, *lajawaab*, Indians love their food, here you get food at a higher price, but people will come here in the evenings for dinner and all. Before people would prefer home-cooked food, now there are alternatives, it's common now to eat out.

Poster Project - **Namita** [19: urban respondent]

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like-* **Megha** [19: urban respondent]

Key issues from these projects were the emphasis upon mall culture and the way in which infrastructural development helps to portray 'modern' images of the city. Through these visual depictions the urban girls stressed the importance of mixing the traditional with the western. Examples of this were: the selling of traditional Indian dresses at CTC mall; the selling of Indian jewellery at a Connaught Place boutique; the traditional *Kathak* dance being performed in Western attire and the notions of an Indian mindset with a Western exterior.

Deepika's responses, in particular, had prompted a more in-depth discussion of a number of the issues raised for her photographs. She explained how a place such as McDonalds had become a "fashionable place" amongst youth where consumption of the environment was also an integral component of its enjoyment. This notion had also been mirrored through her description of the cinema-going crowd, where the environment proved to be a safe haven for couples wanting to spend time with one another. The Archie's gift-giving experience was also dwelled upon by Deepika, who noted how important it was for a gift to be an *Archies* gift:

> "*People make an issue of it being an Archies product. You will give the gift in an Archies bag as well. Archies use a lot of techniques for different days- chocolate day, sorry day, mother's day, father's day etc, so they market it well. On the 14th Feb, Shiv Sena were smashing up Archies shops because of Valentine's Day, it was bad. They say that western culture is corrupting our youth, and Archies are promoting this idea*"

Deepika describes an inherently status-based ordeal, where a gift from a mere neighbourhood market is no longer credited with the same social value as it once may have maintained. A branded gift, according to Deepika, has become of utmost

importance and she is acutely aware of the promotional campaigns which surround Archies on a regular basis. Her responses were not critical of these techniques, but rather, were more appreciative of the novelty associated with the days. The opposition Deepika refers to by the right-wing political party, Shiv Sena, was a topic of discussion with a number of the respondents; below is an example of an online-flyer compiled by one such group who I had heard about during my time in India. There exists stern opposition amongst some sects[13] of what is deemed to be inherently "Western" traits and characteristics, which are infiltrating the social fabric of society. Within the context of discussion, the celebration of Valentine's Day, according to the HJS, is an act against the moral ethics of Hinduism which will ultimately result in a denigration of Indian culture and destruction of the self:

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[13] See also: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2749667.stm

Inset 19: <u>HJS flyer condemning the celebration of Valentine's Day</u>

Viewed as an evil inflow of the West which is deemed as immoral, those who engaged in the consumptive elements of this occasion were seen to be breaking social morality codes. The Western definition of the term 'Valentine's Day' and its connotations with Western notions of love - usually equating sexual activity - seem to be the focal underlying issues here. Political surveillance, therefore, is not absent in the lives of youth, however, what was disappointing to learn was that Valentine's Day was as

much, if not more so, an occasion celebrated between friends. I had heard that it was not unusual to give female friends, relatives and parents cards on this day; rather than it being a day for 'lovers', it has become more specific to local interpretations of the celebration of love between a wider circle of individuals.

Deepika was closely attached to her friends circle, and it became clear from her assessment of their personalities how she negotiated what it meant to be 'modern':

> *"we are all modern in our own ways...I am talking more about individualism...we're ambitious and don't follow orthodoxy, but there's some...umm..*[pointing to one of the girls in the photograph] *she succumbs to more patriarchal values and all...* [pointing to another two girls] *they're shy and won't know what to do when boys are saying things behind them...if I am there, I will say something. We all like to stick to the latest fashions and try to adjust ourselves to this; most of us don't have the same level of freedom in the home and we have to stick with our parents and go along with them".*

What I found particularly interesting here is the way in which Deepika navigates her way through the nuances associated with what modernity means to her as a lived experience. Similar to a number of the other respondent's images, she distinguishes between notions of modernity which at one level are concerned with the external, developmental space in terms of infrastructure, and secondly, through a more personal space where identity is constructed through the frame of modernity. Not following orthodoxy and a refusal to submit to patriarchy are important traits for Deepika whose own experiences with her father have directly influenced a more rebellious nature which she wholly integrates into her own interpretation of what it means to be modern. The restriction of freedom within the domestic sphere, which Deepika describes, seems

to act as a hindrance to what she feels would otherwise be a fuller expression of the girls' selves; her assertion of having to "go along" with parents alludes to the levels of surveillance she and her friends are exposed to within the home, making the domestic sphere, in this instance, a non-integral component when negotiating a 'modern' self.

Photo Elicitation- Renu [19: Rural respondent]

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I really like malls and they are foreign so this is why I have this picture **[1]** I wanted to show that India is becoming successful through these things. The next picture **[2]** is of a hall [theatre] it's the Moti Nagar one- before they used to put up this big sheet and show films on a projector in villages, I wanted to show the progress; the sound is good in here as well as the picture. The next picture is of my favourite car **[3]-** it's not so clear but it's my favourite. I was sitting in a rickshaw when I took this one. If money was no object, I would buy this. The next image **[4]** is of a house, if I had all the money in the world I would buy this house- I really like this house, its design is so nice, this oval shape and its spacious…I really want one. I have a house bigger than this one! But I like this design. The next picture is of office blocks **[5],** and I am showing how people can earn really good money in these kinds of positions- people can become successful. The final picture **[6]** is the metro, travelling wise it's been so good without a problem, especially for ladies. The metro, for India, is a very very good thing.

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Asha [18: rural respondent]

Caption: [Translated from Hindi]:
"Every Changing fashion is making India modern. With new technology, the old state/situation is changing and people's thinking is constantly changing"

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Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Baby [19: rural respondent]
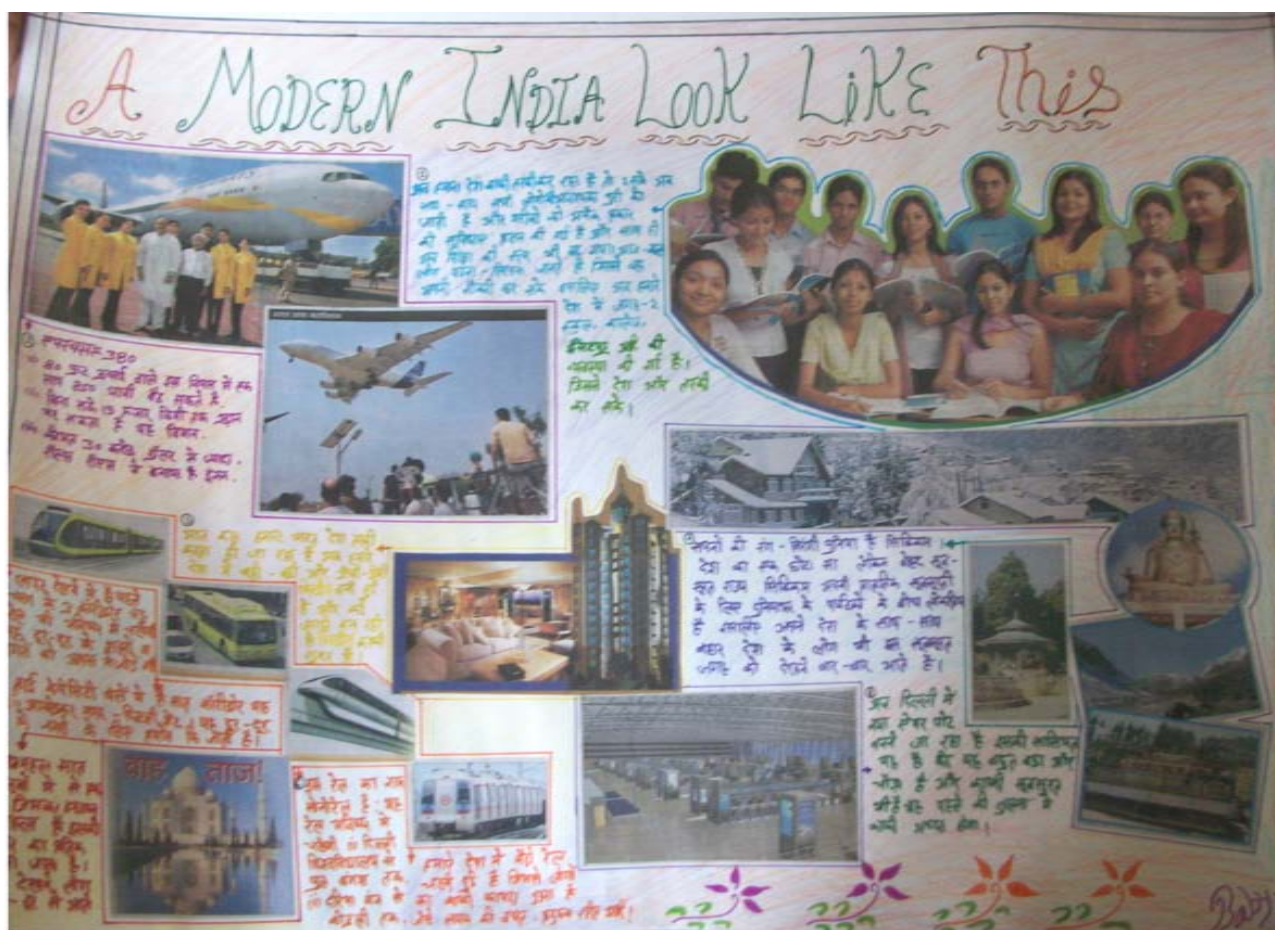
Summary:

"Our country is progressing a lot, and through this, people's needs are being fulfilled and poor people are being provided with a lot of benefits. The status of education has also improved and these days people are literate and can obtain jobs. This is why at every corner there is a school, college and institution to help the country progress/succeed. Large buildings have been constructed and continue to be built. These buildings are very beautiful. The colourful state of Sikkim is a very beautiful place; it is small but beautiful nonetheless. It is very famous for its natural beauty and people come to visit this place time after time. A new airport is also being built in Delhi, it is special because it is so big and wide and very beautiful – much better than before."

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Rakhi [19: rural respondent]

Summary:

"Today's children are tomorrow's future. In the near future India will look like this. There have been many inventions in India in the past and there will continue to be in future. There is now a cure for almost every illness. Tall buildings and malls, metro and many other things are characteristic of a modern India. India is no longer behind any other country"

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Suman [19: rural respondent]

Summary:

"Today's Trend/Era. To make a darker person into a fairer one. Wear that which makes you attractive. Simplicity hidden within jewels. Keep your feet moving forward. Beauty is in simplicity."

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like*- Asha [19: rural respondent]
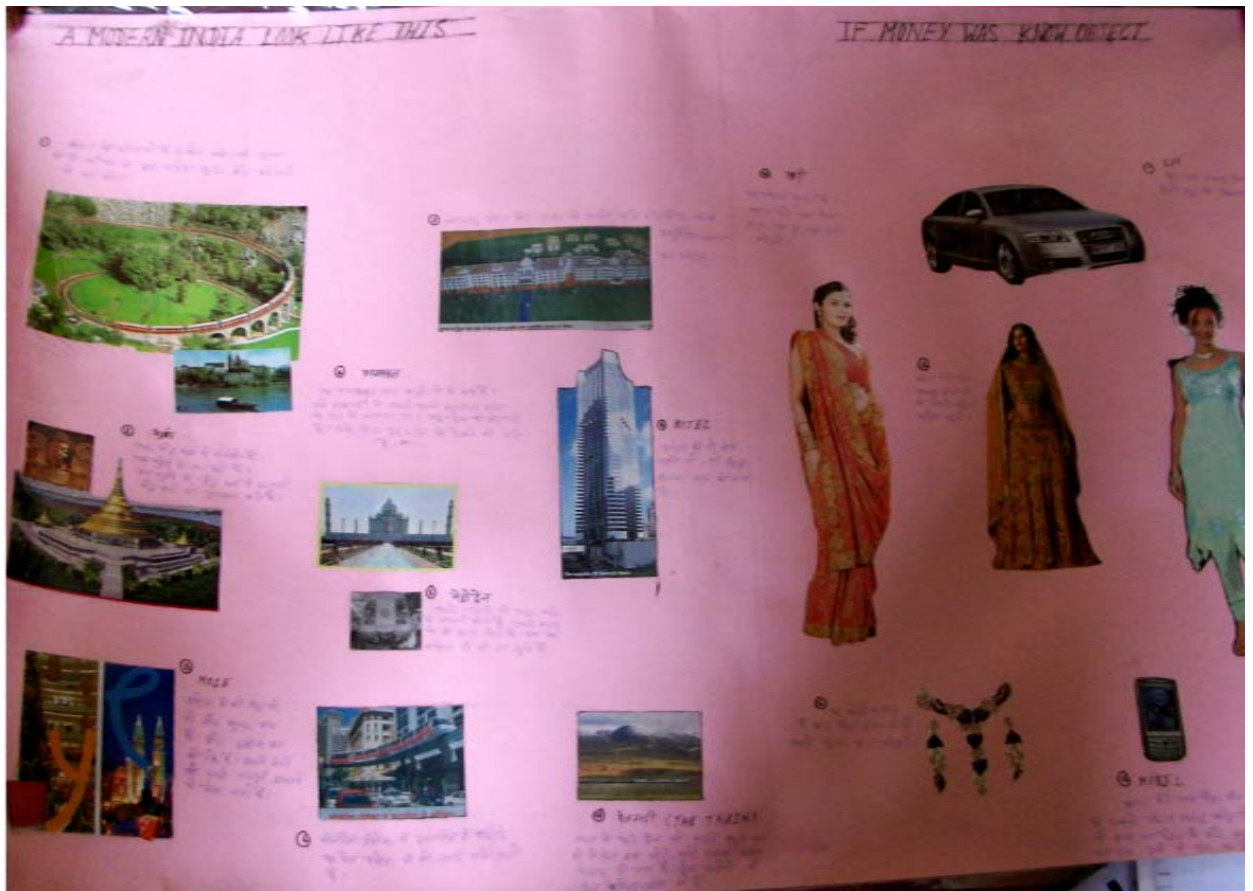
Summary:

"In India there is greenery but also pollution and in future the whole of India will be beautiful and green. In India there are many beautiful big malls and more under construction, people's needs and wants can easily be catered for here. The metro now makes it much easier for commuters/travellers and the mono-rail is also about to be introduced into india. Najafgarh – this factory is proposed to be built in here and it is to house all the Ayurvedic treatments by Dabur. In the country there never used to be so many train lines, now they are under expansion."

If Money Was No Object: "This is an Indian saree and if I had the money I would buy this. If I had money I would buy my own personal car and the most expensive lehenga [traditional clothing]. I really like salwaar suits, if I had money I would buy lots of them; I would buy the most expensive jewellery. I would buy the best mobile phone because it is very much in fashion. It is easier to talk to others via the mobile phone."

Poster Project: *A Modern India Looks Like-* **Pooja** [18: rural respondent]
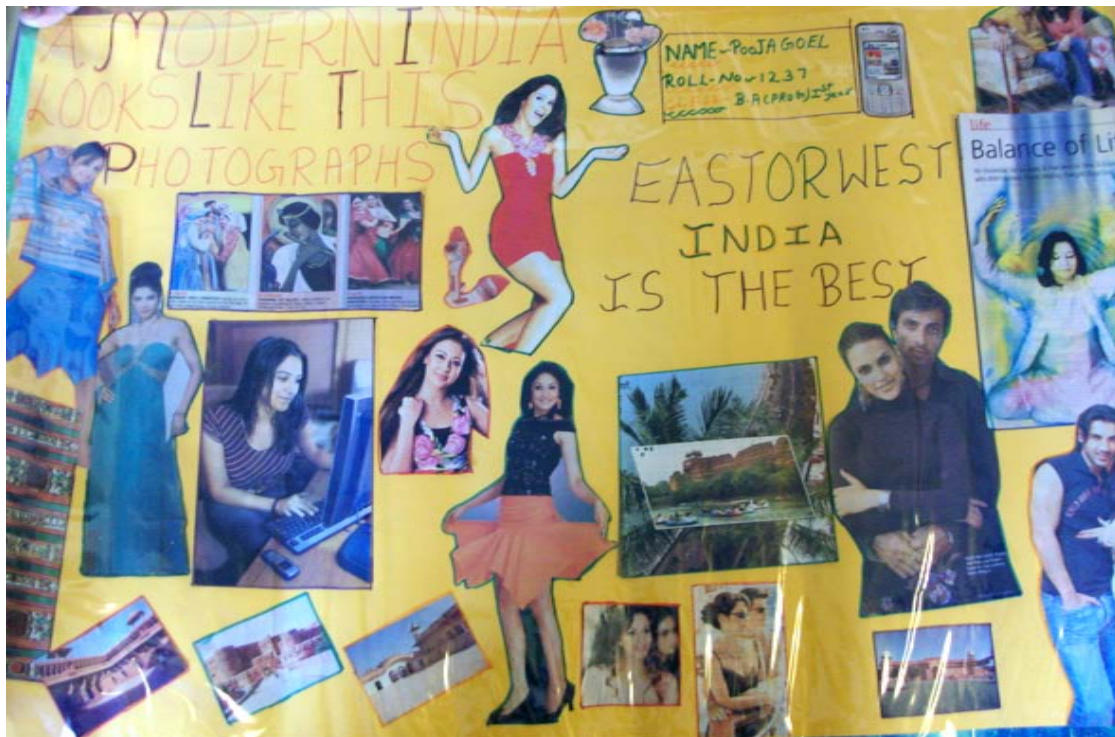
Statement [in English on back of poster]:

"It is a well known proverb 'East or West India is the best'. India is a united [sic], although there are many religions in our country but still India is united. So we have unity and love in our country. Nowadays as we can see that our youngsters are adopting the western culture and ignoring the pure Indian culture and customs. They are no doubt acquiring higher education but sorry to say neglecting to respect the elders. In olden days, people used to be very pure and real. Now they are very formal. Apart from that politics is real distructing [sic] part of India. Politics is polluting India and thats [sic] the reason our country is still developing. People used to be very innocent and simple but now in our culture all the crap things are progressing. Western culture has polluted the young mind. They are doing all crap which is affecting modern India. Earlier people used to be very cultured and used to respect elders, no doubt people are earning a lot, but they are losing the Indian culture. girls who are considered as the innocent sex but they are doing more crap like they are educated and earning high and yes obviously adopting western culture. They are smoking, drinking and doing whatever they like to do, even they are practicing extra marital affairs. There are many things which cannot be explained in this small piece of paper. I would pray that youngsters should adopt all the goodness of western culture and ignore the crap part of the western culture."

A number of similarities can be seen from visual representations of modernity amongst the rural group with those of the urban such as infrastructure and development, education and mall culture. However, there was one significant distinct difference upon closer examination, of the annotations. The rural girls had presented an India of *description* rather than India as *lived*, what I found most interesting was that the notion of a 'modern India' was tied up through the ideals of the urban locality. There was little association of the rural context in light of a negotiation of modern India, making it periphery to the negotiation of it, however, Pooja's statement presented a sentiment which was imbued with undertones of rejection. She presents a nostalgic image of India which was a surprising observation considering her age; she felt that all negative aspects of the West were being adopted, enticing young women to behave in deviant ways which in turn was eradicating the "pure" Indian culture.

4.3.2   Modern Identities: Struggles and Negotiations

During a conversation with some of the urban respondents, the topic of Bollywood and western fashion had prompted a discussion on what it meant to be modern:

> **Divya***: it's more about your thinking, broad mindedness*
> **Heena***: our clothes definitely contribute, but ultimately I feel it's a way of thinking*
> **Researcher***: Do you feel as individuals, modernisation automatically translates into westernisation?*
> **Heena***: to some extent they are related*
> **All***: they are related*
> **Diya***: they get along*
> **Tanya***: To some extent, I think so – because westernisation means moving out and a lot of other stuff, going out. In America at the age of 18 a boy and a girl they have left their parents, I don't think that's what you could term as*

> *modernisation, that's westernisation. Modern for me means practical thinking and mindset*
> **Heena**: *they are both related to one another, but when it comes to thinking then modernisation is different*
> **Divya**: *my cousin in the US left home at the age of 17 for a different city*
> **All:** *we're not into this thing*
> **Divya**: *it's just not common to be honest – you don't really see it*

As can be seen from the responses, the notion that modernity can be split between internal and external components is an interesting one. There was consensus amongst the girls that being modern in terms of thought was seemingly more important than certain 'acts' of modernity; in this case Tanaya and Divya note how moving out of the home at 17 and 18 years of age is not an act of being modern, but rather an act of being western. Although there seems to be some suggestion that westernisation and modernisation are inter-linked, it could be inferred from the discussion that an act which challenges social morality, or an act which could potentially be seen as stigmatising upon the individual, is cast out of the negotiation process. There is evidence here that the girls are beginning to developing their own sense of modernity, albeit a culturally-negotiated one; this construction could, in part, fall into the category of hybridity as the girls are able to adopt elements which they feel are appropriate to the cultural context and dispose or alter those which may otherwise be deemed as inappropriate. When asked to describe the attributes which they feel to be considered as modern, the respondents present a socio-cultural understanding of how the notion of modernity is received in an Indian context:

> **Divya**: *western people have their own thinking and Indians have their own, but this doesn't mean Indians are not modern. The western element is in India*
> **Heena**: *just look at our clothing*
> **Tanya**: *it's difficult in a country like India, with pressures from all sides from family and society.*

> **Heena**: *when it comes to cultural elements- we want to remain Indian. Tradition, modern thinking mixed with moral values*

The respondents shed light upon what they believe to be an inherently culturally specific way of 'thinking'; an attribute which, according to the young women, is central to the role of accessing modernity in India. Divya sees modernity as distinct from Westernisation, yet she is quick to acknowledge the existence of both within contemporary Indian society. What seems to be of importance to this group of respondents is the preservation of their national identity and wanting to remain Indian when negotiating a 'modern self'. This context-specific assessment is, as Tanya notes, riddled with domestic and societal pressures, strengthening the case further of a culturally grounded understanding of how the modern, Indian self operates at the level of the body and within society. Shivangini was also of the opinion that it was important to keep traditions just as central within the notion of a modern self:

> **Shivangini**: *keeping up your traditional things and finally move forward in your mentality*
> **Deepika**: *losing the negative parts, like superstition and traditional India- orthodoxy and the mindset*

Deepika is quick to interject, stating that it is the positives of Indian culture which need to be preserved, in this case what she believes to be inherently traditional and orthodox should be disposed of. It wasn't the first time that I had heard the explanation of 'moving forward' when discussing a modern Indian mindset, this 'movement' seemed important and I found this to be a good opportunity to understand its relevance.

> **Researcher**: *when you refer to this idea of 'moving forward' what is it you mean?*

> **Shivangini**: *In every respect, like when you go out for jobs and things and go against them* [parents]- *you're trying to come out of a shell and doing things on your own accord.*
> **Deepika**: *being an individual is to follow your heart and instincts, and keep yourself free from this hypocrisy. There will be obstacles but you have to stay focussed, you may not always agree with your parents.*

The movement referred to is one which Shivangini describes as being a shift from collectivity to one of individualism. Although I questioned whether this was possible within an essentially collectivist country, I believed that what the respondents were referring to here was not separation from parents, and nor was it complete isolation from society, it was their plight for wanting more freedom and independence with respect to their choices and decision making. Adding to this is the stark contrast between their parents' generation and their own; their parents were not exposed to the cable television, the internet, mobile phones and roles were, as has been explained, clearly defined between the sexes.

> **Shivangini**: *every time my mum will say to me, I didn't do this when I was young- so I am like come on, this is now, and we're in a modern time now. You have to convince them that we've moved on.*
> **Researcher**: *what is being modern to you?*
> **Shivangini**: *the metro, lots of malls and ambitious people*
> **Deepika**: *they* [women] *will not consider any obstacles in their path- today girls will want their careers to be set and things. Marriage is secondary*

Once again, references to infrastructure and the relegation of marriage are viewed as 'modern' traits. Deepika strengthens the active role of women in the negotiation of what it means for India to be modern – this is interesting, as women have for long been viewed as the upholders of morality and tradition they are simultaneously becoming the bearers of Indian modernity.

> **Deepika**: *earlier they used to have many restrictions and suppress women, modern people don't give a damn for these restrictions, and they just go for what they want*
>
> **Dimple**: *I don't care too much for clothing to be honest, if they* [parents] *don't allow me to wear something, then it's ok. I love acting, and I wanted to take this up as a career, so I told my father and he said there's no future in it and a girl should not be taking up this line. Their thinking is just...I am so interested in this field and I am not allowed to go into it!*
>
> **Shivangini**: *I feel modernity is the ability to accept everything that is coming your way- it's like we'll be coming home one day and then pop into McDonalds, then suddenly realise its Tuesday, then it's like, oh forget it* [laugh] *it's not like our parents know about it.*
>
> **Deepika**: *tradition means that a girl needs to behave in a certain way, nor is she expected to be too talkative, not show her feelings*

The excerpt above provides some wonderful insight; Deepika, being the outspoken and headstrong character that she is, asserted, somewhat irritably, how a modern woman would look beyond restrictions and keep a strong focus of her goals and what she wants to do. Dimple, on the other hand, had decided not to pursue a career which was riddled with immoral connotations for a woman; her decision making had been highly influenced by her parents who had prohibited her from following her passion. Shivangini's response paints a portrait of the sentiment surrounding her generation at present; her mixture of tradition and the west in her response is an interesting one. Tuesdays are usually denoted as 'holy' days in parts of India where consumption of non-vegetarian food is generally avoided; Shivangini described a form of compartmentalisation where traditions are placed aside whilst engaging in the act of consumption at McDonalds, an icon of the west. Dimple is not alone in having to sacrifice her interests, rural respondent Baby had also been subject to discouragement when wanting to pursue a career which, stereotypically, a village girl like herself could only dream of:

> **Baby**: *I really feel like doing something like this, but I won't be allowed. People used to call me very smart and good in sports etc then I thought, mum is ill so who will do the work in the home, and this is why I opted against it. See, I would really like to have become an air hostess, but I'm at the wrong college for this and...ummm...it just won't happen...my family wouldn't let me get into this. If by chance I come home late, the whole village will say that their daughter is coming home late.*

Interestingly, Shivangini brings to light how the products which they purchase now were also available some time back, however, the adoption of certain items on this scale, she suggests, has been more recent.

> **Shivangini**: *The things that are coming up in India now had been introduced long back, but what we are taking up is modernism, we're giving up our suits for jeans...if you're following a western tradition then it in inevitably modern.*

Emphasis upon clothing when considering the role of modernity amongst the young women was an ongoing theme; even amongst the rural respondents it was a central feature:

> **Rakhi**: *There can be one way of saying that something is coming up in India, like malls and all...then girls as well will show they are wearing jeans and jewellery and things- more on clothing*
> **Renu**: *we're more traditional because of our parents. If you behave as though as you are modern, they will think you have an attitude, you show a lot in that sense...but sometimes we become more modern*
> **Researcher:** *would you say, then, that clothing is something that speaks volumes about an individual?*
> **All:** *yes*
> **Renu**: *girls look better wearing salwar suits in India*

There is a tone of negativity which surrounds the idea of what it means to be 'modern' in human terms; when considering infrastructure and development, the responses are

more positive and encouraging. I could not help but sense a hint of uncertainty surrounding the term, 'modern' for a number of the respondents.

4.3.3   The language of Modernity Identity

In addition to clothing, knowledge of English was another contributing factor in being able to 'access' modernity, according to the girls:

> **Renu***: In traditional parts of India, people don't know English as much and people who are more western will speak English right…from what I believe, if we are western, then we will automatically become western…I think both of the things are mixed though. It's so important to know English*
> **Asha***: If you don't know English, you can't do anything*
> **Rakhi***: In India you can't do anything*
> **Renu***: my own father says it, that if you don't know English you won't achieve anything in your life.*
> **Researcher***: what's the reason for this?*
> **All***: to be modern, for a modern India*

This excerpt above highlights the link between the superiority of the English language over Hindi in order to be deemed as a 'modern' individual. I had come to know that a number of the rural girls were at the college not to pursue courses which would further their career prospects, but in order for them to be more 'marriageable'. It was here where it dawned on me that English was another factor for why there was a lack of interaction between urban and rural students. The English teacher, Ms. Sanyal, had mentioned this to me during my initial week at the college; she explained that the girls suffered with an inferiority complex and that they would be surprised that I would be giving them equally as much time and attention as the urban girls. Their supposed invisibility concerned me deeply.

The constant grapple of finding a comfortable balance between East and West was evidenced further through Niti's experiences:

> **Niti**: *I'll tell you an incident yesterday- Diwali has just gone and I made rangoli at my place and then I put that photograph on Orkut. One of my friends, my English honours friend, said "Oh I don't put rangoli on Orkut" so I asked why, and she was like "because you are an English literature student." So I thought, ok...even though I am an English Literature student I am an Indian...I don't forget that as well. You see, there is so much confusion being modern means, going away from your values...but that's not the case. Over here it's like wearing fewer clothes flaunting your body seems to be more modern! But I don't think so.*

Inset 20: <u>Example of a 'rangoli'</u> [a sandpainting prepared on auspicious occasions/festivals]

Niti highlights the confusion associated with subject of study and identity; I had observed that a number of students announced their subjects of study with pride, publicising it as part of their identities and forming group associations on the basis of it. In this instance, Niti is faced with criticism concerning her image of a rangoli which, according to her peer, goes against her 'image' of an English honours student. Niti asserts that a rejection of Indian values is not necessary in order to be classified as 'modern', in addition to this, she indicates how there has emerged a notion of modernity at the level of the body, which for women involves revealing attire which may be deemed as licentious amongst the masses. It had occurred to me after having spent a

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considerable amount of time discussing the topic of modernity with the respondents that that there were a number of immoral connotations associated with what it meant to be 'modern'.

4.3.4   Constructing Identity: Buying Lifestyles

Self awareness and the need to acquire goods which in some way mirror the respondent's identities was of utmost importance amongst this urban group:

> **Researcher***: mobile phones, when I was here 5 years back, weren't such a big thing*
> **All***: it's cheap to buy mobiles here now*
> **Divya***: I'm a total mobile freak*
> **Tanya***: cameras and stuff*
> **Divya***: we want it! It's top of the list*
> **Megha***: we're into all this fashion stuff, so why not have a mobile?*
> **Tanya***: If you carry some silly handset which is cheap, then you go into a mall wearing branded stuff people will think it's fake.*
> **Researcher***: Do you feel that interaction with the opposite sex is easier because of the mobile phone? Is this thing allowing you another kind of space?*
> **All***: yeah, definitely*
> **Megha***: helps with bunking!*
> **Researcher***: could you live without your mobiles?*
> **All***:* [uproar] *NO!*
> **Divya***: Nationally in India, it's [mobiles are] not so common*
> **Megha***: the appeal is gone for things that are common*

There was a sense of excitement amongst the respondents and it almost felt as though I had touched a nerve amongst the group. They were undoubtedly passionate about this technology and reinforced its priority within their own lives as individuals and as consumers; in particular, Tanya's response sheds light upon how an inexpensive mobile phone handset could potentially tarnish one's overall appearance. Technology goods were very much a part of the make-up of this urban group of respondents and during a

conversation some days earlier they had referred to themselves as "mouse potatoes" and spent a considerable proportion of their free time on the internet and social networking websites such as Orkut and Facebook. The popularity of technology, they felt, was invariably altering their social make-up as young urban women. The same could be said for another respondent, Niti, whose explanation seemed almost like an advertisement in itself:

> **Niti**: *It has changed my life, like if at night I am not feeling sleepy I'll just see what my boyfriend is doing, you know…goodnight sweetheart, this and that. In 25paisa there's a smile on your face [smiling].*

The discussion had given the girls a chance to describe their daily routines, as had the rural respondents; aside from some of the more mundane daily activities, a major difference between this group's daily routines and the rural group's seemed to be the lack of domestic duties. I prompted this discussion further and presented the following statement: 'the position of women in India today?'

> **Megha**: *the class categories would be different. In the lower classes they are not given much importance…they expect them to do housework or farming work. My maid is like that, she's from Jharkand* (a city in the stereotypically backward state of Bihar)
> **Heena**: *In cosmopolitan cities, it's completely different*
> **Researcher**: *What kind of differences?*
> **Megha**: [urban women] *are working, and* [rural] *men want* [women] *to do the housework*
> **Kanika**: *Their education is also really limited*
> **Megha**: *they are not at all educated. Men respect women in metropolitan cities- see even my father, he respects my mother- they're educated, right.*

Once again, location becomes of central importance when discussion the position of women in society. A limited education, according to Megha, develops into a lack of respect for one another; her definition of respect here is not only limited to emotive elements but also means that women are able to acquire professional work out of the home with the support of their spouse. The girls believe that through a number of identifying categories women's lives and experiences would be markedly different from one another. When discussing the specifics of markers of identity between both groups of girls, Heena introduced the distinction between urban and rural notions of caste:

> **Heena***: in metropolitan cities, you won't find people discriminating on the basis of caste- in places like Bihar it would be different and in villages*
> **Megha:** *yeah*
> **Researcher***: So what kind of indicators are people using in the city to distinguish themselves from one another? What has changed in the city?*
> **Megha***: again, it comes down to dressing sense, mentality...it's all money, everything comes to money*
> **Heena***: at the end of the day what matters is money*

When asked what indicators are predominantly used within an urban context, both Megha and Heena pointed towards materialism and wealth as the predominant urban social indicators. However, what I found particularly interesting was the way in which Heena was of the belief that caste discrimination is a predominantly rural phenomenon which exists at the fringes of society, yet, during a conversation outside of the college campus, when prompted to describe the characteristics of caste in Indian society, she was able to provide examples in addition to some from her own family experiences. I was sceptical of the claims that the caste system may have been eradicated from the urban mindset and questioned whether the mere acknowledgement and knowledge of this cultural hierarchy was enough to secure its hold within society at large. Tanya and

Tanusha also provided a little more description on this topic during a later interview session:

> **Tanya***: If you take an example of our parents and grandparents, they will be concerned about these things. I mean in my family they would prefer me to, you know stay within that*
> **Tanusha***: It's getting more common these days, inter-caste marriages*
> **Researcher***: So, when looking for a partner, would you intentionally pick someone who fit that category?*
> **Both***: No*
> **Tanya:** *If I have fallen for someone who is out of my caste, then I think it's ok, I'll deal with it.*
> **Researcher:** *so, then, if caste is not used as a primary identifier between individuals, what is?*
> **Tanya***: dress*
> **Tanusha***: Nature and wealth*
> **Tanya***: the attitude as well, the kind of style they have. We don't really consider housing as an important factor though*

The older generation, according to Tanya, are referred to as the ones who uphold and consider the role of caste more expressly and would subsequently want their children to uphold this element of tradition. Similarly as with Heena and Megha, the girls indicate that primary identifiers amongst people in the urban setting are clothing, behaviour and wealth. This view was also shared by Niti and Swati who had noted:

> **Swati***: the way they talk*
> **Niti***: their thinking… it's really wrong but, we do it…generally with boys, this ego comes with them- they will say 'oh you're not brand conscious?' 'what are you wearing?' this ego comes with them. This ego, you know, like I'm from a rich family, an upper middle class family, I have this power to take this and that. Wealth also comes for me, and also my English Honours- so these two things really matter to me.*

The excerpt here highlights an increased awareness of branded items and a need to develop a specific identity; in this case it is Niti's English honours degree and wealth which are important factors and elements of the 'self' she wishes to display. I had posed

a similar question to the rural group of what they believed to be the major differences between the girls on campus:

> **Asha**: *by seeing what fashions they follow and what they are wearing you can tell. The language, how they speak or the manner in which they speak...a girl from a poorer background, she may not have the same level of education and will therefore speak differently. The other person may speak well in English, and this girl may not know English very well and will only converse in Hindi. Girls from the 'high society', they will travel more and get around more so will have more knowledge of certain things. If two girls will come in front of you, you can tell by their clothing who is rich and who is poor. Some girls will come here on the bus, others bring their drivers, so from this you can also tell. These days it's like this...if someone has something, it's almost a necessity that you also have to have it. No one wants to be any less than the next person*

Asha's response highlights a number of themes which have been consistently evident throughout a number of group and one-to-one discussions with the girls. The emphasis in Asha's reponse centres upon usage of the English language, increased mobility in India and abroad for girls form the 'high society' (upper middle and upper classes), making them more socially aware. Asha also notes how there is an increased amount of competition between people; the girls are highly influenced by their urban counterparts who play the part of cultural intermediaries between the rural girls and the West. Baby's response on how key identifiers work amongst rural individuals sheds light upon some interesting observations:

> **Baby**: *what they eat, what they wear how they speak...you can tell someone's area by the way in which they speak. We can tell, for example, if someone is a Jat by the way that they speak. Those people from cities, they have a more polite Hindi. In terms of their clothes, for instance, these Choora's and Chamar's* [low castes] *wear so much perfume! They also wear so much make-up! They don't have so much money but they have extravagant spending habits and live well. They wear old things and it looks gaudy*

She claims that it is also possible to ascertain which caste someone belongs to; garish make-up and mis-matched and uncoordinated outfits, Baby asserts, is characteristic of those who belong to a lower caste yet are eager to assimilate into a modern, and stylish, frame of life. A similar point had been mentioned by Pooja in a later conversation:

> **Pooja**: *my parents tell me about the different castes and stuff, I mean chamars [low caste] and all…but these days you can't tell because they can also look attractive and have money. Some incidents happened near Rajasthan, some fights between groups so that people recognise them as middle-class etc, and they demand recognition for the class level.*

The demand for class recognition as well as the ability of some caste groups to disguise or consume their way out of a fixed caste association has meant that it has become more difficult for initial observations to be made. Although with Baby's response, she had noted that it wasn't as much what the lower castes purchased, it seemed more to do with the way in which these items were utilised and presented in a rather ostentatious manner. Asha went on to support this observation with what she felt to be evidence of 'dikhaava' (overt display of wealth):

> **Asha**: *they call this dikhaava. If someone has a nice car but it's not in your capacity to buy one, you can at least match the style of clothing. The quality is different, but to look at them they will seem the same. Like at S N*
> **Researcher**: *S N?*
> **Asha:** *Sarojini Nagar [market which is known for cheap fashionable imitation clothing], actually high-fi people just say SN.*

What I found particularly interesting from Asha's insight was the evidence of imitation and copying fashions of wealthy individuals. In her example, the owner of the car is viewed as a representative of 'upper-classness', s/he inevitably become markers of success, and because of this, one aspect which onlookers can easily imitate would be

clothing. Sarojini Nagar market [see inset 21], as I had heard on a number of occasions, was popular with youngsters for its branded imitations and variety in the latest fashions. Asha has also picked on the usage of the acronym, SN, to participate in 'hi-fi' speak.

Inset 21: <u>Sarojini Nagar, Delhi</u>

Who or what was classed as modern also produced interesting findings amongst this group:

> **Asha**: *Like in serials they show the fashions...on Fashion TV they show the dresses and how society is changing and everyone is living in a modern way, they're getting facials and conditioning their hair...all these things are done to keep up. People will go to roam around in malls, either with their boyfriends or friends, they will also think of themselves as modern because they are doing all this. Going to restaurants and the movies...*
> **Researcher**: *who and/or what is considered to be 'modern'?*
> **Suman**: *always staying in style, coloured hair*

Asha makes reference to a fashion channel which is broadcast on cable television. Although, in previous discussions, this channel had aroused much controversy amongst a number of rural girls and their families, it was one way in which the respondents were

able to visually access the latest fashions and trends from overseas. Looking after one's appearance, in this example indulging in specialised treatments for the face and hair, are all identifiers, according to Asha, that an individual has a modern outlook. Not only has infrastructure been central to the idea of modernity for the respondents, consuming the environment is also of equal importance – those who frequent restaurants and malls are deemed as wanting to participate in modernity.

4.3.5   Surveillance and Control

Evidence of surveillance and control became a consistent theme throughout the responses. Shivangini had also noted the differences in location specific lifestyle patterns; although, her observations had incorporated a comparison of India and the West, she was keen to develop an individual identity as opposed to a seemingly collective one.

> **Shivangini***: I have my cousins living abroad and after school both of them started living on their own, earning and started on their own...doing anything they wanted. My cousin is now talking about marriage, it's totally up to him and he has chosen a girl so I think the level of independence is more after schooling. You have to be separate, you have to go separate for your own identity and you have the freedom. Nowadays, girls they don't want arranged marriages, I've seen it. They want to know the guy first and have a proper relationship with him, only then can they think about marriage.*

Shivangini notes specifically the lack of restriction and surveillance upon young adults abroad, which, she believes, is the reason for their increased level of freedom; the notion of living alone, earning for one's self and being dependent upon one's salary alone is still regarded as a relatively new concept. She emphasises the importance of developing an identity, one which is seemingly independent from family, but this level

of independence, as she recognises, is a product of the freedom which is allowed to youngsters overseas. The traditional arranged marriage system is becoming frowned upon by young urbanites; as Shivangini explains, the importance of needing to get to know a prospective spouse beforehand is imperative and the meeting of minds as opposed to merely external, looks-based compatibility, is taking precedence. I enquired into why she felt as though there was a heightened element of restrictive behaviour in India, to which Shivangini replied:

> **Shivangini**: *Even if your parents are still free enough to allow you certain things, they are more bothered about neighbours, talking. They don't want that. Sometimes, your relatives and family members they will not like certain things and it's because of that.*

Interestingly here, Shivangini highlights the potency of collective groups in the form of family and society. Once again we have an example of surveillance and control, methods through which collectives are able to morally guide decision making and consumptive behaviour. What I found particularly interesting was the way in which the girls described the level of transparency which was expected of them post shopping trips and personal mail:

> **Shivangini**: *my grandmother, she wants to always see what I have bought- sometimes I don't want to show her*
> **Researcher**: *is your privacy restricted?*
> **Shivangini**: *yes. when I get letters and it's not obvious who the sender is, they will be intrigued over it so I tell my parents, what do you expect it to be? A love letter? It's a vague letter just on my name, why do they want me to open it in front of them?*
> **Deepika**: *you have to really try hard to keep your privacy from your parents*
> **Shivangin**i: *you have to fight for it* [laughing]

Interestingly, Niti and Swati had also described similar experiences:

> **Niti***: I have male friends; it's just that now I am not in touch with them. But I can't tell my parents I'm going with a male friend. I don't know how many times I have lied! It's my life you know, I want to enjoy. I am respecting them* [parents] *but I'm also doing those things which I want to do.*
> **Swati***: If I travel to tilak nagar* [local market]*, they want to know everything!*
> **Niti***: They want to know every little thing. When I'm doing this, when I'm doing that...I have been to a disc* [nightclub]*, I can't tell anyone not even my mum that I've been to a disc.*
> **Swati:** *our brothers they do everything, they have girlfriends...but those girlfriends are also someone's sisters. There is no restriction on them.*

Once again there is evidence of a heightened degree of surveillance which both the girls face, and interestingly they note how there is a difference in attitude and behaviour when addressing the male and female child. The respondents seem to be naturally outgoing, yet the fear of being restrained had forced Niti to behave as a deviant and lie about her activities. The conversation with Shivangini soon reverted back to relationships, where I found the respondents keen to disclose their own experiences with me.

Rural respondent, Baby, shared her comparison of what she felt were characteristic traits of life abroad and the situation within her own life. Particularly influenced by television, I was interested to know if there was anything that the girls envisioned themselves wanting to adopt through the depiction of the West in media.

> **Baby***: I like the fact that you're able to go around openly and things...see, I want my mum to be like a friend to me, but this isn't possible in a village, it's rare. I never had best friends before, I want my family to be life friends to me- sharing things etc. just in case something happens, then we should be able to understand one another. If you have an opinion about something that is not the same as your families then they will threaten or scare you and tell you off to quiet down.*

Baby had developed an image of the West regarding the way in which the interaction with the mother and daughter is seemingly more open. The sentiment shared between mothers and daughters in the village setting, she notes, is markedly different and there is a distance which does not help to foster a non-authoritative relationship. Baby's fear is one of being an individual within a tight knit collective community and blind acceptance of others opinions and views seem to have become common practice in day-to-day life.

4.3.6   *Dikhaava* and Mobility

In terms of consumption, the girls were critical of 'dikhavaa' (overt displays of wealth) and the need to compete, according to them, has never been stronger:

> **Renu***: It's not just that people have a car; they will tell you "we have this model of car"*
> **Rakhi***: people are dying without enough food, yet they will purchase the most stylish clothing*
> **Renu***: I was sitting in a rickshaw, and suddenly I heard the sound of a mobile, and the rickshaw waala took out the phone. I was thinking, even the rickshaw guy has a phone!?*
> **All:** *it's all too much*
> **Researcher***: so people are buying things when they can't really afford it?*
> **All***: yes*
> **Renu***: they don't want to be left behind…Zidd hai [TRANS: stubborn] Competition between people is so much! People just want to get ahead. Where we used to live before, a neighbour of ours bought home an LG television and my father said, "What's in that? I'll buy a full home theatre!"*

Changes in patterns of consumption and the need to display wealth has become of significant importance according to the respondents. Status goods such as mobile phones, branded clothing and electronics are rapidly becoming sought after through the fear of being 'left behind', pushing consumers, who are already stretched financially, to

make status purchases. Baby was of a similar opinion, in her rather philosophical view she felt it should be more important to think of those with less, rather than be focussed on accumulating excess and indulging in dikhaava.

> **Baby**: *I don't like it. People show off a lot saying they have this car and this kind of house, but if you don't even have these things then what's the point of dikhaava? Whatever God has given me, I'm happy with that…you have to think of those with less than you and how they cope. People with money show a lot of ego; my take on this is that it's here today and gone tomorrow.*

Urban respondent Tanya, in an earlier interview session, had also described incidents of when people would feel overwhelming urges to display their wealth:

> **Tanya**: *I know people like that, sometimes it's too much. Sometimes its fine to know what kind of clothes you wear or have and where you shop where you go etc it's just this irritating 'itne ka hai, utne ka hai'* [TRANS: it cost this much, it cost that much] *we don't ask you for this information, they will tell you though and shove it in your face, oh this was 15,000 from this boutique and that boutique. I didn't ask; only if I ask then tell me. We have people like this in our family…even though we're critical of it, we do it ourselves* [smiling] *not just how much it cost, I mean if you stand in front of someone who's just flaunting themselves in that way, you will also behave like them- oh I got this from here and I got this from there, trying to show the other person down. I have come across so many people like this, sometimes I'll just say 'oh that boutique'. Sometimes it's too much to digest*

Tanya's description is full of insight; she describes the ways in which her class group are actively engaged in conspicuous behaviour regarding their consumption. She openly admits that she is also part of this conspicuous competition, and although it requires effort from her part, she is prompted into this behaviour through the company that she is at times faced with. I found Tanya to be one respondent who was most aware of herself; she was very particular through the way in which she conducted herself and was

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polished in speech. I found her to be a lone entity at times, not completely fitting in with the others and at times compromising on her highly privileged upbringing. I had set time aside to conduct a one-to-one interview at a later stage as I felt that the group scenario was becoming restrictive for her to reveal her true feelings through the fear of being judged.

> **Tanya**: *see, with people like that, I will just tell them straight to their face- so what! They are just trying to show their wealth*
> **Tanusha**: *they think that it helps them move up a level*
> **Namitha**: *they are so desperate to move up!*
> **Researcher**: *so a low class group who have just acquired wealth will do this more?*
> **Both**: *yes*

The respondents were critical of the display of wealth for the purpose of upward mobility and feel that this was an act which was also typical of lower classes who may have recently acquired wealth. Interestingly, country of origin also holds significant weight when discussing products, rural respondent Renu describes her mother's behaviour when serving an American branded fruit drink concentrate.

> **Renu**: *my mum was given this drink from abroad, you know the ones where you have to mix water in with it- well she was insisting to a relative, "Oh you should drink this because it's from America"- there's so much dikhaava about this, oh it's from America!*

I had recalled a conversation with Deepika earlier about a similar issue:

> **Deepika**: *From childhood if they are used to wearing branded clothes, they will grow up to want to wear branded clothes, the status thing has become so huge. You're wearing local stuff? People will make it an issue that oh my son/daughter is studying in this school and she's learning this and that, she's doing swimming, karate and they encourage their children to speak in English and groom their children properly. When they go to parties too, they will take their kids along with them just*

to make a statement about how modern they are, how they can speak English, they will decorate their children's rooms in a specific way, they'll put Disney characters all over the walls and things. If someone gets a new haircut in the college, the first question would be, where did they get that haircut from? They'll be like, oh I've been to Dabbas Habib ...it's all just status. Even if they've bought a new jacket, people are always focussing on the brand. Status has taken over.

Deepika's response provides insight into the ways in which people have become preoccupied with branding and status. The image of 'pushy parents' parading their offspring as billboards of prestige is an interesting one, but an image which I have often associated with the West; modernity here is indicated through a fluency in English, participation in extra-curricular activities and an adoption of what seems to be a highly middle to upper-middle class way of life. Status through branded goods and branded educational institutions has become a prerequisite to gain membership into an exclusive society, one, which as indicated, is favouring a consumption of excess.

4.3.7   *We don't Mix*: Urban and Rural Lifestyles

During my time at the college I had observed a growing schism between the urban and rural respondents, yet this had little to do with issues surrounding class in economic terms and was more so to with choices in lifestyle and behaviour. The girls vented much frustration at being a 'minority' amongst a predominantly rural student body:

Tanusha: *We didn't like this college earlier, but now we have settled it's a different thing. Our marks were not so high that we could go to North Campus; ultimately we had to come here. For a whole year we were struggling, we were thinking why are we here!?*

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Tanya: *Look at the proportion of people we're having here! I'm not used to it, these girls laughing about and dancing here and there, I don't like it.* **Researcher**: *So, if the college set up a disco for fresher's, something you had mentioned earlier, would the majority show up?*
Both: *no*
Tanusha: *it's like when you have to tell people where you are from...we have friends from other colleges and they'll be like, oh we're from Khalsa college, North Campus- they're so proud you know. Then we're like* [lowers voice] *we're from Bharati College* [laughing] *we change it now, we'll say we're at Delhi University.*
Tanya: *Bharati is the lowest of all the colleges; it has no access to any activities or anything. Not just activities, also academically*

The respondents had clearly been troubled about the college environment and North Campus was seen as being a place which was highly sought after for students. I had heard a number of stories regarding the freedom allowed to young students, females in particular, on site and the girls at the college would be eager to repeat such 'tales' to their friends and those who had limited knowledge about the North Campus environment. These stories revolved around deviant activities of smoking, drinking, consumption of illegal substances and a heightened level of physical interaction with the opposite sex. The struggle which Tanusha refers to is one of adjustment amongst an inherently non-urban student body, despite the fact that the location of the college was in a predominantly middle-class urban region of Delhi. Tanya, once again, presents a glimpse of her privileged schooling when asserting that she is not used to the behaviour of many of these girls; the behaviour which she had referred to in an earlier interview was that of overt flamboyance, something she had been evidently uneasy with. Whilst walking around the college campus later that day, Tanya and Tanusha pointed out a group of students who were performing what seemed to be a dance amongst their friends, I was alerted to this by the girls who muttered, almost disgustedly, "look, this is what we were saying, this type of thing":

Inset 22: Students dancing [video snapshot]

Tanya and Tanusha described the shame that they felt through being associated with Bharati College and how they had developed an avoidance mechanism by merely stating 'Delhi University' to those who enquired about their place of study. Although I had noted an evident split amongst the student body upon my first day at the college, I was still interested to delve into the specific factors which made both groups of students believe that they were markedly different from one another:

> **Tanya**: *over here they are always study, study, study...we asked for an event to be organised for the honours students, and there were more teachers than students who showed up- it was so bad*
> **Namita**: *We don't even have any inter-department competitions like between Commerce and something else. There's no one to participate in these things here*
> **Tanusha**: *They* [rural students] *want to spend their time doing their homework*
> **Namita**: *they are more into their homes than college; they want to finish their work in the college itself so that they can spend the evenings with their mothers*
> **Tanusha & Namita**: *It's all about spending money and they don't want to*

One of the major factors which the girls had been critical of was the lack of participation and enthusiasm for extra-curricular activities which had inevitably fragmented the student body. Namita's response, however, provides a little more insight into the possible reasoning for this type of behaviour; the rural students are seen to be occupied by domestic duties and they may have, in some instances, found that study time would be restricted in the home which would mean that much of their coursework would need to be completed during college hours. The urban group were demonstrably frustrated as social events and extra-curricular activities etc would only take place if a significant proportion of the student body demanded it. The respondents felt that as these activities were not an integral component to studies, the rural girls would find them to be a waste of their time and refuse to participate. I sensed bouts of resentment and rebellion from the urban respondents who were keen to integrate more activities into their college lives. This resentment and lack of participation was evidenced during the college's annual day celebrations - none of my urban respondents were present during the event.

Inset 23: <u>Bharati College Annual Day Function</u>

This annual event was also an opportunity for some of the college 'activity groups' to perform songs and dances where most of these performances were in regional languages and traditional region-specific attire. It had occurred to me here that the urban group were not merely in need of any extra-curricular activity, but wanted it to be tailored to their needs as the city's future professionals. Further probing into the schism between urban and rural students provided some interesting responses:

> **Researcher**: *where does your frustration stem from?*
> **Tanya**: *there's no unity in this college*
> **Tanusha**: *or in the classroom…even if we say something in the class, they will say oh they are showing attitude*
> **Tanya**: *they feel inferior to us*
> **Kanika**: *it's not even language; we don't speak in English in the classroom*
> **Researcher**: *what is it about yourselves do you feel they are weary of?*

> **Tanya**: *the way we dress up*
> **Tanusha**: *body language too*
> **Kanika**: *It's just the way we are, we don't want to show any attitude*
> **Tanya**: *see, when I first started the college, one of the girls was showing aggression towards me, and I'm thinking why? I sat down and she just pulled her book towards her! They're making sure we know we're different.*

The respondents were of the belief that the urban group suffer with an inferiority complex; the reasoning for this, they explained, was the attitude they supposedly displayed and their choice of attire. As an observer, I also noticed stark differences in dress, body language and spoken language between both groups of respondents. I had found this element of difference certainly difficult to describe into words as the weeks went on; there was an essence which I found difficult to pin down and struggled to define. It was this very difference in behaviour and dressing sense which had prompted me to approach Tanya and her group of friends as a prospective urban group of respondents for the study during my first days at the college. Tanya introduces a new light to the discussion by asserting that it was in fact a number of rural girls who were unwilling to accept her into their 'circle'; the differences she felt were ones which she was seen to embody and the behaviour of her rural counterparts was an uncouth reminder of this difference. Ultimately, this disparity seemed to be presented as an 'urban ailment' which many of the rural girls were cautious of.

> **Tanusha**: *There's really no motivation for us to dress up in a good way either- if we change our dresses and all frequently then they will make comments- so there's no point.*
> **Tanya**: *They will think that we are showing off- we can't change ourselves or lower our standards to that level and this is why they feel we are superior to them...had I have gone to a college of my choice then, there would have been better grooming in the way we speak and style ourselves, not just clothing wise, but there would have been differences in our body language. These people here are too much into their books*
> **Namita**: *yeah, these people have bookish knowledge*

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> **Tanya**: *they're bookworms and they don't know anything about the outside world- we keep these things in mind*

Style, image and the way that one carries oneself is of extreme importance for this group of respondents and they feel that the rural students are unable to understand or appreciate their efforts. What is clear from this excerpt is that an audience and appreciation is highly sought after; they feel the need to be well groomed and well spoken, yet they feel restricted within the college as their lifestyle choices are not always accepted or appreciated amongst the majority. The refusal to 'lower standards' as Tanya notes had, once again, placed light upon her upbringing; it became significantly apparent to me how central the role of image had been for her throughout her youth and I was eager to understand more about her as an individual. I was fascinated to learn that through fear of being mocked and judged, the urban respondents had distanced themselves from the rural group who were seen to be threatened by their inherently urban ethos. The respondents went on to describe this mocking in more detail:

> **Tanya**: *See, at one point a couple of girls asked me where I got my bag from, I was a little reluctant to tell them that I bought it from London, so I just said I got it 'bahar se'* [TRANS: from outside]. *I feel they'll think I am showing off if I tell them I bought it from London. I can't always tell them where I actually bought things from.*
> **Namita**: *if we wear something different on campus and they would gossip between themselves*
> **Tanusha**: *yeah! I came dressed well one day and they were asking me 'where are you going?'* [laughing]
> **Namita**: *you get that sound in the classroom like 'ooooooooh!' like an audience*
> **Tanya**: *we are so noticed in our class* [laugh]

Evidently, this group of respondents had made an impression amongst their peers in terms of dress and Tanya had decided to conceal product origin through fear of being

branded as conceited. Despite wanting to make more of an effort with regards to appearance, through an assessment of their environment the girls had tailored not only elements of their behaviour (e.g. not speaking English in class), but they had also become cautious of the way in which they dressed. This feature is yet another variation of surveillance which had been mentioned earlier in the chapter; peer-to-peer influence and the intensity of judgement and being judged had significantly 'toned-down' this group of respondents who would otherwise have no reservations in experimenting with their appearances and utilising product origin to acquire social status. The discussion soon became heated; I was surprised at the level of frustration which had been built up amongst the group as well as the emotional turmoil some of them had experienced upon starting the college.

After a series of lengthy discussions with the urban group, I had become increasingly intrigued with Tanya, who, as mentioned previously, seemed to stand apart from the rest of the group through her responses and general behaviour. She had, on numerous occasions, presented elements of herself in a group context yet was never able to completely present her 'actual' self. I was able to schedule a one-to-one interview with Tanya one afternoon after her lectures, she was eager to want to speak to me independently from the group and had mentioned on several occasions if they would all have get the opportunity to speak to me on a one-to-one basis. I acted upon these cues to gain a better understanding of her life and her experiences.

> **Tanya**: *My home circumstances changed a little which meant that I had to make do with less, something that I was not at all used to- it's difficult to restrict myself when I'm not used to it. Living up to a lifestyle, my family is very brand conscious and spends a hell of a lot on clothing, trips and all this stuff. Our lifestyle matters a lot to my family...because of a few reasons we've had to settle down a little and it's been difficult to adjust*

to that way of living. We have to maintain our standard, both societal and personal because we've been used to it since childhood, we got more stuff than we wanted or needed

Tanya describes her upbringing as one where a conscious choice in practicing an inherently upper middle-class lifestyle had been made, and where access to excess, be it in the form of branded goods, became a prerequisite of elevated social status. However, due to complications concerning the family business she narrates her experience of having to make do with less and how this adjustment was one filled with difficulty. Maintaining standards and 'face' are of central importance to both Tanya and her family as societal pressures compel them to display wealth and prosperity and where 'keeping up with the Jones'' is a requirement to remain on par and within the social circle of their counterparts. Tanya had noted earlier in a previous discussion how she felt the strains of this facade, of always having to put on a performance to maintain this level of social standing. Although critical of overt displays of wealth, she openly admitted participation in it. I went on to ask Tanya about her rapport with the group she frequently socialises with in college to which she responded:

> **Tanya**: *I can adjust with these girls a little bit; no one wants to be the odd one out. A lot of times they comment on my accent and things, but I can't do anything about that. I was at a convent school and an Irish system even the lifestyle in my home is like this, it's very different. Here, it's all Saas Bahu* [TRANS: Hindi television dramas] *and stuff like that. When I am in touch with my school friends, it's different and when I'm with this college group I'm different. I'm used to it now- I have to be actually. I spend a different amount of money in front of these girls and a different amount with my school friends. I'm not part of the rich class but I am upper middle class and people are very professional in my home.*

Her response was full of interesting insight, Tanya is acutely aware of her difference amongst the group and felt that in this instance it was disadvantageous to her. She believed that she had to compromise on a number of levels – linguistically, socially and

financially. Although the group with whom she frequented with on the college campus were classified as urban middle-class, Tanya seemed to associate herself with a seemingly higher expectation in terms of lifestyle. Her education within an Irish convent school features heavily as part of her social and academic conditioning; she credits the institution for her polished English and knowledge of current affairs through daily classroom discussion and debate teams. What I found of particular interest is how Tanya presents two very distinct versions of herself amongst different groups of friends; her school friends, she noted, were those closest to her, understood her way of life and shared a similar lifestyle. I was surprised to discover that Tanya also kept her expenditure on par with her college friends, when prompted to explain this behaviour she responded:

> **Tanya***: obviously I knew I'd have to adjust the way I speak with my school friends, like I bought this and that...these guys will feel odd and think I am showing off may leave me out. They know I am brand oriented and for my Birthday they gave me this stuff; I thought these guys, who generally have a budget of 300-400Rs and buy stuff from Janpath* [market in the city]*, are telling me to buy whatever I wanted!*

Through an element of fear Tanya developed a coping mechanism to 'survive' college life; by curbing elements of her more hedonistic nature she was able to adapt to her new circle, although it was not a comfort zone for her, her peers were quick to observe her lifestyle, taste and consumptive behaviour which led them to delve deep financially to treat Tanya for her Birthday. She went on to discuss how joining Bharati bought with it an element of shame, which her family had openly expressed:

> **Tanya**: *Even my dad and other family members were saying things. It's embarrassing for them to say this to others- to tell others I am at Bharati. I do belong to a completely different*

> *sector and lifestyle matters to us a lot. Punjabi's are like this actually, they're concerned with lifestyle, heavy food, rich food and things.*

This notion of a branded institution holds significant weight amongst the middle-class sect in India. Both groups of respondents had explained to me how youngsters were being increasingly pressured to perform academically and gain admission into the country's best schools and colleges. Choice of institution had become an identifier of prestige. Tanya pinpoints the Punjabi community[14] as being most susceptible to this show of wealth, and they have become increasingly concerned about lifestyle tastes and children's educational achievements. Tanya explains in more detail how her mother was apprehensive about letting her study at Bharati:

> **Tanya***: I remember the day I came here for admission, my mum was like "you have one more chance to decide, will you be able to adjust or not"- she was so tearful then.*
> **Researcher:** *adjustment in what sense?*
> **Tanya***: the way I carry myself, what I wear, what I speak. Sometimes my family will say to me, "tu Bharati jaake Bharati jaisi hogayi hai"* [TRANS: since going to Bharati you've become like them] *I have to keep up to their standards.*

What seems to be presented here is a fear of falling from one's class; Tanya was clearly mocked for attending the college and the comments she received were ones which inadvertently paid reference to the majority of the student body within the college. Tanya seemed to be placed in a constant battle between her surroundings and not losing her sense of self. The risk of attending the college initially was one of losing an identity which Tanya had developed significantly in her youth and was clearly proud of; her experience at Bharati had not enhanced her persona, although she felt this had been an opportunity to test her ability to adapt. There was an inherent fear of mixing amongst

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[14] A community that originally hail from the northern state of Punjab.

certain students and this was evidenced through a conversation with both Niti and Swati:

> **Swati**: *If we come to know that, oh he's a BA Pass student, we won't talk to them*
> **Researcher**: *explain the BA Pass to me*
> **Swati**: *it's just a pass, you're just passing it*
> **Niti**: *it's like your thinking will be like a 'behenji' and you'll have to get married after this BA Pass and all that*

I could not help but feel as though the rural group of students were not only ostracised by urban students because of their location, but the subject of study had become an additional component for some to ostracise them further. The fear of looking like a 'behenji' (as noted earlier in the chapter) was one which would dilute the English Honours tag which both Niti and Swati held dear. Subject of study seemed to act as a potent social indicator amongst students – BA Pass students were deemed as having a different 'mentality' and way of thinking, however, what was lacking in this assessment seemed to be any form of empathy for the urban student's rural peers. Niti paused through her discussion and reflected upon her criticism:

> **Niti**: *I question myself...when I'm alone I will question myself...if a person is well versed in Hindi and not English why do we look down upon them? The guy I'm going to meet, my prospective partner, I thought to myself if he doesn't speak good English I won't marry him. That's sick on my part, and I try to overcome it...but. I look down upon people who can't speak English! I am an English Honours student and I have this pride in myself- on my Orkut profile I have listed this as well as the kind of books I read. This mentality...I guess this is what we call post colonialism* [smiling]

Niti's statement is one riddled with introspection into her thought processing; she vents her disgust regarding the judgements she develops of others and realises how this is problematic. Although she is able to openly criticise her actions and beliefs, Niti is

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more than aware that she is also a contributor to a prejudice which is held by a number of urbanites.

Diary Entry 6: Tilak Nagar Market & The Beauty Parlour

I had returned from the college somewhat exhausted, yet felt I should take up the opportunity to take Anya on a shopping trip with me to Tilak Nagar, a traditional market relatively close by. Upon arrival, I was initially surprised at the sheer number of people, yet the crowd was in essence no different to a busy Saturday in the city centre back home. Anya pointed out the more affluent customers through their dress, and as I looked around at the girls that surrounded me in the market they all seemed to be dressed modestly and rarely would I see a skirt being worn. The general trend was a tunic top, jeans and wedge sandals. Anya, despite being a 'working girl' and somewhat financially independent, would during purchases still consider her mother's reaction when considering items. Whilst scanning through a range of earrings, she asked my opinion on one particular pair, I, however, suggested another pair which were slightly bigger in size. She agreed that the set was nice, but informed me how her mother would think they were too big and decided to decline, despite the pushy attendant's concerted effort at persuading her to purchase.

On the way back from the market, we decided to take a de-tour towards the local beauty parlour; I was greeted by a not so modest board boasting 'Exclusive beauty parlour' above a modest sized shop front. As I entered into the front of the store, I found the staff to be very limited in chit-chat and very much to the point; the expression on the face of the young women behind the counter prompted Anya to immediately tell her what she wanted. I decided to wait at the front of the store and face the stares, as I seated myself on a wicker sofa a middle-aged woman in front of me was displaying her jewellery to the beauticians, she seemed to be a friend of the owner. Another lady wished her well for her forthcoming marriage and asked her whether she had taken part in this year's Karrva Chauth (a fast taken primarily by married women) she boasted 'yes!' in reply and mentioned that she took a strict fast 'not even a drop of water!' she asserted. Their mode of communication was English, which indicated much affluence within the group of people that they were surrounded by. This instance took me back to the times that Anya used to call me from work; she would speak in English yet in the home environment the mode of communication switched to Punjabi/Hindi. Anya paid the 10Rs for her treatment and informed me that she needed to purchase some moisturiser on the way back home. On the way to the store, Anya asked which moisturiser I used, I told her *Olay* to which she replied 'that's expensive here- out of most people's reach monthly'.

4.4 Summary

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this research is to present and interpret the data of the empirical study of the lived experiences of consumer culture amongst a sample of young female, urban and rural consumers in Delhi. This chapter has presented and interpreted the findings of an empirical study of these processes, examining in detail the ways in which the young women organised their identities through various frames and how they integrated, re-negotiated or rejected global flows in their respective constructions of identity and difference. It can be suggested from the data that there is a complex interplay of the negotiation of 'modern' identities which are constructed through the seeming rigidity of social structures in the form of surveillance and control. In the next chapter I go on to discuss these points in greater depth, showing how they relate to the globalisation, consumer culture and India literatures reviewed in chapter two. In particular I pursue the argument that the typologies present in the literature on globalisation which serve to characterise consumers are restrictive problematic in the Indian context. Additionally, I will note the specific nuances which the data presents in light of current debates in the globalisation and CCT literatures.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0   <u>Introduction</u>

The previous chapter presented and interpreted the key findings of the empirical study of consumer culture carried out for this thesis. Specifically it explored the emergence of primary themes which were uncovered through the reading of the data: The media, bodies as sites of consumption, consumption and modernity and lifestyles. The objective of this chapter is to relate these findings to the academic literatures and previous studies reviewed in chapter two. I will attempt to tease out the key theoretical and empirical implications of the research, showing where they undermine, support or add to the arguments of previous authors. I would like to reiterate the key aims underpinning this study: to understand and describe the meanings, values and lived experience of contemporary consumer culture of a sample of young female Indian consumers; to establish the extent to which, and describe how, global flows of culture serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers; and to establish whether and how traditional belief systems and practices influence young consumers' identity projects in contemporary Indian society.

The following discussion will be structured around a core set of themes which were developed in the findings chapter. Firstly I would like to discuss the importance of the stories narrated by my respondents in relation to consumer culture theory.

5.1 The Importance of Stories

The previous chapter presented the reader with a number of stories, stories which exposed intricacies and nuances regarding the respondent's lives and how, amongst other elements, they participated in the act of consumption. These insights illustrate the ways in which these young women were able to construct meaningful identities which involved utilising their bodies not only as 'sites' of consumption but also sites for negotiating modernity whilst fulfilling their obligations as preservers of tradition. Before I commence, I would like to present Margaret Somers ideas surrounding stories and social processes which I feel will help to support my core objective for the study; to provide the reader with the lived experiences of consumption and modernity amongst a sample of young rural and urban women in New Delhi.

> "that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life...that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories, that "experience" is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narratives." (1994: 613-14)

Somers explanation of stories and narrative as an 'ontological condition' places authority back into the hands of my respondents; being able to understand and develop an intricate understanding of the ways in which this group of consumers are able to

construct a multiplicity of identities, through skilful cultural navigation, was at the heart of my research study. The process of 'making sense' and the ways in which the young women are guided through 'social, public and cultural narratives' whilst negotiating their own sense of selves are of central importance in developing a rich understanding of consumption behaviour amongst this group of respondents. This thesis, simply put, is about experiences and not solutions; it is about presenting to the reader the sorts of questions which force a renegotiation of Western theoretical perspectives where some theoretical assumptions could not lie further from the realities of lived consumer experiences in the East.

Cautious of orientalism and essentialising the 'Other', I take on board Macgregor Wise's (2008:24) criticism of the imposition of Western theory "speaking the truth for the orient in which the orient itself is conspicuously silent". I have aimed to present to the reader a select group of consumer voices from the sub-continent and not to produce universal truths from the data presented. However, I wish to inform theory with empirical insight and argue the case for alternative approaches to understanding consumption amidst the backdrop of global flows in India. I begin this chapter in section 5.2 by reflecting upon the theoretical relevance of the findings for the various literatures discussed in chapter two. In particular I will examine the extent to which the debates presented in the globalisation literature hold true in light of my own findings and present an alternative view of the effects of globalisation upon Indian female consumers. In trying to understand the consumer experience of modernity, it is important, as Appadurai (1995) states, to engage with the subjective experience of modern life, which is closely tied up with particular sorts of pleasure, desire and agency. "Consumption, conceived as "the work of the imagination", is an activity that simultaneously captures

the distinctive disciplines of modernity and draws attention to new forms of expenditure and social identity" 1995: 5). Consumption in contemporary India can be seen to involve the overlap and interpenetration of diverse modes and sites of cosmopolitan experience, interrelated by consumption, the modern media and technology. In light of this, the diagram below attempts to provide the reader with a visual map of this inter-connectedness:

Figure 3: The Indian Consumer Experience
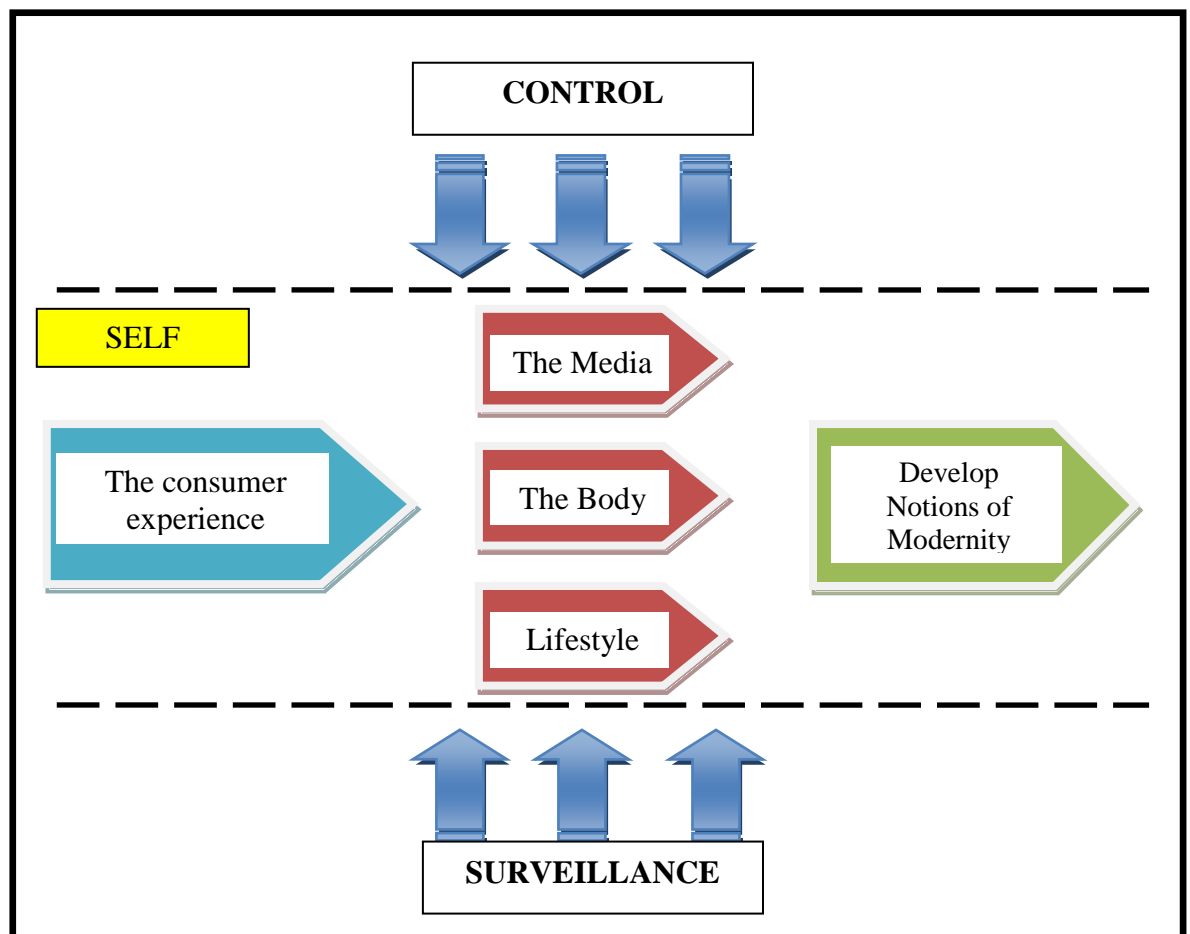
The model above, albeit tentative, is an attempt to represent the dynamics of consumer culture as presented in the data set. The model depicts the consumer through a process of negotiating identity through three central frames: the media, the body and lifestyle

choices. Upon these three frames is an exertion of surveillance and control which is exerted through society, family and peer groups. It is important to note that in light of this model, the young women construct identities *through* 'structural realities' (Derné, 2005) which represent, what I term, 'embedded frames' or facets which are specifically embedded into the social and cultural fabric of India.

5.2   Locating Globalisation

As outlined in chapter two the debates surrounding specific areas concerned with globalisation and this thesis - cultural homogenisation, cultural heterogenisation, glocalisation and hybridity - were explored. Described as an elusive yet pervasive phenomenon (Scholte, 2006), the faces of globalisation are many. Yet, these definitions which have served to preoccupy theorists in their pursuit for precision has resulted in a word-play of various sorts and has, in my view, left the concept devoid of exactly that which it assumes an authority in understanding; global cultures. A summary of the literature suggests a tone of difficulty which is attributed to the notion of 'coping' with the effects of globalisation through a cultural lens; I would like to present one of my major observations in light of the data which is how global flows are not viewed exclusively as problematic. A good proportion of the young women viewed their increased knowledge and awareness concerning global media, events, lifestyles and fashions as advantageous. Rather than the idea that global flows are part of an omnipotent process which is received, in addition to being classed as unidirectional in some cases, the global provided the young women with a selection of alternative 'styles' through which they were able to successfully position themselves as young Indian female consumers. As will be explained in more detail later in the discussion, forms of

appropriation did not result in any form of erosion of the indigenous culture, but rather, produced a complex territory of 'cultural layering' which sits between what is more commonly referred to as cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation.

An imposition of a global flow is a rather simplistic explanation of the how an increased inter-connectedness works at the level of the consumer, supporting Featherstone's (1997) argument that global flows can only really be understood when they are appropriated at the level of those who consume. Globalisation has often been denoted as synonymous with the cultural imperialism thesis and has been presented as a potent idea in early theories of globalisation, where control of the cultural and symbolic world through mass media was perceived to be in the hands of Western nations (read: America). However, to borrow from Barber (1996), as much as there is the flow of Western mass media, there also exists a simultaneous resistance against "encroaching Westernisation". Although the concept of Westernisation has become widely absorbed within globalisation theory, what seems to be greatly emphasised within the literature is inter-country as opposed to intra-country flows, and by this I note specifically flows at a micro level which concern the urban to the rural and vice versa.

Considered as worlds apart, not only by the respondents but also through my own observations, flows were considered not only from external 'Western' sources, but also from the urban to the rural which both, as distinct locations, presented me with consumers who were at varying proximities to what is considered to be characteristic of a global 'scape' (Appadurai, 1986). The consumer mediums through which these differences were presented by the young women developed into focal themes in the

findings chapter - the media, the body and modernity - which will be taken in turn to form the structure of the remainder of this chapter.

5.3   Questioning Homogenisation

In agreement with Liechty (2003), overly homogenising youth through the assumption that they *all* like Western films and music and that they are *all* materialistic consumers who are ultimately dupes of global capital, gives little space for alternative assessments. With the case of young women in Delhi, the reception of global flows could not be more diverse, as will be evidenced below; I reverse the suggestion that 'global youth' utilise global resources to deal with local conditions and argue the case for 'global youth' utilising *local resources* to deal with global conditions. However, one major concern regarding the findings is that young rural women have access to fewer resources and lack in confidence and cultural authority to even attempt to construct a non-mediated version of a valued, modern Indian self. The authority of producing this 'modern self' sits with the urban youth who are ultimately able to construct a model where subscription and participation is dependent not only upon lifestyle and consumption choices, but also residence in an urban location.

Pilkington and Bliudina (2002) emphasise that practices of consumption and reception of global media and products happen within specific economic, social and historical structures and their work on Russian youth cultures produced interesting insight where on the one hand the youth envied the standards of living and quality of products from the West, however, they would question the morality of that way of life. To a large extent, the same can be said for my sample of respondents, who are collectively intent

on preserving an Indian identity but were highly critical of the actions of their Western counterparts. This criticism predominantly revolved around promiscuity, behaviour towards elders, social factors such as the age one leaves home and the concept of paying rent to parents, were all issues prone to criticism.

Similar to the findings of Pilkington and Bliudina's Russian study, there was a distinction made between '*living*' as they do in the West and '*being*' how they are in the West. The notion of a cultural rootedness was apparent through the responses. However, in contrast to the Russian findings, although young urban women seemed relatively unperturbed by consuming elements of Western culture, their rural counterparts were comparatively sceptical and presented on numerous occasions a fear of loss. The young rural women had presented themselves, at times, in a rather despondent fashion; there seemed to be an acceptance that they would remain as observers of the effects of global flows which were being absorbed more rapidly in the city by their urban peers. Globalisation, for these rural consumers, remains to be nothing more than an awareness; one which places them further towards the periphery of what is commonly viewed as important global developments. If Giddens' (1990) view that globalization is a direct consequence of modernisation were to be taken as true, this would assume, therefore, that these rural women have bypassed the modernity project and remain as onlookers. However, what my data indicates is an understanding of modernity in the absence of a potent, global inter-connectedness; in other words, both concepts, as lived experiences, are independent of one another and there is evidence to suggest the existence of a culturally grounded modernity which will, no doubt, open up debate concerning an inherently Indian version with its roots stalwartly embedded in the sub-continent.

The literature on globalisation has, understandably, pointed towards the West as a point of departure (see Iwabuchi, 2002; Liebes and Katz, 1990). However, in light of emerging markets such as India, this feature of the theory is problematic in that it imposes what would otherwise be seen as a theory of the West into the East with little cultural accommodation for the movement. As a central criticism, then, from the outset, the cultural multiplicity of India has rarely been accounted for in the limited studies concerning consumption and globalisation in the sub-continent, and even if it has, the emphasis has been upon print advertisements alone (Venkatesh, 1994) and a gloss over linguistics. Although there is consensus amongst a number of scholars who are sceptical of the homogenisation thesis, the mere fact that the country under study has been homogenised at the outset assumes 'sameness' across various geographical regions[15]. To borrow from Robertson (1995) it makes little sense to assess the effects of globalisation in India if the study excludes recognition of intra-country differences as facets of the same locality.

Cultures borrowing, swapping and diversifying have, as discussed in chapter two, been consistent themes in the attempts at understanding how 'globalised', if at all, nations are becoming. The global consumers, described by Steger (2003), are those who subscribe to popular culture as "pessimistic hyperglobalisers" and whose culture is underwritten by the Western culture industry. However, Steger's view is one which does not account for the variation in appropriation of popular culture and assumes a place for Western hegemony which remains as preserved and unhampered. The data presents numerous examples where the appropriations of global flows are intricately weaved through a

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[15] These geographical nuances within India have been discussed in detail in chapter 2.

complex maze of negotiation which considers heavily the role of family and society at large. Supporting this is the work of Mazzarella (2003: 242-43) who also noted that:

> "The cultural and moral centrality of family was a crucial marker of the cultural difference that, in the global marketing imagination, separated Indian teens from their Western counterparts. This emphasis upon family involved two related themes: first, the authority of elders, which itself was read as an index of the persistent authority of Indian cultural "tradition"; second the emphasis upon family in Indian life…contrasted with their more "individualistic" counterparts in the West".

The following sub-section will focus upon the place of media consumption within broader patterns of consumer practice amongst my sample of respondents and how media images, like other consumer goods, find roles in the production of 'modern' urban and rural identities. Rather than focus upon the text – reader media dynamic, as has already been showcased through Mankekar's (1999) colossal ethnographic study, I present a discussion of the role of media as a seriously influential medium in the sub continent which has served as not only a medium for entertainment and transmitting information, but its usage as defining what is considered to be urban and rural ways of life.

5.4   Consuming Media, Constructing Selves

As was evidenced in the findings chapter, a fundamental component of much of the girl's lives centred upon the negotiation of media; although at the outset of the research I had not made the role of media central to my research objectives, its function in the lives

of the young women was substantial and, at times, overwhelming. The choice of what these young women decided to view on television reflected much more than a mere 'media choice' and it was evidenced that it's role held a significance which spanned much further than its utilitarian character and commercial value which rests largely in media's ability to carry and communicate cultural meaning (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978; Sahlins, 1976). In the narratives and images of cinema, Indians experience a new polyglot image of glamour, fashion, and mobility centred on the lifestyles of heroes and heroines (Appadurai, 1995: 8). I observed a significant overlap from fiction to reality and the girls regularly used the fictitious to frame their own experiences of the society in which they live. Television had become an aid for these young women in two important ways, firstly the medium was used to transmit and communicate information which the girls would not otherwise speak about openly, and secondly, viewership became one of the predominant ways in which the girls were able to distinguish themselves from others i.e. cosmopolitan and urban vs. rural and reserved.

The criticisms which were attributed to the rural girls in light of their choice of viewership had generated much frustration and rejection on the part of the urban respondents; quoting from Divya, there was a belief that rural girls made a conscious effort to avoid English programming which, for the urban group, translated into conservatism and rural disinterest towards anything "beyond their own lives". This element of distinction confirms the findings of Butcher (2003) who posited that media has become a cultural space where it has become the marker of identity, reaffirming, reflecting and challenging boundaries. Similarly, the findings also support those presented in Derne's (2005) study in that globalisation has helped to introduce new cultural celebrations of autonomy and choice which becomes the central feature of

attraction for the urban girls in particular. For the girls, media presented them with an array of alternative opportunities in terms of clothing, preferences for food, careers and so on, but the appeal seemed to stem more specifically from the fact that the images were 'imported versions' which the urban group, in particular, made concerted efforts to adapt.

This pattern of distancing and othering of rural girls by the urban girls had emerged from the discussions as a consistent theme. The urban respondents had identified patterns of behaviour amongst their rural counterparts which they believed was, in part, a consequence of their choice in programming. The 'saas-bahu' (mother-in-law – daughter-in-law) television melodramas present at the core an archetypal, and to some degree, traditional family structure which becomes emotionally stressed through a tangled web of villainous activity. Classified as ridiculous, unrepresentative and melodramatic by the urban respondents, the popularity of this programming is still immense. Kaul and Sahani (2010) argue that:

> "all serials wrapped in tradition of male chauvinism discourage women to aim for more than a loving husband, happy children and a modern home. She is portrayed as a glamorous doll whose physical beauty is her only asset. The sacrificing role of women in every serial is highlighted, as it possesses no threat to the patriarchal structure. Women are all the time compromising and negotiating" (p.15).

It is this typology of the Indian woman depicted in these serials which I believe contradicts the ideals of 'the new generation', a term used by a number of the respondents throughout the interviews. Heavily based upon notions of Indian womanhood, the television dramas were not only viewed by many as a mirror but also a benchmark for the way in which women were expected to behave. The programming served to glorify the ethical integrity and strength of the character whilst evoking notions of *dharma* (duty). Raghavan's (2008) ethnographic study on popular television in India focussed upon one particular drama, *Kyunki* (literal translation: *because*), from her study she found that the serial was a place to confront and negotiate notions of womanhood, primarily through the female protagonist, Tulsi. She goes on to note how "woman and womanhood form pivotal points through which notions of gender, family and nation simultaneously develop, and this is the central site of the serial's [socio-political] significance" (ibid: 177).

Critical that these melodramas serve to promote an image of the woman who remains obedient to the family and subservient to patriarchal norms, the model has become highly contradictory to the tastes of the urban respondents who are seen to be in a process of self-empowerment, despite a multitude of restrictions. Consuming this media has, for the girls, had a significant impact upon inter-group relations and there is an inevitable mocking and out-casting which occurs from consuming this type of programming. Television became a potent way in which the girls would separate themselves; access to the 'right' media was seen to aid their development as consumers, young urban women and future professionals. The medium was seen to transmit a genuine form of knowledge. On the other hand, data from the rural girls indicated a

literal acknowledgement of media content and little differentiation between what was shown through this medium and what was occurring socially.

A number of the rural girls, in particular, had stated how the television dramas they were viewing depicted a reality in terms of social issues, for example, behaviour towards daughters and the behaviour of children towards parents etc, however, in addition to this, the rural girls in particular received 'Shiksha' (knowledge) from the programming, where they were taught not to lie, respect their parents and avoid deviant activity. The programming, to some degree, functioned as a reinforcement of a collective social ideal which is heavily rooted in the traditional and the sacred. Butcher's (2003) work on television in India is relevant here, she found that the media provided a symbolic universe which simultaneously reaffirmed, reflected and challenged boundaries. It should be noted, however, that the challenging of boundaries occurs within a specific frame, for example, the notion of the working woman still occurs within the domestic environment, it would be false to assume that this is a challenge of boundaries per se, but more a social acceptance that more and more women are embarking into paid employment. The rural girls saw this element as a way of 'moving forward', incorporating professions into contemporary life for women, however, there is an undertone which has been noted by Rajan (1993) of how "the media have been characterised by images of 'the new Indian woman', one who must attend her national identity as well as her modernity; she is Indian as well as new" (p.132).

Although promoting an image of independence with regard to paid work, the television dramas do not dismantle the core which is built upon inherently Indian ideals of womanhood, and nor has the programming, in my view, hybridised a more

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contemporary image of Indian women. As noted earlier, the depiction promotes a form of layering, or what the urban respondents had referred to as accessorising. The core remains relatively unhampered and is the nest of Indian traditions and morality, what is built around this core are a number of distinct notions, or assemblages surrounding the 'modern Indian woman', be it in the form of paid work, fashion or even education. Consumption of the unfamiliar or Western, in light of this, is performed at the periphery, and is a central finding of the data; what has been noted in chapter two regarding the changes in the socio-economic position of women still holds true (see Venktesh and Swamy, 1994) but what is of concern is the naivety with which the subject of the tradition with regard to Indian women has been approached.

It was noted in chapter two, that women were seen to be given new sets of possibilities which were enabling them to survive outside of the confines of a patriarchal structure (Liddle and Joshi, 1986), yet the reality of this, in light of my findings, seems much less optimistic. It is the complex dialogical process (see Runkle, 2004; Held, 1999; Liechty, 2001; Nagel, 2003; Appadurai, 1986; Kendall, 1996) which does not present a clear binary of inside and outside, or in this case, self and society. The findings support Lury's (2001) notion that images and products follow a trajectory which encompasses the processes of undoing, destruction and construction. The opportunities and choices presented to the young women, particularly urban, of television programming, lifestyles, clothing, education and professions were ones which they were pleased to have access to, yet the adoption, appropriation and negotiation of these elements were still, to some degree, conducted within the frame of a system of surveillance and control mediated by the familial and social. Supporting this is the work of Derné (2005) who noted in his study of cultural globalization in India that "there is a fit between a

sociocentric cultural orientation (which emphasises family obligations ahead of individual desires), families structured around arranged marriages and joint-family living (which limit individual autonomy) and an emotion culture that warns of love as a potentially dangerous emotion that could disrupt family obligations, while valuing social fear that keeps people in line".

Continuing with the theme of media, I would like to present a tentative illustration one of the dominant ways in which the reception of Western media was transferred to rural groups:

Figure 4 : Urban/Rural reception of Western media

If, as stated by Negus (2002), the central strength of the notion of cultural intermediaries is that it places emphasis on those who come in between the creative and consumers, or more specifically production and consumption, the figure above indicates somewhat of a similar process. The rural respondents, as indicated throughout the findings, had limited access to Western television programming. However, what was interesting to observe was the way in which the urban girls were viewed as those fortunate enough to adopt elements from the media in the form of clothing and lifestyles, but more importantly, the

urban group were seen as being better able to decode the meaning of what was being transmitted. Urban consumers, in the college context, were a way in which rural girls were able to access the foreign and the new without fear of surveillance or stigmatisation. As levels of appropriation towards foreign media varied significantly between the two groups, the tastes mediated by viewing upon consumption behaviour between the two groups also presented disparities which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections. Ultimately, the rural groups had become imitators of urban consumption patterns as opposed to directly adopting Western elements. The urban girls, in one sense, served the purpose of diluting and normalising the 'foreign', which in turn produced localised access for the rural group. If scapes, as Appadurai (1996) suggests, are perspectival constructs which consider the situatedness of different sorts of actors, I would propose, albeit tentatively, the notion of an internal Indian *mediascape* where the fetishised components are viewed at two distinct proximities by urban and rural consumers.

There has been long held criticism amongst scholars of an 'electronic invasion' which "threatens to destroy local traditions and to submerge the cultural heritage of less developed countries beneath the flood of television programmes and other media products emanating from a few power centres in the West" (Thompson, 1995:166), however, in light of my findings there is no evidence to support this view. The young women have been able to weave together complex consumption patterns which, to some degree, pick on elements from the West, but are appropriated through a melange of social and individual elements which serve to monitor, in moral terms, the suitability of the 'foreign'. In line with the present discussion, although there seems to be a naivety which surrounds this view of media as transmitter of legitimate information, I had

observed an overlap which unites India's approach towards the sacred and television viewership. The manner in which the sacred in India is worshipped and revered seems to also be applied to television consumption, or media consumption in broader terms. In the same way that popular actors on screen are, through my observations, visualised as immortal beings, the powerful, omnipotent media has created an alternative form of worship which boasts a national following.

Turning attention to the popular television dramas, the reception of the 'saas-bahu' programming, amongst the rural respondents primarily, indicates a seeping into reality where the notions of faith, dharma and karma are given visual representation predominantly through the role of the woman. If this genre of television programming presents the role of the woman as pivotal in the preservation of the traditional and the sacred, the argument raised by a number of the respondents is that their actual lived behaviours can be monitored through a form of collective moral policing by individuals who have been heavily influenced by this type of programming. Fernandes (2000) notes how the value system inherent in the make-up of India still remains potent when confronted with ideas of the 'new Indian woman'; her interview with a publisher of an Indian woman's magazine argued "our value system remains, they don't leave a certain framework which is still the Indian value system…I think we respect that and we function and address women within that framework. Of course she is urban, she's contemporary, she travels…but that framework still exists." This quote, in light of my data, presents an interesting dynamic with regard to young women in urban and rural Delhi and brings into view the two external forces depicted in figure 4 above: surveillance and control. This framework which has been spoken of is characteristic of a

form of social navigation that the young women face daily, and their consumption decisions heavily took into account the social and familial.

In this light, meaning is drawn from the object and transferred to the individual. Yet cultural meaning, according to McCracken (1986) can be located in three specific places: the culturally constituted world, the consumer good, and the individual consumer. One of the important ways in which these categories are substantiated is through a culture's material objects, making one's possessions and use of goods central to the understanding of consumption as a rich text of not only cultural principles, but also as a creation and creator of the culturally constituted world. The images that the urban girls would identify with through media helped to support not only their interests, but also notion of themselves. As Gabriel and Lang (1995) purport, the consumer is seen to be an identity-seeker where images are purchased and narratives made up. The rural group distanced themselves from Western media on the grounds of it being 'bold' and 'immoral'. However, the urban group were keen to embrace this type of programming as it proved to be a lens to the outside world; although the girls did not have an overwhelming urge to want to leave India, their thirst for the foreign was, in essence, their thirst for something 'new'.

The approach now is one of choosing which elements best comply with an ideal of 'Indian-ness', which is no longer solely identified through a lens of the mystical and exotic. An example of this is the urban girls wanting to wear spaghetti tops to college, the group realised that this garment alone would be risqué and therefore experimented with wearing a T-shirt beneath it. The trend inevitably caught on. In concurrence with Singer (1971) "Indian society and culture are not 'traditional' in the sense of the

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nineteenth-century stereotype that it is dominated by unchanging traditions and immemorial customs, nor even in the sense that many characteristic institutions, culture patterns, values and beliefs have persisted in spite of the numerous changes which have occurred. The 'traditionalism' of Indian civilisation lies elsewhere – in its capacity to incorporate innovations into an expanding and changing structure of culture and society." (p.163) Although the term he uses here is one of cultural metabolism, where the foreign is broken down and re-ingested into indigenous culture, it should be noted that this process of re-ingestion simultaneously undergoes a process of disposal. As much as what is seen to be appropriated by consumers, it is equally important, as my findings indicate, what has been rejected in the process.

This sub-section adheres specifically to the CCT domain of marketplace cultures as outlined in chapter two, where there is a collective understanding of symbolic meaning which is apparent in the findings. The 'sub-culture' in light of my findings is one which could be categorised as an 'urban class'. Rather than focus upon individual traits of consumers, as did Maffesoli (1996) in his definition of 'neo-tribalism' (see also Bennett, 1999), the respondents of my study presented a form of selective collectivity, localising the definition of sub-cultures to some degree. The urban girls 'symbolic boundaries' were developed not only through an ongoing opposition to dominant lifestyle norms, but also through the rejection of markers of a rural identity.

5.5   Sites of Consumption: The Indian Body and Morality

The findings contained many instances where the young women had considered the role of the body as central to negotiating both consumption activities and notions of modernity. It should be noted that the importance of the body here is one which is heavily grounded in Indian culture and history. The discussion of the prominent texts in chapter two, the Atharva Veda, Dharmasūtra and Manu Smriti, highlighted specific entries in the text which concerned women directly and revolved around the various functions of the female body, yet more importantly, the fear of not being able to control it. The female body was perceived to be more than biological and was a site of power as much as of destruction. To recall chapter two, 'uncultured' power is dangerous and helps to represent one of the more essential visions of women in Vedic India. As the woman is the receptor of the seed, she is simultaneously the benevolent, fertile bestower representing growth and prosperity.

The source of this benevolence, according to Wadley (1977), is that "the male controls the female; that Nature is controlled by Culture". Ultimately, the female is regarded as fertile and benevolent if control of her sexuality is transferred to men. On the other hand, a female who is seen to control her own sexuality is potentially destructive and malevolent. Shilling (2006) had noted the "massive rise of the body in consumer culture as a bearer of symbolic value" (p.2), however, his assertion that for those who have lost faith in religious authorities and grand political narratives, and are no longer provided with a clear world view, the "body provides a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self in the modern world" proves to be problematic in the context of the findings of this study.

Transplanting the notion of the body into the Indian context poses a number of difficulties. The body as a site of consumption in addition to being an embodiment of Indian morality and *Laaj* (respect) presents a complex pattern of negotiation that the young women were often faced with on a daily basis. The result of this negotiation had, in some instances, resulted in acts of submission, resistance or deviance on the part of the respondents. Additionally, what the body could potentially be exposed to through engaging in the act of consumption at various sites had prompted an increased level of surveillance and control by parents, society and rural peer groups over the young women. This notion of the body is constructed heavily in the social realm, where the "significance of the body is determined ultimately by social structures which exist beyond the reach of individuals" (Shilling, 2006: 63), or in Goffman's (1963) words, the meanings attributed to the body are "determined by shared vocabularies of the body idiom which are not under the immediate control of individuals" (p.35).

These shared vocabularies, as evidenced, have their roots firmly planted within the Vedic period, but what is of particular interest here is the way in which those historical narratives have seeped through the passing of time and still remain as heavily influential with regard to consumption in contemporary Indian society. Taking into account issues of safety within Delhi the body becomes a site of risk and the girls were more than aware of this aspect and had tailored, where appropriate, not only their choice in clothing purchases but also their behaviour. There were numerous examples of where purchasing behaviour had come under scrutiny, however, at times much of this criticism had been self-imposed and demonstrated social conditioning: Shivangini's potential purchase of shorts, Deepika's resistance of her father's rule of not wearing jeans, Anya's experience with the researcher in purchasing undergarments and

jewellery, Baby's discomfort in wearing jeans and make-up in a rural setting and Swati's explanation of how dress deems one as 'good' or 'bad' socially. Tarlo's (1996) ethnography of clothing in the northern state of Gujarat, India had noted how:

> "…a person's clothes are not so easily determined in India as one might expect. We read, for example, of a low-caste man in Gujarat who imitated the turban style of high-caste landowners and was beaten for doing so (Peacock, 1972:28); of local elites in the Ramnad district of South India who tried to impose consumptuary restrictions on their social 'inferiors', including prohibitions on certain types of ornament and dress (Hutton, 1946: 74-75)…and of a Nayar man who claimed that when he put on his shirt for work, he literally 'took off' his caste (cited in Srinivas, 1968: 123)"
> (p7)

What Tarlo is referring to here is a complexity of identities which are intimately tied to clothing that surpasses its utilitarian function. A direct example of this in light of my own findings was the explanation of the way in which a traditional North Indian ladies garment, the salwaar kameez. Despite providing ample coverage for a rural setting, was seen to be carefully stitched so as not to overtly showcase the body. It was noted by the rural girls that the garment should not be 'fitted' to the point that it becomes figure-hugging and subsequently sexualised as this would prove to be immoral on their part. Tarlo (1996) noted the development of clothes as a new art form in India and described the reworking of the saree as new high fashion, despite it once being considered by many as staid, standard and almost sacred. Now, however, it has re-emerged as an erotic wrap which serves to expose as much as it conceals. This notion of flesh-bearing attire was highly criticised by the rural respondents who, once again, used the depiction

of 'vamps' in the popular Hindi dramas to express their distaste. Ger and Sandikci's (2010: 16) study on the wearing of the veil in Turkey presents some significant overlaps in light of what has been discussed so far. They note that the process of adoption and transformation are largely understudied "…perhaps due to a scarcity of historical analyses, which are necessary for mapping out a process and perhaps, in the specific case of stigma literature, due to an emphasis on the individual effects of stigma rather than its socio-cultural underpinnings". They found that the unveiling of women became a convenient instrument for signifying many issues at once "…the construction of modern Turkish identity, the civilization and modernization of Turkey and the limitation of Islam to matters of belief and worship". Just as the young Indian women in my study had modified their consumption choices in light of what was socially acceptable, Turkish, *tesetturulu* women, as noted by Ger and Sandikci, were also seen to "skillfully resolve the tension between being faithful and comfortable and creating, modifying, and vigorously legitimizing their clothing choices" (2010:26), ultimately being able to dilute the stigma which faced them.

The criticisms presented by the rural respondents support Aldridge's (2003) notion that consumer society is now regulated by aesthetics, not ethics. For the rural girls the showing of flesh and heavily applied make-up were both indicators of an immoral, deviant woman. They criticised the way in which the blouse of the saree did not have sleeves, and the way in which the saree was draped which made it too similar to a back-less dress. Through their disgust, the girls, explaining to a 'foreign researcher', utilised their own *dupattas* (scarves) and draped them across the body to show the amount of coverage a saree should 'traditionally' give. This notion supports one of Tarlo's primary observations that "people can only change their clothes within the accepted

limits of their social situation, and we can see from the many examples in Jalia, the constraints in an Indian village are many and the opportunities for change are comparatively few, especially for women." (p.326).

Continuing with Goffman (1963), clothing, in the Indian context becomes an advertisement for a woman's understanding of her own morality. The notion of loss of face and potential stigmatisation signifies a threat not only to the individual's social identity but also reveals a gap between what Goffman terms a '*virtual social identity*' and '*actual social identity*'. The former rests largely in the way in which an individual sees one's self and the latter deals with the way in which they are viewed by others in society. What is interesting here is that this gap is perceived by a number of the respondents as closing to some degree. However, what is seen to make this possible is media, with the potential ability to 'normalise' images to the masses i.e. the wearing of more revealing attire, diluting stigmas associated with drinking and nightclubs etc. What was evidenced in the findings is that it is in part due to the fact that images of women still remain to be presented as either highly sexualised or quaint and submissive that the young women had struggled to carve a niche which sat comfortably between the two and which did not attract undue attention from onlookers.

Frequently noted by the rural respondents, the woman is burdened with the responsibility of being maker or breaker of the family and is expected to tailor her actions in accordance to her social and familial setting. The rural girls often spoke in 'morality terms', almost showcasing their understanding of the importance of shame and the repercussions of their actions on a wider group of individuals. Subsequently, their consumption behaviour mirrored those 'traditionalist' ideals and became shaped

by them through avoidance of those products which were either deemed as for use after marriage, such as heavily embroidered outfits, make-up and facial treatments or products which pushed the boundaries of social acceptance, such as jeans and short tops which would expose and place emphasis on the backside and thighs. It should be noted that the girls' stories were often woven through the fabric of the family and were extremely collective and integrated in nature, making it difficult at times to distinguish between their 'selves' and the 'social selves'.

The function of clothing had become a prominent point of discussion for the young women and the notion of reinventing traditions, ideas of modernity and safety had revolved around this aspect. "Where clothes are treated as a subject in themselves, the emphasis on studies of industrialised societies tends to be on clothes as fashion" (Drazin, 1994: 62). Douglas (1970) has attempted to provide a framework which expresses approaches to self-identity through both the tiers of society and the individual. Highlighting the distinction between "group-orientated" and "grid-orientated" societies, cultural symbolism, especially body symbolism, he notes can sometimes emphasise group boundaries. Drazin follows on from this framework by asserting that "since it has multiple referents, it can mediate between the important ones, especially where a changing situation demands it. Such change can be swift and uncompromising in a marketizing society" (p.62). There are, however, shortcomings to this view, as the respondents were limited both by what they had in their wardrobes to begin with and what they had in their culture; it should be noted that the clothing *of* a particular culture varies drastically from the clothing available within that culture and it is here that I witnessed a delicate balancing act performed by both groups of respondents within their respective locales.

Both groups of girls tracked the fashions of the domestic through the all influential Hindi film industry. In addition to this the rural girls would also trace fashions through the television dramas and textile vendors were quick to pick up on this trend and would often sell fabrics through character associations on small screen and cinema, for example, a "Kum-Kum Saree", "Tulsi Style" and "Bunty-Babli Suit". Similar findings were identified in Drazin's (1994) study of the consumption of clothes in Romania where emphasis was placed upon the cultural significance of garments in a post-socialist society. He found that "clothes are judged according to prevailing moral principles. Some people consciously aim for an image, some aim to demonstrate an inherent identity. These ways of dressing do not merely change in time, but in Romania are inseparably linked to dynamic change". I would borrow from Drazin and affirm from the findings that the separation inherent between both groups of respondents was that the urban group were heavily influenced by the notion of having a good image as opposed to developing an identity as such.

The urban group would engross themselves in the world of fashion where the primary objective would be to experiment with changes in image. Fashion in this sense could be easily disposed as new fads and trends emerged, the girls were highly influenced by Western programming and fashion magazines and would pick elements from what they saw and skilfully adapt it, if needed, for their own use. Their identities were, in part, built around attire, yet their understanding of identity was constant and stable as opposed to an image which lacked in permanency. An identity, for the urban girls, was one which incorporated facets of their lives such as education, career, finances and so on, yet for the rural group the prospects for them after college life were reduced to a

few options which had been carefully picked out for them; marriage and teaching were two examples of this. In the same way that Romanian consumers devour picture advertisements in Western magazines yet hold little hope of buying anything like that, the same could be said for the rural respondents who were keen to experience the lives and styles of dress seen on screen, but would not, in reality, be able to adopt these elements, hinting at the possibility of a global characteristic to this phenomenon.

In light of this disparity, the importance of clothing was equally potent in both the rural and the urban sphere. However, the findings push to question ownership over identity and whether the social self and the private self presented overlaps which are much more significant and difficult to distinguish. In light of this, the study adheres to the domain of consumer identity projects as presented in chapter two. However, what is a consistent theme within a number of the studies in this domain is the notion of generating a sense of 'self' through utilising marketer-generated materials. What I wish to express here is that in the context of India, the very notion of the self is problematic in that this duality of public and private selves raises further, more complex ontological questions of the construct of self and identity.

A number of commentators have noted that the increasing influence of consumer cultures has imposed an individualising effect on citizens-turned-consumers (Bauman, 2005; Du Gay, 1996; Giddens, 1991), Binkley (2009) in particular, asserts that "consumer cultures impose an individuating, reflexive or narcissistic orientation on individuals who become self-enterprising, self-governing and disembedded from collective, shared contexts" (p.25) What seems to be apparent from this definition of consumer culture is that it is an inherently Western notion of the term. There seems to

be little acknowledgement for the term 'culture' within the assessment and it pushes to turn a complex phenomenon into a distinct binary where consumer and culture are placed at opposite ends. Although there may be some element of truth in Bauman's (2005) assertion that "there is no such thing as collective consumption" (p.30), my findings present consumption as a social process in that it relates to a continuous expression of identity and continuous cycle of negotiation and re-negotiation which is prompted by a collective form of moral policing. As has already been evidenced through the findings, the girls describe the ways in which society dictates the actions taken by young women at the level of their own individual body projects, although the urban group are quick to overtly challenge the status quo, the rural girls consider it a social obligation to adhere to the heightened intensity of morality within the village setting.

Despite this, it would be false to assume that resistance to these social norms did not exist in the village setting nor amongst rural girls. There were elements of resistance where stories of rural girls changing into jeans whilst on the college campus were numerous. The college campus became a safe haven for consumption of the unfamiliar, immoral and Western, in addition to it being a place where the body could be showcased. Journalist, Kalpana Sharma (2003) has written extensively on the topic, and notes that the fear for the female body "arises out of the widely held belief that women must be protected, that they will unwittingly invite rape and sexual violence if they don't hide their sexuality, if they don't conform to the way society wants them to dress". Women's bodies and sexuality, therefore, become the material and discursive sites where tradition is performed, values contested and boundaries policed and controlled (Oza, 2001). Runkle's (2005) descriptive account of Mumbai during her

research fieldwork further supports the claims already proposed regarding women, the body and public spaces. She highlights the powerful distinction between inside and outside where women would judge which areas and forms of dress are appropriate, for example, elite women dressed in revealing attire would negotiate public space by staying in cars en route to spaces where such attire is appropriate, as well as by wearing loose shirts over tight or revealing clothing. Runkle describes an unfortunate incident on her way to dinner in the elite Breach Candy neighbourhood:

> "…I remember feeling extremely uncomfortable standing on the street for the few minutes that it took to fix my shoe because it was a public space, and then walking into the Breach Candy restaurant where every single other woman was wearing the same type of clothing as me; the only difference was that they were only wearing it inside, whereas circumstance had forced me to wear it outside which forced me to feel the difference between myself and the people on the street"   (p.15)

This notion of inside and outside was further evidenced by the girls in conjunction to socialising with the opposite sex. Social codes meant that it was not acceptable to be seen loitering with another male (non-related) one-to-one; groups were seen to be preferred and acted as a mechanism to dilute attention on any particular individual. Although urban parents were described as being relatively relaxed with their daughters' circle of friends, they were specifically asked to socialise with them indoors and not in public view. One mechanism utilised by the rural girls highlights an interesting process of re-definition, to allow them some element of freedom with regard to forming relationships with the opposite sex. A re-definition of the term 'boyfriend' in the Indian, rural context was formed which was one of a platonic relationship between a male and

female, stripped of any form of physicality. The term 'boyfriend' in this sense was indigenised to the point that its stigmatic connotations existed to some degree, yet its understanding became localised and specific, diluting the effects of what would otherwise be regarded as deviant activity. This example is important in that it demonstrates the ability of the young women to exert some degree of control over their activities.

5.6   Negotiating Sites of Modernity: Multiple Avatars

In traditional societies, notes Shilling (2006), "identities were received automatically through ritual practices which connected people and their bodies to the reproduction of long established social positions" (p. 157). Although Shilling's account presents the idea of identity in the past tense, evidence from the findings has indicated how historical narratives have remained to exert influence within the contemporary landscape of India, particularly in relation to women. To assume the passing of 'tradition' to make way for more individualistic, contemporary forms of consumption patterns would be a rather naïve portrait given of young female consumer patterns in India. What was certainly apparent from the findings was the concept of 'lifestyle' which refers directly to a relatively integrated set of practices, chosen by the urban girls in particular, in order to give "material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (ibid). To borrow from Giddens (1991: 80-1) the more tradition loses its ability to provide people with a secure and stable sense of self, the more individuals have to negotiate lifestyle choices, and attach importance to these choices. This element of Giddens' analysis certainly holds weight in light of the findings; however, it would be

incorrect to attribute the reason for urban participation in lifestyle negotiation exclusively to a dilution of the 'traditional'.

Through the surge in media channels, access to the internet and an increase in non-domestic programming, both sets of young women now had access to a wider variety of lifestyle choices. Despite the urban respondents being at a substantially closer proximity to executing, in reality, what was seen on screen their 'traditional avatars', as defined through the body, were still very much a part of the consumer 'modernity project'. Even if the process of modernity can be regarded as a global phenomenon, it does not constitute a common project. Additionally, modernist projects "claim and promise the universalism of their values… [and] tend to lean almost completely on Western traditions of knowledge, shunning debates with other knowledge traditions" (Fuchs, 1994: vi). The modernity project in India is evidenced as being much more complex and at times contradictory; to borrow from Martin Fuchs (1994), how is it possible to identify with a project that is not only of alien origin, but just as it drags one into its domain, it manages to marginalise another.

This marginalisation has been evidenced through the urban girls' rejection of their college and its associated 'backward' connotations. This environment had significantly restricted their ability to fully explore their lifestyles/tastes and meant that much of their frustration fell upon the shoulders of the majority, rural student body. This group was subsequently sidelined and at times mocked by the urban crowd for their 'backward' dress, lack of fluency in English, body language, lack of exposure to the 'foreign' and overall lack of drive and professional ambition. In other words, the girls were seen to lack in all attributes associated with a modern, cosmopolitan notion of an Indian

woman, as defined by the young women themselves. The work of Ustuner and Holt (2010) is especially relevant here. They looked at the ways in which status consumption operated amongst the middle class Turkish women and also found that those with higher cultural capital often looked down upon those with lower cultural capital as "new rich who have money but no taste or manners" (p.48). Similar to the case of India, the authors note how Turkey also has "strong norms against sticking out, so status has to work within orthodox behaviours that one has no choice but to follow" (p.51). Modernity, in light of the findings, was a push towards improving one's material condition, not 'traditional thought' (see also Ger and Belk, 1993); modernity, for the rural, could be purchased, for the urban group modernity was equally embedded in the acquirement of 'status goods', but the actual performance of consumption was where the distinction between rural and urban heavily came into play. To illustrate, it isn't *what* you wear, it is *how* you wear it.

As noted by Appadurai and Breckenridge (1995), it is important to engage with the subjective experience of modern life and consumption is an activity that simultaneously captures the distinctive disciplines of modernity and draws attention to new forms of social identity. Ultimately, and in agreement with the authors, "what is distinctive about any particular society is not the fact or extent of its modernity, but rather its distinctive debates *about* modernity, the historical and cultural trajectories that shape its appropriation of the means of modernity, and the cultural sociology that determines who gets to play with modernity and what defines the rules of the game" (p.16). Modernity through the interplay of the body and consumption presents this specific group of consumers as meandering between what is inherently traditional and what is deemed as modern. There is no fixed state or fixed definition from the findings, but

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each meaning is an addition to the development of an Indian notion of modernity and its many subsequent avatars.

Bauman's (1990) notion that consumption can be viewed as 'work' can be viewed through two distinct frames in light of the Indian context. For the urban group, 'project self' was an ongoing, continuously changing and fickle mode of identity, where the upkeep of a 'modern' self was necessary to maintain membership within an inherent 'urban class' of peers. The self, in the rural context, almost ceased to exist in an autonomous form, adding nuance to Bauman's conception of 'work'. Spending time on appearance and grooming was viewed in light of leisurely activity for the rural respondents, whose time otherwise was filled with a plethora of household duties.

5.7   <u>**Summary**</u>

The objective of this chapter has been to relate the findings of the empirical study presented in chapter four to the globalisation, consumer culture and India literatures reviewed in chapter two. It has teased out the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermine, support or add to the approaches or arguments of previous authors. In sections 5.2 and 5.3, I introduced the reader to the broad relationship between my findings of the effects of globalisation and the ways in these are tackled in the extant literature no globalisation and CCT. In addressing the problematic tone inherent in much of the literature on globalisation, I introduced the notion of 'cultural layering' and the importance of intra-country flows which would need to be accommodated for in understanding and

positioning the remainder of the discussion of the findings. In section 5.3 it was suggested that there were stark differences between consumers living as those in the West and being how they are in the West, mirroring the distinction posed by the respondents in that being modern could be attributed to either 'modern *soch*' (thinking) or 'modern dress'. The data had also suggested that the rural consumers were often found to be at the fringes of global flows subsequently meaning that they may, as Giddens (1990) suggests, ultimately bypass the modernity project.

The importance of media inherent in my data examined for the way in which the viewing choices of the young women helped to frame and construct distinct identities. Interestingly, what the girls viewed on television had undoubtedly gained them access and membership into a distinct 'urban class' on campus. Yet what the girls *did not* view on television was of equal importance. From the data, choice of media was not merely an expression of taste; it was an expression of identity and had often been the catalyst in the process of othering. Most importantly in this section, I explored the way in which the '*saas-bahu*' melodramas functioned as a reinforcement of a collective social ideal of the Indian woman in her various forms (mother, daughter, wife and negative character roles) as well as presenting the traditional and sacred as a subliminal undertone into the sphere of entertainment.

Following on from this, the role of the body as site of consumption and embodiment of morality was presented in section 5.5. The issues of control and surveillance were of particular importance as they operated as mechanisms to curb and control not only women, but also a human form of self-respect. The links apparent from the Vedic literature discussed in chapter two were also presented as existing to be framing

paradigms through which women were expected to behave and perform acts of consumption. The data also presented clothing as a way of negotiating through and constructing identity, supporting Goffman's (1963) notion that clothing, for the Indian context, becomes an advertisement of a woman's understanding of her own morality. Importantly in this section, the grappling between virtual and actual identities were ones which the girls were seen to navigate through on a continuous basis. Ultimately, as material and discursive sites where tradition is performed (Oza, 2001), the body poses a number of complex and often contradictory negotiations for the young women in light of their constructions of identity.

Finally, the concept of lifestyle and the integrated set of practices, selected by the urban girls in particular, to give material form to a particular narrative of identity. As my data suggested, the development of contemporary 'modern' lifestyles was not an automatic disposal of all that remains as 'traditional', although the push towards being considered modern was one which was to improve material condition as opposed to traditional thought. Modernity, in light of my findings, requires a complex pattern of negotiation which becomes difficult to define but adhering to traditional norms and values where needed is still considered part and parcel of the notion of Indian modernity.

In the following chapter, I bring this thesis to a close. In addition to summarising the key points of the thesis, it will attempt to evaluate its overall significance for the discipline of consumer culture research by stating its contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Having presented and substantiated the key findings of the research study in chapter four, the previous chapter five discussed these results in terms of their relationship to the globalisation and consumer culture theory and India literatures reviewed in chapter two. It teased out key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these bodies of research, showing where they undermined, supported or added to the arguments of previous authors. This final chapter brings the thesis to a close. Its objective is to provide an overview of the thesis in its entirety and translate this overview into a number of final conclusions about the nature of consumer culture in India. These conclusions provide the basis for an evaluation of and statement of the project's contribution to knowledge. Directions for future research will be set out in section 6.3.

6.1   <u>Synthesis</u>

In summarising each of the chapters which comprise this thesis, it is hoped that the reader will be able to obtain a clear overview of the research project as a whole. Following an introduction to the thesis in chapter one which contextualised the project and initiated the reader into its focus and empirical concerns, chapter two presented a review and critique of the key conceptualisations in the form of globalisation and consumer culture theory (CCT). The examination of globalisation comprised notions of internationalization and de-territorialization, cultural homogenisation theory in addition to debates surrounding heterogenisation, hybridisation and glocalisation. In reviewing these areas I was primarily concerned to illuminate the ways in which the various

manifestations of globalisation had served to naturalise a particular understanding of global consumer culture, and specifically the impact of global cultural flows. To this end the section demonstrated how the development of ideas and insight from marketing, sociology and anthropology can help to develop inter-disciplinary perspectives to provide a sound examination of consumer culture in the Indian context. Firstly, culture and the logic by which global flows are received is seen to comprise a central element of the extant literature on globalisation which leads to two distinct notions – an outward extension of a culture and its subsequent compression. Based on this notion, the view of a unification of the global cultural landscape was discussed in light of the critique that despite the existence of commonalities, globalisation should be seen as a field in which the notion of difference should be showcased and played out.

The creation of an inherently non Eurocentric, context specific, examination of the phenomenon of globalisation was evidenced as a significant shortfall in the extant literature. Additionally, the binary notions of homogenisation/heterogenisation, internationalization/ deterritorialization were purported as restrictive in application for assessments of actual lived experiences of consumption. Globalisation is, in itself, a globalised theory in the sense that it posits the authority of the West in dominating the sphere of symbolic imagery and meaning which, in turn, are circulated across the globe through the mediums of media and technology.

Section 2.1.4 of chapter two dealt primarily with consumer culture theory and the contemporary debates as articulated by Arnould and Thompson (2005). An examination of the primary domains through which consumer culture research are illuminated were presented in light of their theoretical and empirical contributions within their respective

areas. Although these domains were not exhaustive, they helped to frame the idea that consumption is seen to be a historically bound mode of socio-cultural practices which operates within the dynamics of various marketplaces. It was noted that much of the work conducted within the broad domains focussed primarily upon the contributions of studies conducted in the West by predominantly North American scholars. Additionally, research conducted on Indian consumers within the Indian context presented a void within the topics of study for CCT; the limited studies which have been conducted have typically presented the Indian consumer in light of their diasporic associations. With this in mind, the theoretical positioning of the research was framed heavily through an assessment and integration of context of study, placing its contribution as distinct from US/Euro centric studies. In concluding this chapter, the aims of the research were set out as: to understand and describe the meanings, values and lived experience of contemporary consumer culture of a sample of young female Indian consumers; to establish the extent to which, and describe how, global flows of culture serve to hinder, propagate or catalyze markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers; and to establish whether and how traditional belief systems and practices influence young consumers' identity projects in contemporary Indian society.

Having outlined the conceptual framework for the thesis, chapter three went to develop and justify the research design for an empirical investigation of the study of young female consumers in New Delhi. It began by re-iterating the key research aims and theoretical commitments established in the preceding chapter and advocated an interpretive and ethnographic methodology which reflected these commitments. From this methodological perspective, the chapter outlined and rationalised the design,

development and execution of this project's two-month research study into the lived experiences of consumer culture of twenty three, young urban and rural females all studying at Bharati College, New Delhi. It presented the reasons for site selection and sampling decisions and then went on to discuss the use of multiple methods in the research study, namely those of participant observation, transcription, interviewing and visual methods. The chapter concluded with details of the research process and the strategy in interpreting the data.

Chapter four went on to present the main findings of this research study. Specifically it provided a detailed account of the consumption practices employed by young rural and urban women via the predominant frames - the media, the body, modernity and lifestyles - through which they negotiated and constructed their own distinct identities. The findings demonstrated that there was an evident distancing and form of othering which was reflected between the urban and rural groups through their choices in media and lifestyle. Adding to this, the processes of social, familial and peer group surveillance and control were evidenced as highly influential upon the young women and their consumption choices, bringing to the forefront traditional notions of the control of women which during the Vedic ages were seen to be of paramount importance.

Chapter five related these findings back to literatures as presented in chapter two. The chapter discussed the key theoretical implications of my empirical fieldwork for these corpi of research, showing where they undermined, supported or added to the arguments of previous authors. In stark relief to the homogenising notions of consumer culture as presented by a number of researchers on globalisation, the chapter discussed

the implications of the findings that the reception of global flows in the construction of identities did not produce homogeneity, but rather a complex notion of difference at the level of the local, perpetuating one example of intra-country difference. I proposed the notion of 'cultural layering' in place of hybridity, emphasising the disposability and temporality of new cultural flows. Despite examples of the indigenisation of products and images presented in the literature in section 2.3, the findings indicated hinted at a set of cultural flows *within* an Indian 'mediascape' where the fetishisation of images were not exclusively those of the West. A tentative model of 'The Indian Consumer Experience' was also presented to attempt to represent the dynamics of consumer culture as presented in the data set.

I will now use this overview as a basis for drawing out the main conclusions of this research in the next section, particularly as they relate to the central aims as set out in chapter two.

6.2   <u>Conclusion</u>

This section states the main conclusions of the thesis and uses them as a basis for an evaluation and statement of the project's claimed contribution to knowledge. A suitable starting point for such an evaluation is to re-iterate the key issues which emanated from a discussion of the findings in chapter five. These key discussion points can be used to address the aims formulated earlier in the thesis and thereupon draw together overall conclusions from the research project.

The first research question related to the extent to which global flows served to hinder, propagate or catalyze current markers of distinction between rural and urban consumers. It can be concluded form the discussion of the empirical evidence that rather than fitting the consumer into binaries and typologies born out of the literature on globalisation- homogenisation, heterogenisation, hybridisation - global flows in the form of symbols, images and media served to simultaneously propagate and catalyze existing markers of distinction and othering between urban and rural consumers. The discussion did not present a rejection of these terminologies per se, but the fluidity of these markers were apparent in that homogeneity and heterogeneity operated simultaneously, in overlap and without clear distinction. The most palpable effects of the markers of distinction were held between the urban and rural girls, in that the appropriation of Western clothing, Western music, hybrid linguistic forms, emphasis upon professional achievement and personal grooming deemed the urban girls as directly involved with the project of modernity.

For rural consumers, the global flows served to hinder and problematise the status quo and they believed that the erosion of village sentiment was in part attributed to the attainment of new global symbols of prosperity which encompassed characteristics deemed as 'modern'. This distinction was not only limited to urban vs rural consumers, but was also evident for the young women when negotiating between socially ascribed identities and forging new ones. With access to alternative modes of life through the medium of television, literature and print media, a number of the urban women in particular readily challenged the more traditional model of the 'Indian woman'. However, not wanting to forgo their ethnic identity, the urban group were in a process of carving a niche which picked at elements from the West in the form of 'cultural

layering', where the foundation remained inherently Indian yet the layers, as with fashion, could be disposed, amended and reworked where needed. The cultural imperialism thesis also comes under scrutiny in light of my findings and discussion.

The second research aim was to establish the extent to which the young women consider consumption to be intimately tied to constructions of identity. As an overlap from the discussion above, conclusions can be drawn about the centrality of consumption for the young women in being able to forge alternative identities which have not been socially scripted. However, the attempts made at constructing this alternative is constrained through forms of control and surveillance from the familial and social spheres respectively, presenting an ongoing tug-of-war between traditional, social narratives of the conduct of women, and an individually ascribed notion. Although there seemed to be a constant battle of negotiation, a preoccupation with the 'self', which has been a characteristic in the CCT literature, presents an interesting variation within the Indian context. The 'self' emerged as an ontological dilemma where the separation between public and private selves of the girls became increasingly difficult to distinguish. In addition to this, the preoccupation with the 'self' was looked down upon by rural respondents who felt that the loss of collectivity would result in a loss of tradition (*parampara*). The self in terms of grooming and maintaining trends was a project of necessity for the urban respondents; the rural girls on the other hand critiqued this expression of self-indulgence as unnecessary, especially before marriage.

I suggest that the belief systems and practices within contemporary Indian society are especially potent, so far as to deem them as one of the most influential forces in shaping consumption practices and constructions of identity in North India. I purport that this

notion extends the work of Derné (2005) since the changes resulting from globalisation are more likely to follow from changed structural realities than the introduction of new cultural meanings. Although through Indian history, the schism between urban and rural is not a recent emergence; the wider implication of globalisation in light of the study has served to further increase the cleavage between those who are deemed as periphery to the development of modernity within India and those who are central to it. Western assemblages are inevitably viewed as symbols of prosperity within the Indian context, making it difficult to forge alternative notions of the modernity project in the realm of the rural. Having said this, micro-level indicators serve to pan in on the unique definitions of the term 'modern', for example, the wearing of jeans in the rural setting may be a significant break away from tradition, where in the urban setting jeans have become an everyday norm and the wearing of skirts is now the risqué strategy of pushing further away from others who are getting closer in proximity to being viewed in the same defining frame of 'modern'. Ultimately, for the urban girls, the Other needs to exist in order for them to remain as central to the project of modernity making consumption not confined to notions of construction of identity, but also having wider implications on society.

I would suggest that the contribution to knowledge which this thesis might claim for itself is twofold: contextual and theoretical. In terms of contextual contribution, this study has presented an exploration of young female Indian consumers, a group of consumers from a developing country location whose voices are rarely heard in CCT and consumer research more broadly. Understanding their lived experiences and meaning-making in their own terms, situated within the historical, material, cultural and moral structures of contemporary India provides an antidote to the Eurocentric, and

more often US-centric terms of reference, of much consumer research. These local cultural structures are drawn and deployed by the girls with reference to 'global' symbolic resources, most typically flowing into the country through media scapes, and related to their personal identity projects. The intersection of these global and local resources produces both a form of cultural hybridization, as well as an assertion of local Indian difference.

This simultaneous hybridization and assertion of difference contributes a nuanced, empirical investigation of globalising cultural flows to scholarship on globalization. A second, theoretical contribution can be claimed to the body of work known as CCT. This study offers a competing theorization of the notion of consumer agency based on the empirical dynamics described in this thesis. An underpinning notion of CCT is that consumer culture is accessible to all, and therefore, that access to the structures of consumer culture that provide the basis for consumer agency and subjectification are also available to all. I have demonstrated that the girls did not have access to consumer culture in the same ways, and for different reasons associated with their social background, the girls demonstrated a process of navigation through various mechanisms of control and surveillance which served to restrict this element of consumer agency to some degree. The girls had developed their own sets of ideas regarding the adoption and appropriation of consumer goods, making this intra-country variation between rural and urban consumers of central importance tempering the neat typologies through which consumers have been framed in light of the reception of global flows.

6.3   <u>Reflections</u>

Just as I found India a country full of contradictions, I found the research process to be equally perplexing and challenging yet extremely fulfilling. Undertaking this project was certainly a high risk venture as I had little to no prior contacts available to assist me in arranging fieldwork within Delhi. I was in no way 'going home' to conduct research, making my subject position and my own identity significant to the research process but also dissolving any form of nostalgia as I felt completely new to the country. This would be the only India I would ever really know. My own ethnic identity had certainly fuelled my interest in India and during my time in the field I became increasingly aware of myself and how dissimilar I felt, despite successfully merging into the masses. In light of implications concerning idealism, my journal entries became a space to express my experiences, my fears and concerns as well as providing me with a space to note my feelings as during an experience.

On numerous occasions I had recorded myself on the electronic dictation machine speaking within crowds, at times of anxiety and at times when I felt overwhelmed with my surroundings. Irrespective of ethnic identity, the reality I faced within India was just that, a reality but nowhere did I feel I was presenting idealistic elements within my own accounts of India. I wrote of India as I saw it and spoke of India as I experienced it – a reality which may be confined to my experiences alone, but a reality which existed nonetheless. My ethnographic entries may be subject to claims of a 'romanticised' account of India; however, I attribute this to the descriptive devices I had used to scribe my experiences. To purport them as romanticised, however, would be a misreading of my intention for diary entry inclusions in the thesis.

Although at times I felt as though I was grappling with my British Indian self, this amalgam had worked in my favour during the interview process as reported by a majority of the respondents. They felt a sense of security that as an 'outsider' I would not judge their responses in the same way a native Indian researcher may, however, as someone who also shared a number of cultural, linguistic and ethnic traits they believed my level of understanding would be much more than a researcher who they felt would be unable to understand 'their way of life'. The girls believed I had been exposed to certain experiences which meant that the fear of any of them being stigmatised was dissolved significantly. I was certainly not prepared for how attached a number of the respondents would become with me, joking with me and urging me to tell them stories about my life in the UK, about my partner and about living away from my parents.

This sharing of information facilitated an immense amount of trust, to which I had developed some unease as the girls from the outset were extremely talkative and more than willing to share the details of their lives. What I had learnt about myself through this process was how despite being ethnically similar I was very much culturally distinct from the majority of people I had met; the restrictions which the girls had been operating within were automatically imposed onto me when in India. No choice and no discussion. I realised that within the home I was living I was also expected to live through a number of distinct boundaries and also had to make sure that the family did not lose face, as before being a researcher I was, of course, a woman. My gender certainly helped me empathise with the young women a great deal as Delhi became a place where as a woman you felt the need to be on guard. I was almost forced into a way of carrying myself and conducting my behaviour which, at times, made me feel helpless.

Being a woman, then, had a number of benefits for this study, yet being a woman also meant falling into a system over which I had little to no control.

Aside from gaining firsthand experience of the practicalities of conducting fieldwork overseas, I realised that being a female researcher does not separate you from the realities of who you are. The term did not shield me from the realities I faced within India and my experience with male faculty members at FMS in Delhi confirmed who I would remain to be in India - 'some girl'. The entire process was a huge learning curve for me, one which helped me to recognise myself and one which forced me to probe those questions I had forever occupied my mind with regarding my own identity . It was in India that the reality of who I was suddenly dawned on me and how real the crossroads of my identity actually were – a Brit in India and an Indian in Britain.

6.4   Limitations and Future Research

This final section brings the thesis to a close. Its particular aim is to point to directions which future researchers reading this thesis may wish to pursue. One of the main limitations which could be viewed in light of this thesis was the limited discussion of the Vedic and historic texts in relation to contemporary Indian consumer society. Although the aims of the thesis were not to develop an understanding of consumer culture in light of religion as such, there seems to be scope for further development of the interplay between religion and consumer culture. Having said this, religion did not feature as a significant point of discussion amongst the respondents and one of the conclusions which I believe can be drawn from this is the fact that the Vedic ideology is so ingrained

within the social fabric of India the girls were unable to distinguish it as forming part of the consumer culture. India's socio-cultural landscape integrates religious elements to the point that culture and religion become almost indivisible and, at times 'as one'. Although the girls did not overtly speak of religion throughout the interview process, the assumption that they were not in any way influenced by it would certainly be a precipitate conclusion to make.

How to identify and define 'religion' comes under significant scrutiny in light of its placement within India; the OED defines the term as "the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power"[16], however, in Hindi and Sanskrit, when referring to religion the term "dharma" is utilised, showing an overlap with its alternative meaning, 'duty'. Religion in this sense is seen as a *way of life* and is subsequently integrated as a *part of life* for the respondents as opposed to creating a separate compartment for belief and religion. If I am to take this definition as holding true for my data, then religion features as an omnipotent thread throughout the responses as the girls make constant note of their duty and moral obligations in light of their families and society at large. Secondly, due to the limitation on time in Delhi I was not able to spend a considerable amount of time with the respondents out of the college environment, nor had I had the chance to meet with respondents in their homes, an opportunity which I believe would have provided a valuable addition to the data already presented.

As my study is located within a very specific locale in North India, specifically West Delhi, it would be interesting to observe the patterns of consumption behaviour amongst a similar age-group of female consumers within other characteristically

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[16] http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0699400#m_en_gb0699400

cosmopolitan cities such as Mumbai or Bangalore. Questions of how far regional identity play into consumer identity could also be the key focus for research in other regions. In addition to this, future research could also involve women who are not grouped within an educational establishment, for example, young professionals and those women in rural regions. Related to this, rather than focussing upon females, future research may consider the experiences of males in the same age bracket and demographic.

Due to restrictions upon my time and the practicalities of travel within the field, I had few opportunities to travel around the city with the respondents and visit their homes. As an extension of my study, personal possessions/spaces in the domestic environment may also be a route which could be pursued in future. Generational differences had also caused some element of dispute as I had observed with my domestic respondent Anya. This was an area which I felt would uncover the stark differences not only in terms of consumptive behaviour, but also in light of a broader set of considerations regarding identities and perceived change.

A final note for directions for future research would incorporate in-depth examination of the role of the researcher in the process of data collection which has been downplayed in much of the CCT literature to date. The addition of researcher reflexivity would help to inform future interpretivist researchers of the complexities of researcher position and how influential this position is when collecting and extracting data within the field.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The Girls

The Urban Group

The Rural Group

Bharati College Campus

Appendix 2: <u>Rural student written project</u>

Dear madam,

Anoop Mam Came in our Bharti College from Delhi University for research programme. I am a first year student of the B.A (prog). I am a B.A English B student. She took our Class. She asked us about the media & asked about the difference in old movies & new (today's) movies. How the women lives in today's society. How do people lives in villages. & She asked about the difficulties faced by these people.

In the second class she asked about the difference between Indian & foreign Culture. Mam prepared a Chart also. In that Chart I made beautiful pictures. Mam asked about the Indian life style & asked about the colour indifference, in our Country. & What is the reason behind it. people over & how off & here, They shows Superiority in Clothing, house, Car, moble. etc. They always Compare them-selves with others.

In the third class, Annu mam asked about the Indian tradition, their Culture, about their languages, about their festivels & asked how do pepole Celebrate their festivels. mam asked that had you watched an English movi movies & asked about the name. And what things

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do you do ~~all the~~ that ~~days~~ ~~what~~ ~~do~~ you like most.
What do you do all the days & what do you
like most , she also recorded the conversation. ~~of~~

eMy views (experiences) about Annu Mam
                    I liked Annu mam very much.
~~ste~~ she talked with us like a friend & communicated
with us in a very polite & affectionate way.
One sir ~~was~~ also accompanied ~~by~~ annu mam
& we had a lot of talking with him. Annu
mam also shared her personal experiences with
us. Annu mam is very ~~posite~~ polite & very
peaceful lady. Her behaviour ~~be~~ ~~haveiour~~ was fantastic
& she knew ~~has~~ how to ~~tak~~ talk to others.
After meeting her I experienced that I know
~~their~~ her from before!. I ~~o i~~ All the compliments are
insufficient for her. I liked Annu mam
very much. I love you Annu Mam.

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