A NEW INDIA: CONTESTATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AT THE CROSSROADS OF POSTCOLONIAL ASPIRATIONS AND GLOBALIZED IMAGINATION

BY

KOELI MOITRA GOEL

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communications with a minor in Gender Relations in International Development in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014

Doctoral Committee:
Professor Angharad Valdivia, Chair
Professor Cameron McCarthy, Director of Research
Professor Norman Denzin
Associate Professor Pradeep Dhillon
Abstract

My dissertation examines contestations of national identity and representation of individual aspirations within a globalized imagination of 21st century India. In analyzing the metaphoric construction of a New India, I look at the unrestrained urbanization that has followed economic liberalization and the political mobilization of marginalized sections of the population, also concomitantly emerging within these new urbanscapes. As they intersect with new media practices, community-building and neoliberal restructuring of the state, enterprise and the individual, the tenor of a national community, previously invested in the narrative of a glorious past emerging from classical Hindu roots seem to be merging with myriad flows of globalization, transforming the social landscape of the postcolonial nation in significant ways. In studying this, my study uses archival data and ethnographic research to adopt a critical approach to communication and cultural studies with a focus on exploring how the country’s national imagination has been formed within the coordinates of the original Nehruvian trope of the nation as “a new star… of freedom in the East” and the newest construction of “India rising,” especially as it develops with relation to conditions of globalization. It examines how globalization has reconstituted the image of the nation, the national community and national prosperity, as well as development and progress – national, regional and individual – in the minds of the ordinary citizen.
To N.C., my best friend, whose presence is the mainstay of my life
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of many people who supported me throughout my graduate work, generously gave me their time, inspired me to strive towards excellence in my ambitious project and held my hand on those rough days when I needed reaffirmation. The constraints of space might limit me from expressing my feelings individually, but the fact that this project stands here today is itself recognition of their presence in my life.

Before I express my thanks to my wonderful teachers, my family and close friends, I would like to take a few minutes to recognize the people whose stories I bring here. Their generosity is invaluable to me. In allowing me into their world, in telling me about their journey through a landscape which is changing faster than can be comprehended, in forming an easy camaraderie with me as they guided me towards greater understanding and knowledge, they gave me the keen insight into their views and values - absolutely crucial for my critical work. I especially thank the domestic labor population in India’s National Capital Region, especially in Gurgaon and Saket areas, who trusted me with their narratives and allowed me to participate in their community. Their courage and everyday struggles, their resolve to live their lives with dignity and forbearance under trying circumstances have become sources of inspiration for work which will go far beyond this project.

I particularly want to mention Sohan Singh Pundeer, who came into my project as the local contact – a tour guide and driver – and stayed on to become much more, assisting me in everything from recording videos, taking photographs, collecting media artifacts, organizing field trips, providing security cover, helping me get to areas and communities which are hard to reach and providing ground knowledge for accessing various local resources. His moral support and companionship became crucial for me through my fieldwork and though his story was never
recorded here in my dissertation, I am indebted to him beyond measure and I hope he will find a
little bit of himself in every page that follows. Though he has never been educated formally, he
was sufficiently enthused by my project to start adult education classes, hoping some day to gain
enough literacy to be able to read what “Madam-ji” (I) had worked so hard on.

I am deeply appreciative of my professors at the Institute of Communications Research
for creating an intellectual environment within which academic excellence emerges with an ease
and grace unseen elsewhere. Above all, I want to thank my wonderful Doctoral Committee – I
could not have asked for a better one. They brought with them not only many decades of
scholastic work of the highest quality - setting standards to which I will always aspire, but also
experience and insight into intellectual endeavors which opened up an entire new world to me.
My Committee Chair and Adviser, Dr. Angharad Valdivia, incredibly knowledgeable and
supportive, was a bulwark of strength throughout my dissertation process. Her guidance is that
key component which made it possible for me to move forward and finish this ambitious project.
Dr. Cameron McCarthy, my Director of Research, whose work in global studies is the main
source of inspiration for my dissertation, often made me feel that he thought about my project
more than I did. My participation in Dr. McCarthy’s legendary seminars and his research group
work initiated the key questions for the intellectual foundation of this study. Dr. Norman Denzin
has been a constant source of motivation and creativity for me since my first semester at
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, when his acclaimed Advanced Interpretive Methods
seminar changed my academic outlook and impassioned me with the spirit of social justice-
oriented critical inquiry. He made me feel like I had come home. I am especially grateful also to
Dr. Pradeep Dhillon, of the College of Education, for agreeing to come into my project relatively
late and yet still providing invaluable insights into the research environment in India. I really
appreciate the help Dr. Madhu Viswanathan, of the College of Business, for allowing me to participate in a field trip into Nuh, in interior Haryana, related to his Marketplace Literacy project. It gave me valuable insights into the contrast between India’s urban and rural landscapes.

I was fortunate to have studied with a great cohort in ICR – Tabe Bergman, Katia Curbelo, Richard Doherty, Stephen Hocker, Jungmin Kwon, Mel Stanfill, Ray Victor and Jungmo Youn were great friends and peers who made the challenging coursework seem more enjoyable with their novel insights and impassioned arguments. Katia’s infectious optimism and constant encouragement motivated me to stay focused amidst myriad challenges of overseas research. I never forget what my dear friend, and once professor, Suzanne Enck told me: “Koeli, you have two lives which you lead simultaneously.” I guess the same is true for many other immigrants who fall in love with their adopted country but can never really forget their homeland. So my community and family are spread across North America and India. Here in Champaign, my special thanks go to Sanjeeva Reddy, who never hesitated to take on an extra load from my share of work in all community projects when I ran into academic deadlines; Prabuddha Mukherjee, who gracefully offered to read my chapters and offer logics which only a scientist can offer; Rakhi Sen, who helped me calm down every time I panicked about never finishing my dissertation and the entire group of ECIBA, the community organization which sustains me with Bengali culture in the American Midwest.

In India, I am especially grateful for the love, generosity and advice of my lifetime friend and sister Jashodhara Dasgupta, whose dedicated service among the marginalized women of Uttar Pradesh over past several decades has consistently inspired me and made me proud. She kept me abreast with many finer details of India’s journey in these times even when I was absent from the scene. I am thankful for having the opportunity to spend time with several
intellectually-gifted and committed activists and citizens in India, among them Abhijit Das, Samrat Basu, Shilpa Bansal, Piali Moitra, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar have all contributed in some form or other to the ideas which circulate in these pages and remain important parts of my life even after this project is done.

Last, but not the least, my family members merit a huge thanks for tolerating my frequent departures from my home in Champaign as I prepared for fieldwork in India, my midnight study sessions, the hastily cooked meals, the absences from family vacations and many more other infractions which I could not avoid under pressures of graduate work. My mother, whose well-meaning impatience in announcing that her daughter is a “professor” despite being cautioned that I was quite a distance from that status, reminded me everyday how urgently I needed to finish my dissertation so she could see her dream come true. My sister and brother-in-law, Shibani and Amit Haldar, whose faith in my intellectual leanings helped me to gain the confidence to come back to school, deserve a heartfelt thank you. My children, Kavi, Oeishik, Natalie and Devayush, while making me proud every day of my life with their stellar achievements in high school, college and work life, also energized me to complete this project on time and conquer all misgivings. The youngest, Dev, merits special mention because, being the last to leave home and closest to me, he knew of my dreams and visions, and my struggles and challenges more than anyone else. He was always trying to be there for me, whether in sending me online links to news stories of pertinence to me, doing copy-editing or helping me with technology issues. Finally, I come back to where my center is – my husband, Naresh, who I don’t know how to thank enough, because I don’t know how I would have done this without his constant material and spiritual support. I love you.
## CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 2: VISUALIZING A “NEW INDIA”: YOUTUBE AS AN ARCHIVE OF CONTESTATIONS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY ................................................................. 30

CHAPTER 3: READING SILENCES: RE-VISIONING AN AUTHENTIC PAST BEYOND A MAZE OF CURATORIAL CHOICES IN MUSEUMS OF POSTCOLONIAL INDIA ........ 57

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING A NEW INDIA: THE CITY AS THE FACE OF THE NATION IN TRANSFORMATIONS OF URBAN LIFE FROM INDEPENDENCE THROUGH FIRST DECADES OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM ............................................. 104

CHAPTER 5: AWAKENING TO A NEW INDIA: AGENCY, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION AMONG INDIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE NCR .......... 156

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION ........................................................................... 214

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 236

APPENDIX A: PHOTOS OF NEW INDIA.................................................... 248

APPENDIX B: USEFUL LINKS TO ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS ..................... 329
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The time of the national is illusive; it needs excavating. It is constructed of a past filled with the nation’s founding myths and a future set to inherit the state as the necessary consequence of the nation – that is, the national is a time that looks to the past and inherits the future. As such, work that interrogates the past and locates it in the present is especially compelling. (Sassen, 2000, 223)

My project critically examines the metaphorical construction of “New India” and the many complex and conflicting realities this implies for the postcolonial society in the age of globalization. This critical cultural analysis will first examine the radical transformation in India’s national imagination from one of self-sufficient economic nationalism to that of a prosperous liberalized country as it is discursively constructed in media productions (YouTube videos, government websites, citizen’s network websites). In parsing through this narrative of civilizational rejuvenation, I also draw from ethnographic research data and review mainstream media coverage (newspapers articles, advertisements, magazine features), to interrogate the usual anchoring of the discussion of a new India in globalization, liberalization and economic development discourses and ground it in the contemporary cultural history of New Delhi and Gurgaon, both parts of India’s National Capital Region (NCR). While this examination is also of the new urban facet of India and adds to the discourse of “global cities,” in covering the “totality” of the city, I try to bring in oral history narratives from the domestic worker population of Delhi and Gurgaon, many of them migrants into the NCR. My orientation is towards the oft-silenced stories of marginalized groups to see how these ever-new configurations have played out in their lives.

I draw from critical scholarship in postcolonial theory, urban and globalization studies, and media studies for the theoretical foundation and use several different case studies in order to
elaborate on the multiple strategies deployed by consecutive generations of administrators to present the City as the representational entity for the postcolonial nation’s new identity through various architectural/ spatial, cultural, and political actions. Deploying critical qualitative inquiry methods, my ethnographic research among the domestic labor population of gated communities in Sohna Road in Gurgaon, and Saket area in New Delhi, as well as MNC executives and professionals in the Indian NCR illuminates not only the materiality of some of the national spaces showcased as representing the nation, but also builds a textured narrative of this new India, drawing from the memories, subjectivities, lived experiences and performances from the lives of the various human actors.

Background

More than 1.22 billion people, an economy growing around a rate of 6.5% in the first decade of the twenty first century, a dominating position in the field of trade, commerce, information technology, a burgeoning middle-class and half of its total population below 25 - India seems to be calling out for attention as it is being re-visioned as being among the leaders of a future global economic order. The discourse about this “New India” is euphoric and often contagious, the media images larger than life. Experts frequently cite financial statistics like gross domestic product, per capita income rise, fixed investments, input subsidies, foreign direct investments and ratio of rupee value, to claim that India has, finally, “arrived” on the world stage (D’Costa, 2012; Ganguly & Pardesi, 2007).

However, scholars also persistently point out that more than a quarter of its population live in absolute poverty with income Gini rated at the 36-43 range¹, the country has ranked consistently low in the human development reports of the United Nations and with state support

¹ Statistics from website of Central Intelligence Agency
receding within a neoliberal governance structure, a growing number of its population has increasingly been made vulnerable under precarious conditions brought about by uneven development (Majumdar, 2011; Ramakumar, 2010; Sen, 1990). Then again, it is difficult to ignore the revolution in the field of media and communication, which experts call the “media explosion” (Sundaram, 2005, Thussu, 2013) and which, coded under the shorthand of “globalization”, has transformed the country’s experience of national life, in fact, changed the way India views itself. While it has accelerated the commodification of culture leading to an electronic, consumerist orientation, it has also become the “in-between agent that has the dual potential of ruthlessly perpetrating homogenization of regional cultures as well as securing the longevity of heterogeneity of cultures from the urban to the tribal sectors” (Dasgupta, Sinha, & Chakravarty, 2012, 2). Since all of these are part of contemporary India, and both of the sharply contrasting views on India’s fortune have been legitimized in current discourses, scholars have insisted that: “There are two different, almost dichotomized, worlds in India. There is an India that is global and there is a Bharat that is local… It would seem that there are two worlds that co-exist in space even if they are far apart in well-being.” (Nayyar, 2010, xii-xiii). In a recent book called An Uncertain Glory: India and its contradictions, eminent scholar and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen joins his co-author, Jean Dreze, another influential figure in Indian development economics, to assess this dichotomy. Perhaps their evaluation goes some way in pointing the direction toward the story of these two Indias, not necessarily in the urban-rural divide, nor much in the global-local gap either, but rather entrenched in the story of those who have been included and those left behind in India’s recent progress.

Since India’s recent record of fast economic growth is often celebrated, with good reason, it is extremely important to point to the fact that the societal reach of economic progress in India has been remarkably limited. … The living standards of the “middle classes” (which tends to mean the top 20 per cent or so of the population
by income) have improved well beyond what was expected – or could be anticipated – in the previous decades. But the story is more complex for many others such as the rickshaw puller, domestic worker or brick kiln laborer. For them, and other underprivileged groups, the reform period has not been so exciting. It is not that their lives have not improved at all, but the pace of change has been excruciatingly slow and has barely altered their abysmal living conditions. (Drèze & Sen, 2013, 28-29)

Research Question

In exploring India’s contemporary reality, my search starts with an examination of India’s identity, if at all a unified national identity may be imagined within this postcolonial nation’s innumerable diversities. It then proceeds to the processes and visions which enter into a radical redefinition of “India” within these complex multiplicities. The questions that my project addresses are: What is the “New India” that is being circulated in popular and academic literature (Figure 1.1)? Is “New India” simply a fancy idiom for describing a modern India (Figure 1.2) or does it portend a “seismic cultural shift” (Sundaram, 2010, 5) in the national imaginary about the identity of the nation? What are the various dimensions in need of parsing for crucial insights into the transformation of the country’s past colonial and postcolonial identity within the context of its globalized present?

In pursuing these questions, I am motivated by Sassen’s recommendations that “the imperative for research is to identify precisely what remains national today in what has historically been constructed as national, to decode what national means today, and to ascertain the new territorialities and institutional conditionalities of national states” (Sassen, 2000, 229). However, I also suggest that the language of globalization, urbanization and class formations are often inadequate in describing or analyzing the proliferating New India discourse because such theorization often does not place it within a wider and deeper politics of postcolonial aspirations and anxiety. To do justice, a discussion should be predicated on past discourses of nation-
building, national identity formation in post-Independence era and the immense momentum of liberalization and uneven touchdown of globalization affecting India in the two past decades. I hope that my research questions will find their answers in the next four chapters, and also point towards future areas of study, based on the questions which further arise as I look at the four dimensions of representing the nation’s identity: the online archive, the traditional museum, the city and the citizen.

Whereas India’s emerging status as an economic power, prolifically articulated in the recent past with focus on its membership in the BRIC coalition, its recent economic growth acceleration, the escalating foreign direct investments and the foreign acquisitions and mergers, usually forms the backdrop for the articulation of a new India (Ganguly & Pardesi, 2007; Li, 2012; Sen, 2010), my project proposes a different orientation in order to elucidate the various other imaginaries that are layered into this newness. Recent scholarship in the social sciences on new India have looked at diverse issues like new interpretations of India’s economic growth (Sen, 2010; Nayyar, 2010) the new knowledge economy of the twentieth century (Radhakrishnan, 2007; Thottam, 2012), the performance of the agricultural sector (Ramakumar, 2010), the dynamics arising from continuity and change within a gendered perspective of India’s growth (Rao, 2010). They have also drawn attention to the accentuation of prevailing divides like those of urban-rural, caste-class, gender and ethnicity. My review of literature showed that there are relatively fewer studies devoted to critically analyzing the transformations in India’s socio-cultural identity in light of the radical transformations and restructuration of power that globalization has called forth. I direct my dissertation towards filling that gap foregrounding the
examination against the tensions emerging between “India” and “Bharat,” especially as the latter came to be used in state communication as a signifier of a classical civilization of mystical origins and is seen privileged mainly in the state’s civilizational discourses and vernacular press.

**Thesis Statement**

By examining transformations brought in by globalization in India in the light of colonial and postcolonial legacies, I suggest that while the New India discourse portends a fundamental shift in national imagination, in which the newness is coupled with global ascendancy and economic progress, the structural foundations of this New India, based on hegemonic constructions of power relations within a caste-class-ethnicity-religion matrix, continue from the past - holding sway even as they are renegotiated, reconfigured and articulated in the language of progress and globalization. In highlighting the configuration of the global city within the Indian urban, the material entity that represents this new India, I channel my discussion of the New vs. Old India through an examination of the logic of spatial action persisting from the colonial era. That the study of spatial action has acquired a new currency is understandable in the face of extensive urban expansion and spatialization leading from globalization processes, where cities have gained prominence as primary conduits for circulation of goods, capital, products, people, knowledge, images, fashions: “the combination of spatial dispersal and global integration has created a new strategic role for major cities” (Sassen, 2001, 3). I argue that in postcolonial societies such as India, while globalization has definitely initiated rapid urbanization of a novel kind, closer scrutiny reveals that the logic under which the capital city region was developed in the colonial period was present in some form, in a similar, contiguous, abiding proclivity, even during the postcolonial and globalized times. The most

---

2 “Bharat” is the vernacular term for India and in recent discourse is often the referent for rural India.
important logic of spatial action that one notices in the organization of colonial Delhi, New Delhi and Gurgaon is the deployment of urban space as a marker of national identity within which spatial politics is used to establish power over the governed. While it continues to be challenged and resisted in a postcolonial setting like India, by what scholars like Chatterjee (2004) call the “politics of the governed”, the use of space and spatial organization as a containment strategy, as a method of stratification of population and segregation according to culture-specific values is undeniable.

This is an interdisciplinary study of how a global climate characterized by neoliberal restructuring of the state, market, national and individual life has initiated profound revisions within the society and culture of a postcolonial state, reoriented its national imagination and initiated efforts to reconstruct the nation’s identity. In recognizing that the celebratory discourses of economic development and progress glosses over complex realities on the ground, I focus particularly on the ruptures in this overarching narrative of ascendance by highlighting the interventions of the underclass, who, despite being repeatedly marginalized, could still not be foreclosed from India’s destiny. In reading the oral history accounts of many of the protagonists of this neglected new India, my work tries to look for utopian possibilities among the many changes which transformed the fabric of India’s postcolonial society - reviewing them in the light of negotiations arising from re-organizations not only within the economic but also the political, cultural and social realms. Therefore, this project is not merely about transformations in the representations of national identity, but it is also about individual aspirations within a globalized imaginary system.

In studying the narrative of the “New India” which emerges from postcolonial projects of constructing a cohesive historical narrative of a unified India, the iterations of the City as a face
of the country’s changing fortunes, and from the spotlight views of changing lives and lifestyles of the heterogeneous population as expressed in their own words, my project analyzes a nation’s evolving life within a global capitalist system which empowers an increasingly mobile, networked and cosmopolitan “elite” to operate and control multiple and interconnected systems of privilege. It examines how globalization has reconstituted the image of the nation and of national prosperity, development and progress (national, regional and individual) in the minds of the ordinary citizen. In this, I focus not only on the lives of the educated, upwardly mobile urban elite but also on the lives and choices made by the common multitudes, like domestic workers and menial laborers, attempting to bring multiple voices and visions into the discussion of India’s national identity as it shapes up at the intersection of postcolonial aspirations and a globalized imagination.

Within an assertion of New Delhi’s metamorphosis as a “global city” in the first decade of the millennium, especially during the Commonwealth Games (Majumdar, 2011), or official representation of Gurgaon as the “Millenium City,” the oral history of the migrant domestic labor community in Gurgaon and Saket is an effort to reveal the many ruptures which qualify the urban experience and undermine this overarching narrative of the urbanization as progress. In foregrounding the textured life, materialities and human flows within this contemporary urban NCR (Figures 1.3, 1.4), I historicize the story of here and now against a historical backdrop of the city of New Delhi, exploring the frenetic activity, incessant mobility, and contradictory currents which intersect in this globally-connected but locally invested postcolonial society.

It is a postcolonial intervention in the sense that it examines the “Third World global city” of the twenty first century that has emerged from the legacies of erstwhile colonial rule on one hand, and, on the other, is being constantly transformed by the intense impact of a capitalist
world system, and the “uneven touchdown of globalization” (McCarthy, class lecture, 2011). Yet at another level, this is an exploration of complex intersections of a postcolonial and post-developmental society with the global neoliberal restructuring where crucial contestations on national and cultural identity, cultural difference and representation, political and social authority, territory and citizenship rights are being fought out in the lives of ordinary citizens struggling hard to keep pace with the juggernaut of globalism.

The question I also try to answer is how does India’s postcoloniality figure within the dynamics of its recent transformation and how is the country’s national identity shaped within the coordinates of the “global” and the “postcolonial” in ways peculiar to a society which emerged from colonial rule as recently as 1947. Here, the pattern that is apparent from social practices and productions is certainly of a global culture slowly but steadily assuming center-stage. Is the postcolonial aspect of India’s culture then a disputable point, and postcolonialism, then, an outdated concept harking back to a bygone socio-political formation which had best been retained within the literary-cultural sphere where it originated? The answer to this is complicated. If we were to look at postcolonialism through a narrow lens – as connected to the study only of previously colonized societies or of academic literature originating thereof – yes. But if one took lessons from all the different “post” theories, many of them are organized around the deconstruction of standard narratives of historical formations. In fact, I draw from McCarthy & Dimitriadis (2000) in trying to reach at the meaning in which “postcolonial” is used in my chapters:

the “post” in the postcolonial is not to be understood as a temporal register as in “hereinafter” but a sign and cultural marker of a spatial challenge and contestation with the occupying powers of the West in the ethical, political, and aesthetic forms of the marginalized. (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000, 233)
In that sense, postcolonialism could be rationalized as an influential theory which reviews not simply the global situation but deconstructs the narratives which underwrite globalization theories, and also analyzes the obvious contradictory situations of this digitized, networked, IT-empowered world with its ability to tease out the astounding inequities, amazing mobilities, innumerable multiplicities and revolutionary propensities.

Within the limited context of this study, ethnographic work in India reveals complex configurations of publics emerging out of the postcolonial society’s negotiations within the global economic system. Whereas all those configurations do not arise merely because the society emerged from colonial rule, some of the complex and contradictory developments are indeed because histories and political cultures in postcolonial societies emerge differently. In this, the postcolonial aspirations of a political elite, the mobilization of a relatively sophisticated civil society, the ambitious, upwardly-mobile and rapidly-expanding middle-class, novel media formations and the radically reactionary positions adopted by some sections of the marginalized populations forge with multiplicities of global flows to create intense negotiations on meanings of progress, development and the global present. If anything, the developmental trajectory of postcolonial India is fraught with contradictions and retractions. Several instances of mass mobilizations and intense contestations on issues of land use, food security, anti-corruption policies and right to information legislations lead one to question how challenges to the sovereignty of the state within a capitalist world order will configure with tensions rising from within the population who question governance structures, policies initiatives and developmental agendas.
The Food Security Bill 2013, (passed by the United Progressive Alliance government\(^3\)), as seen through a review of media coverage, has initiated myriad questions on political agendas and entitlement structures. India’s civil society was schooled by, has historically learnt from, and frequently draws from the Civil Disobedience Movement during independence, especially Gandhian non-violent struggle against British colonial rule. The country is also vested with a large spectrum of media sphere. On one side, this reasonably independent fourth estate ensures relatively unimpeded circulation of public opinion and on another it promotes political expediency focused on populist policy-making (Figures 1.5, 1.6). This often means that despite incorrigible corruption, the end game of political initiatives and governance is often played within a somewhat blatant “people-friendly” framework in an effort to appease “janta janardhan,” – a phrase which could be literally translated as “public is God” or more metaphorically, as “people power.” Political power, wielded by a political elite thus seemingly originates in the masses but in an obverse way might actually be counterproductive since the Indian “janta” or “aam admi” or “lok” meaning the multitudes or masses, are neither a monolithic entity nor homogenous. The legislations on Food Security, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, Right to Information Act and the legislation on Corporate Social Responsibility are populist measures pushed by a political elite increasingly destabilized on one side by unimpeded erosions of State power due to advances of the Market and on the other by waves of mass mobilizations\(^4\) often initiated by new media and civil society initiatives. According to Akhil Gupta (November 19, 2013, UIUC campus lecture), despite high economic growth rates, social tensions seem to be

\(^3\) The UPA is a coalition of left political parties who has been the ruling entity at the Center since 2004 general elections.

\(^4\) For example the 2011 Jan Lokpal movement led by social activist Anna Hazare. It is currently being run by a stable political entity – the anti-graft Aam Admi party.
rising in India. Uneven growth has led to increasing disparities between urban and rural areas, and between different regions of the country. Gupta forwards a theory that connects a series of phenomena that have largely been analyzed in isolation: conflicts over land in the urban periphery; an armed uprising in areas of the country inhabited primarily by indigenous groups; a middle-class movement over political corruption; the growing size of the informal sector and the black economy; the rise of the service-sector economy; the entrenchment of mass popular democracy and decentralized governance; the increased influence of industrial capitalists on the state; and the renewed investments in welfare programs. While studying the relevance of all these diverse but related phenomena to my study might be too ambitious a proposal in this case, I do move forward into my dissertation with the recognition that almost all these bear upon the milieu and the terrain that I am talking about.

Methodology

Cultural studies has often focused not only on artifacts such as newspapers, television programs, movies and popular music, but also “practices like shopping, watching sports events, going to a club, or hanging out in the local coffee shop” (Durham & Kellner, 2006, xiv), which provide great entry points in understanding the changing face of society. In an epoch personified by radical innovations in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), where states aggressively pursue neoliberal techniques of governance, and social life is marred by fragmentation and chaos, cultural artifacts can be extraordinary entry points into a discussion of India’s rapidly changing cultural landscape. A deeper and closer scrutiny of different forms of media presentations, archival records, photographs, and government publicity videos are invaluable for a clearer and current picture of this nascent culture. My dissertation will examine five major areas that are animated in discursively producing the identity of New India:
i. Media artifacts like *YouTube videos* and government-sponsored ad films.

ii. Textual analysis of archival documents and visual analysis of museum exhibits, photographs, artifacts to review the founding narrative of the nation as it was originally articulated and found reincarnation through the decades when repeatedly circulated in media as the visual representation of the nation;

iii. State-citizen communication as viewed in government and citizen group websites.

iv. Critical visual analysis of videos, photographs, paintings, signage.

v. Communication emerging from focus group discussions on New India

I draw from critical interpretive and qualitative research methods and use postcolonial theory, urban studies, communication and media studies for the theoretical foundation. The methodological decisions for conducting the several different case studies, are described in detail in the chapters themselves. In addition to this Introduction chapter and a last concluding chapter, my dissertation proceeds in four chapters. Chapter 2 analyzes new media productions, government websites, and press coverage to evaluate how an emergent online discourse foregrounds the “New India” by uploading videos and slide shows of India’s urban life and draws from the dominant globalization discourse to connect these two concepts to a narrative of progress. Chapter 3 looks at national archival displays to tease out the construction of the story of the nation and a cohesive national identity by a postcolonial elite soon after gaining independence. Chapters 4 is based on analysis of data from ethnographic work in the NCR region during 2011-2013 to study the newly emerging “global” urban which seems to be reiterated and circulated in media discourses of a “new” India. Within this discussion of India’s urban landscape represented in the development of the National Capital Region (NCR), I also
review lives and lifestyles of corporate executives, senior as well as entry level employees of the many national and international firms who have entered the Indian market post-liberalization.

My overall project started by examining and analyzing online presentations under the title or keyword of “New India”, photographs taken in the NCR during preliminary fieldwork in 2011, print press coverage, and video clips collected during fieldwork. Two major Indian newspapers were used for the print media coverage of current issues and New India constructions. These were the Times of India and The Hindu. Selected news clips during the period July - September 2013 were saved in a scrapbook so they could be preserved for later analysis. In order to focus on the city as a display window and parse through the various architectural, cultural, political and performative dimensions of the city, I spent several months in the NCR region between Spring 2011 and Fall 2013, the last being the actual time when I stayed in Gurgaon and conducted my final fieldwork over a period of five months. During this time I visited miscellaneous rural and suburban communities in Haryana and Punjab around the NCR region, spent time in the various neighborhood cafes, some restaurants and bars frequented by the executives, markets and malls within the Delhi-Gurgaon area and also attended ongoing exhibitions at several museums in the NCR. Simultaneously, I met with different groups of citizens like civil society members, educators, corporate executives, local professionals, homemakers, domestic workers, menial workers as well as students and new migrants, to develop an insight into how they framed their lives as citizens in the NCR and also review possibilities of finding suitable gatekeepers for initiating my fieldwork. The archival data was collected in 2013 on several site visits to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and the National Museum, even though pictures analyzed were also taken at the Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts and the National Gallery of Modern Art. The focus groups were conducted
among the residents and domestic labor population of gated communities in Sohna Road in Gurgaon, and Saket area in New Delhi as well as MNC professionals and young executives of national firms in Gurgaon.

Focus groups were conducted mainly during 2013 even though the initial groundwork for the research was started in 2011. The material for the oral history narratives, which form the backbone of Chapter 5 and also a substantial portion of Chapter 4, were all collected during the seven focus groups that I participated in in 2013 Summer and Fall. The conversations were video recorded on a Canon PowerShot S95 handheld camera and most of the dialogues were also recorded on an iPhone. This was in addition to handwritten notes taken during the focus groups. They were then transferred to two different applications of the Mac platform: iTunes and iMovie. The VLC application was also used in addition to iTunes and iMovie. Some of the conversations were conducted in Hindi\(^5\) or Bengali\(^6\), while others were conducted in English. This was according to the capabilities and preferences of the participants. After the transfer into iTunes, iMovie and VLC, the recordings were analyzed, stabilized and formatted for playback. Following this, the narratives were translated and transcribed into the current format to be included in the respective chapters. All names of focus group participants have been changed in order to protect their identity.

Theoretical Framework

*Postcolonial Theory*

Postcolonial theory argues that its area of study is the entire gamut of cultures affected by the imperial process from the time of colonization to the present. Despite being seen as focusing on countries affected by a colonial past, this body of work has also been deployed in cultural

\(^5\) India’s national language
\(^6\) The regional language for West Bengal and national language for Bangladesh.
translation, in understanding, reinterpreting and rewriting the forms and effects of an older colonial consciousness in light of more recent experiences. With a “growing awareness within US and British political and intellectual culture that imperialism and colonialism, either directly or in their aftermaths, are still constitutive elements of the modern world and its conflicts” (Barker, Hulme & Iversen, 1994, 1), the term "postcolonial" is broadly taken to signify a position against imperialism and Eurocentrism (Bahri, 1996).

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of ‘minorities’ within the geopolitical divisions of East, West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. (Bhabha, 1994, 245)

Whereas some of the most influential and nuanced theoretical propositions by postcolonial theorists have been complex interventions into the social, intellectual and political assumptions rising from binary social relations of a world divided into the colonizer and colonized, or the Center and Periphery, I focus on the ambivalence inherent within postcolonial societies even as they “emerge” from the effects of colonization beset with all their disparities and contradictions. The thrust of my thesis is in understanding India’s changing national imagination and how ideological rhetoric and hegemonic cultural representations re-inscribe the postcolonial identity of the nation within an alternate paradigm of globalization. In this discussion on how to organize my study of the new India within the dialectics of postcolonialism and globalization, I begin with a cue from Bhabha on the need to move beyond totalizing narratives. I position my theoretical argument in relation to his references to cultural representation and cultural difference within the world as well as national orders. Bhabha (1994) reiterates the need to move past narratives of originary and initial subjectivities to concentrate on
theoretically innovative and politically important moments produced in the negotiation of cultural differences and awareness of ever new subject positions – of race, gender, sexual orientations, generation or geo-political locale. In new subjectivities rise the possibility of rearticulating the idea of society itself – “The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities – as the grounds of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition” (Bhabha, 1994, p.7).

In examining the vibrant and diverse social and cultural formations in Gurgaon, especially in describing how the indigenous practices of the Bengali migrants get configured within their current lives in the Haryanvi community and their lilt of their Bengali tongues take on the stronger cadences of the Haryana Hindi, I am repeatedly tempted to draw from Bhabha’s development of the concept of “hybridity”, the in-between-ness of cultural forms evolving out of a culture of survival: “hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture” (Bhabha, 1994, xiii). However, I am cautioned by more recent critical scholarship against the indiscriminate adoption of the concept of hybridity to be applied without careful consideration because of the “depoliticizing potential of accepting that there is an inevitable mixture and hybridity in everything and that if everything and everyone is hybrid then there in no theoretical validity to the term” (Valdivia, 2005, 309). Indeed, in parsing through the in-between culture that emerges from the dialogues of my focus group participants, especially the MNC execs, this caution is justified in view of the fact that what emerges is also a syncretic formation between various Western and Indian cultural usages. The concept then becomes most useful in informing my study against any “essentialist notion” (Valdivia, 2005) of a pure identity either of the nation, or of a race or an individual entity. While there is limited
scope within this study to examine in depth the new cultural formations within the special
temporalities and spatialities which emerge among the population flows of Gurgaon, hybridity as
a concept would be far more useful in examining, in a detailed future study, the diverse ways in
which these populations interact, adopt, and adapt to the new influences creating an
unfinalizeable array of cultural iterations each slightly refracted from the original, if there is any.

This position would be helpful in the current context not only to reexamine the
developmental modernism incorporated in the Nehruvian model of nation-building as a
postcolonial ideal but also to interrogate the fiction of a unified Indian nation contributing
towards creating a “secular national consciousness” (Sundaram, 2010, 4). Partially reviewed in
the nation-building project of the elite, in Chapter 3, the “imaginary institution of India” and the
painting of a “seemingly homogenous history” of the nation and nation-builders within the
complex canvas of Indian nationalism (Kaviraj, 1992, 4), is examined in the Conclusion,
pointing directions to the need for further scholarship. In addition to this, postcolonial theory
helps us parse through the chronology and logic of India’s “urban move:” i) starting from
Nehruvian re-orientation of the nation’s course from earlier Gandhian allegory of the idyllic
Indian village to national modernization and then ii) the 1990s’ liberalization and faster
integration into the capitalist world economy (D’Costa, 2010), further on to iii) the neoliberal
spatialization of the Indian countryside for setting up of secure, tax-free, Special Economic
Zones (SEZs) and, eventually, iv) the rise of cities and the global urban. Seen from this
viewpoint, it is easy to argue that nationalism and its attendant ideology could also be versions of
“colonialism in the suppression and appropriation of local identities for a national identity”
(Dirlik, 2002, 428). Following Wallerstein’s (1991) argument that a nation’s account of its
history is contingent upon who writes it and for whom, it is possible to view national history and
identity as being dependent upon the ideological lens through which they are examined. In India, post-colonial nation-building saw the deployment of hegemonic discourse geared towards an erasure of diverse regional and local cultures and promotion of a homogeneous national culture to aid and abet the mission of endowing the nation with a unified cultural identity (Sundaram, 2010; Chatterjee, 2004; Nandy, 1998; 2003). And now the “global” has replaced the “national.” Consequently, hegemonic discourses piggyback on the logic of global integration and economic progress to overlook the local social and political costs of rapid modernization/ liberalization/ urbanization.

According to Bhabha, culture is “an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival,” (1994, 247), and the naturalized unifying discourses of “nation” or “peoples” or “authentic folk traditions” are embedded myths of culture’s particularity. When culture is viewed as a strategy of social survival which communities and diaspora call forth in this process of surviving dominant discourses and assimilation strategies, the various aspects of its transnational quality, woven through the myriad flows of migration, displacement or diasporic experiences help to underscore also its complex translational potential. Above all, such positions clarify the fact that culture is definitely a social construction and traditions are invented. By problematizing processes of interpretation and representation deployed in the earlier “grand narratives” emerging from the West, a “kind of reading against the grain,” (Bhabha, 1994) the postcolonial critique not only emphasizes the indeterminism of culture and political judgment but also forces one to rethink the terms which have been used to conceptualize community, nationality, citizenship and social affiliations. It is a celebration of a resistant trait which constantly
challenges all efforts to incorporate postcolonial narratives within theories of relativism and pluralism which base their theories on understanding the Other as a homogenous absolute.

In my current project this helps us re-examine India’s post-Independence national modernization under the overarching narrative of national integration and development by questioning the construction of the postcolonial elite class and their nation-building mission:

The very groups that appeared in an earlier anticolonial discourse as obstacles to national unity because of their complicity with colonialism out of material interest or cultural bonding appear in contemporary postcolonial discourse as the paradigmatic products of the colonial encounter. The borders, in other words, have taken over from the interior in the understanding of the colonial encounter, also calling into question what nation or national culture might mean under the circumstances. (Dirlik, 2002, 434).

Whereas the predictable route for a postcolonial society to take would have been away from the capitalist machinations underlying colonialism in all its violence and repression, quite counter-intuitively, postcolonial India’s trajectory veered towards a Euro-centric modernism in the immediate aftermath of colonial rule in 1947. Despite the fact that this course was also combined with and variously configured through parallel myths of ethnic singularity and original Vedic purity, it would be useful for a postcolonial critique not to overlook the national political elite’s abiding propensity toward Eurocentric acculturation (Nandy, 2003). Postcolonial scholarship has seen the relationship between the colonizer and colonized as much one of unity as of Manichean opposition and despite all the oppression of the colonial system, the ties forged between the two groups have often been immediate and concrete (Dirlik, 2002).

Where postcolonial theory could be defined as a set of critical and theoretical strategies used to examine the history, culture, politics and literature of erstwhile colonized societies, my project relies on the extension of such strategic interventions into current configurations of postcolonial societies by globalization. Drawing on Dirlik’s (2002) re-examination of colonialism in the light of postcolonial globalization, my theoretical direction is towards
understanding the debate over colonialism as “a stage on the way to globalization – the most recent phase in the spatialization of the world by a capitalism that has yet to live out its history” (430). These debates (Dirlik, 2002; During, 2000, 392) have stimulated discussions on the sharp distinctions between critical and reconciliatory postcolonial thought. Whereas both are responses to the delegitimation of a colonial past under forces of globalization, it is their significant oppositional positionings with which I am concerned at this point. If one follows the logic of reconciliatory postcolonialism, then “colonialism in effect becomes an episode in the longer sweep of globalization” (During, 2000, 392) and consequently a “kind of tragedy with a happy ending” because despite all the destruction and ethnocide it is based on, it finally has a happy world-historical outcome in globalization. (392). Critical postcolonialism, on the other hand, is invested in recovering or constructing “differences and marginalized pasts… against the West, as the West was being emptied out into, or diffused through, the global system” (During, 2000, 392).

In the end, if a position is to be taken, my theoretical orientation is to align with critical postcolonial theory, emphasizing that colonialism, postcolonialism and globalism are, in practice, reductive and often divided names for forces which have always worked in transaction with one another: “Contemporary world unification is simultaneously reconfiguring the past in its own image and renewing colonial struggles which keep old pasts alive” (During, 2000, 392). To the extent that recent postcolonial authors have viewed issues of colonialism as revolving mostly around the issues of capitalism, my postcolonial inquiry of India’s transformation following globalization is fully cognizant that “Postcolonial criticism, as it appears presently, speaks to the legacies of the past, but it is arguably informed in its basic premises and orientations by assumptions that derive their plausibility from its context in globalization,”
(Dirlik, 2002, 429). However, I suggest that in deciphering situations arising from the dynamics of globalization, it is possible to envisage new conditions of colonization, newer cycles of exploitation arriving from the intricacies of this enmeshing of two mega historical forces. One way to conceptualize postcolonialism would be as a shift in global relations in which the transition from Empire and imperial dynamics to a post-Independence or post-colonization moment is attended by new combinations and dispersals of power relations. To follow Hall’s assessment, the only way to develop a true insight is to recognize that we are at present in a space of great political complexity and ambiguity and such ambivalence is an essential part of “our ‘new times’ in which both the crisis of the uncompleted struggle for ‘decolonization’ and the crisis of the ‘post-independence’ state are deeply inscribed” (Hall, 1996, p.244).

**Globalization Theories**

Sassen (2001, 2006) has reiterated that globalization involves “epochal transformations” of the most complex of institutional infrastructures. Ong (2006) talked about the marginalization of the poor and the displaced in the emerging global system. On a more specific note, policies adopted by the government of India in order to initiate a “western-centric” globalization has resulted in a neoliberal, capitalist culture triggering remarkable changes in the social, economic, political and cultural environment of the country including rapidly widening gaps between the rich and the poor, disparities between the urban and the rural communities, and the marginalization and devastation of the lifestyles and livelihood of indigenous and neglected populations. As India adopted globalization in early 1990s, it liberalized its economy, introduced attendant structural adjustment programs and incorporated widespread urbanization resulting in more than 31% of its population living in cities by the end of 2011⁷. Whereas research on this

---

⁷ 2011 Census
superfast urbanization in India projects that almost 70 per cent of India’s population will live in cities by 2030\(^8\) - a staggering 590 million, this move for rapid urbanization has been partially responsible for human rights issues, including rural lifestyles being threatened to the maximum and agricultural professions facing grave crisis (Figure 1.7):

In the name of ‘public interest’ and ‘national development’ the innocent indigenous people sacrifice all the minimal resources under their possession and move to the towns and cities in search of livelihood…. They lose their culture, identity, customs, and dignity and adjust with the mainstream culture and end up as wage labourers, rickshaw pullers and confine to slums for living. (Karunakar, 2011, 158)

While globalization, has initiated epochal transformations of institutional infrastructures, at no point should it be reduced to a simple equation about the “victimhood of national states at the hands of globalization” (Sassen, 2006, 1). Connected to this is Ong’s analysis of issues of citizenship emerging from globalization in many Asian states with reconfigurations of statehood, nationhood, territory and population, thereby bringing into discourse new theories on sovereignty, citizenship and power. Appadurai referred to the devastating marginalization of the poor and the displaced in the emerging global system as the “double apartheid” effect of globalization (2000, 3). The first apartheid addresses a gap between the academic debates surrounding issues of representation, identity, recognition and the problematic of accommodating those within the more localized discourses on cultural autonomy and economic survival in the era of “open” economies. The second is the distancing that the poor feel from intellectual discourses on globalization and intricacies of policy formulation on relevant issues of trade, labor, environment, and warfare.

My study analyses if and how marginalized people routinely get excluded from an environment of rights not because they do not have legal citizenship but because they are often

---

\(^8\) McKinsey Global Institute Report, April 2010
hidden from the view or lack the representation or are stripped of their rights once they are on the move to look for livelihood (Ong, 2006). The “double apartheid” effect of globalization (Appadurai, 1990, 2000) impels me to examine, in the context of Gurgaon, more localized and vernacular discourses on one hand and on the other, the distancing that the poor feel from discourses of progress and policy formulation. Authors like Spivak (1988, 1999), Chakrabarty (2002), Sen (1992, 1999) and Chatterjee (1994) have variously shown their concern for the plight of the marginalized and poor, often referred to as “the subaltern” in postcolonial literature, resulting from conditions of globalization. In visiting issues of power relations between the governing and the governed, they have pointed to an emerging global civil society (Spivak, 1999) as well as a “political society” in India (Chatterjee, 2004). Whereas this scholarship has often highlighted general effects of globalization on populations, Ong’s ethnographic studies have specifically focused on the march of predatory capitalism, the deployment of neoliberal governing technologies in countries like China, Malaysia, Singapore. Since there is a need for similar research on communities developing in India following the country’s incorporation into a global economy and the resultant urbanization, my research will add to the area which Ong’s global ethnographic studies addressed, by giving an integrated and penetrating look at India’s “global city” Gurgaon, and its community: not merely its economic micro-processes, resource flows, political alliances but also the individual subjectivities and challenges faced by its marginalized populations.

The city of Gurgaon is located southwest of New Delhi, in the state of Haryana within the northwestern segment of the Indian nation-state. The mechanics of rampant neoliberal capitalism in this specialized urban zone have been instrumental in raising this space to a different plane – a globally defined urban plane. This movement is in direct correspondence to Sassen’s thesis on
the growth of a transnational network of cities dependent upon growth of global markets, financial restructuration and need for specialized transnational servicing networks (Sassen, 2001, xxi). Consequently, urban Gurgaon now has little in common with its geographically contiguous areas of Mewat, Sohna, Nuh, Manesar, Hissar, Rohtak or Kurukshetra but neither much more in common with distant SEZ\(^9\)s, SUZ\(^{10}\)s, of western countries or even industrialized spaces of other Asian countries which are part of the global network. It aspires to be a global city and houses the regional offices of multinational corporations like Alcatel, American Express, British Airways, Coca Cola, Ericsson, Fidelity Investments, Genpact, General Motors, Gillette, HP, Google, Hewitt, IBM, Motorola, Nestle, New York Life, Nokia, Pepsi, Xerox and several others.

My hypothesis (as explored in Chapters 4 and 5) is that hyper-flows of population into these new urban spaces combine with complex machinations of globalization to reinforce existing power structures and also create new sets of power relations. This also figures in how configurations of economic and social status, language, ethnicity, regional affiliations all combine to create tensions in already volatile community dynamics. Conditions of landlessness, poverty and alien origins exaggerate insecurities of migrant populations of menial workers in Gurgaon and encourage local populations to adopt exploitative practices. Several of these practices are geared to carving out variegated citizenship rights in which the dominant publics demand and secure higher status, authority, or political and economic privileges for themselves. Despite the fact that Gurgaon demonstrates many features of a global corporate business zone, inequities abound here and basic organization and amenities for the general masses exhibit all the deficiencies of a Third World country struggling under the burden of accommodating millions on the move. My research seeks to arrive at a close and nuanced reading of Indian version of the

\(^9\) Special Economic Zones - developed by post-developmental states during globalization
\(^{10}\) Special Urban Zones
global urban so as to closely explore a society remarkable in its continuity to and departure from most previous models of transformation of the postcolonial.

Chapters Outlines: A Space Defined by Colonialism and Capitalist Culture

In examining the concept of “New India” and attending to the articulations of India’s new avatar in the global age, I start my discussion in Chapter 2 by looking at YouTube as an archive for presentations on this new image of India. My critical cultural analysis starts by examining the radical transformation in India’s national imagination from one of threadbare self-sufficient economic nationalism and Hindu mysticism to that of a prosperous liberalized country as it is discursively constructed in new media productions on YouTube videos and government websites. In Chapter 3, by critically examining the institutional representations of two major national museums, I focus on the story of the birth of a new nation – an independent India as it emerges from colonial rule – and the many contradictory decisions which had to be taken by a newly empowered elite in the efforts of their nation-building and creating a national public. Acknowledging the fact that the economy is still crucial in any articulation of Indian national identity, I look back into archival records and displays for origins of the “new” India construct in the rhetoric of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru during his inaugural speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly in the first hours of independent India’s birth. In analyzing the ideological positions and political decisions, I review how the new postcolonial elite administration positioned the story of the nation within a trope of new birth - with newness being constructed as a central attribute of India and Indian-ness. Whereas earlier scholarship emerging from the Subaltern Studies group, as well as more recent works have explored the founding myth of the Indian nation and construction of the institution of the national community in great detail
(Chatterjee, 1992; Guha, 1992; Kaviraj, 1992; Appadurai 1996; Appadurai, 2013), my study focuses more on the construction and circulation of that story in the postcolonial elite discourse.

Against this, I foreground the contemporary cultural history of New Delhi and Gurgaon, both parts of India’s national capital region in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Recent literature largely connects the narrative of a new India to the post-liberalization ascendance, to its status in the global economy as a high-growth region and all corresponding developments. However, I parse through the several dimensions of this emergence to propose that despite the high growth of the recent years, India’s journey towards the global economy has left behind vast sections of its population behind. Only certain sections have been incorporated into the IT and financial services sector and a broad base of its population is limited to janitorial, driving, and other menial services. Despite broad brushstrokes of political litany harping on the taxonomy of “Rural Bharat and Urban India,” the new avatar of India asks for a far more nuanced study than just the narrative of economic glory or binary constructions.

Chapter 4 with its focus on the City, captures the wider landscape of India’s transformation in a market-dominated world. This examination of contestations on India’s national identity focuses on a predominantly urban dimension of the New India construct and adds to the discourse of “global cities,” (as articulated by Sassen 2001, 2006, 2012). In studying the rich materiality of this complex ground, my project develops in tandem with David Harvey’s (2006) proposal of conveying “some sense of the totality of what the city was about through a variety of perspectives on material life, on cultural activities, on patterns of thought within the city”.

In the final section of my dissertation, Chapter 5, I examine how complex machinations of globalization reinforce existing power structures, create new sets of power relations and also
new colonizations. Following Denzinian critical ethnographic fieldwork, this part of my project leads to oral history-based performance texts highlighting narratives of marginalization and empowerment from domestic and household laborers in Gurgaon and Saket area of the NCR. In these negotiations and contestations of power, not only economic and social status but also language, ethnicity, regional affiliations come into play.

The idea of “intimate habitation” (Madison, 2010, 24) is based on the belief that a community cannot be an object that can be studied from the outside, but it has to be inhabited and experienced in order to find expression. This expression is through a corresponding method of privileging the voices of community members as “speaking subjects.” Informed by this, and drawing from my fieldwork among domestic workers, my last chapter engages in the problematics of academic engagement with representations and interpretations of subalternity. Where western epistemological practices have traditionally privileged the voice of the researcher and institutional regulations have demanded strict evidential support of data gathered in the field, how does the voice of the “speaking subject” come through? This paper works the Denzinian view of qualitative inquiry as a decolonizing project to explore possibilities inherent in emergent critical performative ethnographical practices. I argue that the volatile, and often messy circumstances in the field demand the deployment of a radical, innovative and improvisatory methodological framework which goes beyond established standards to unearth oppressive power formations and create visions of a more inclusionary global society, a just future which would “allow us to glimpse a world of the future conquered by difference and the polyglot voices of the marginalized and oppressed” (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000, 250).

The space in which my project takes shape is a complex one. I locate my work within the bigger picture of a world experiencing “successive crises of democracy and capitalism” (Denzin,
2003, xi) and then focus on the troubled arena of a third world country, India, where forces of current globalization intersect with heterogeneous influences of colonialism and traditional societal structures. Here, the remnants of a colonial past informs its postcolonial present with all the usual ramifications of such an intersection on social development, languages, education system, governmental structures, regional political balances, cultural practices, and underlying power relations. Since independence from colonial occupation in 1947, the project of social justice and human development in India have often been overshadowed by burdens of overpopulation, corruption at the local levels of government and the pressure to ensure a safe and secure atmosphere from a volatile regional politics. Chatterjee (2004) examines the postcolonial dilemma of countries like India, torn between adopting western technologies of population management and modernization on one hand and reinstating their indigenous, traditional structures – threatened by long years of colonial rule – on the other: “With varying degrees of success, and in some cases with disastrous failure, the postcolonial states deployed the latest governmental technologies to promote the well-being of their populations, often prompted and aided by international and nongovernmental organizations” (Chatterjee, 2004, 37). These maneuverings have resulted in vast gaps between segments of population and had long-standing effects in areas of social justice and egalitarian dispensations. During the process of this project, I have been grateful for the opportunity to explore and disseminate the effects of such machinations in real terms.
CHAPTER 2

VISUALIZING A “NEW INDIA”: YOUTUBE AS AN ARCHIVE OF CONTESTATIONS ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

The phenomenon of *YouTube* has recently revolutionized the global media community with its potential for initiating new ways in which history is recorded, science is understood, education is imparted and culture is analyzed. It has created reverberations reaching far beyond the boundaries of the media and communication world. In fact, it has helped explore, extend and explode many different kinds of boundaries and borders – both literal and metaphorical – and given power of dissemination to alternative discourses. *YouTube* is emerging as a relatively stable site not only for reflecting social and cultural processes and productions of a global society but is fast becoming a central forum for showcasing the achievements and milestones reached by diverse communities, emerging and developing societies, transnational corporations and an increasingly empowered global citizen, the ubiquitous prosumer – the proactive consumer who no longer just passively consumes media productions, but is also a producer, sometimes at a highly professional level.

To the individual user and citizen journalist, it grants access to far larger markets and audiences than many major corporations had had the chance to reach before. For scholars of critical cultural studies, *YouTube’s* user-generated content has the potential for providing keen insights and multiple perspectives into new developments in contemporary politics, economics,

---

11 A version of this paper was published earlier as a chapter in the following book: *Mobilized Identities: Mediated Subjectivity and Cultural Crisis in the Neoliberal Era*, (2013). This was published by Common Ground Publishing. Permission to reprint has been granted by the publisher under Article ii of the publishing agreement between the author and Common Ground Publishing. A copy of the letter granting Permission to Reprint is attached.
sciences, art or entertainment. The ease with which anyone can access *YouTube* content or upload his or her own production create possibilities in the future of leading to a direct upending of the top-down process of information dissemination so long followed by dominant media corporations and certainly holds great potential toward democratizing media (Garfield, 2006; Wall, 2009), and challenging traditional forms of institutional communication and collaborations. Leading from this, this participatory media format also holds the promise of developing into a highly efficient archival tool, preserving the cultural history of a society as recorded by grassroots publics.

**YouTube as a Platform for Visualizing New Imaginaries**

Forums like *Facebook* and *YouTube* have not only established themselves as exemplary social network systems and harbingers of cultural change but they are proving themselves as primary sites for production, circulation, search and exchange of a global society’s evolving lived experiences, and, a big part of its creative warehouse. This chapter proposes that the new media phenomenon, *YouTube* provides the platform for circulation of multiple perspectives on current issues often overriding dominant official narratives. This way it has the potential of becoming a repository for a society’s grassroots histories, traditionally silenced under hegemonic discourses while acting as a valuable medium for giving voice to various marginalized and underserved communities. By critically examining *YouTube* as an archival tool, this chapter records a transition in India’s national imagination – for long invested in a traditional and exotic past - and inscribes its national identity within an alternative discourse of globalization and economic power. It is thus possible to get novel insights into how new media is redefining this postcolonial society’s political, social and cultural production as it progresses in the emerging environments of 21st century global reality.
Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of such momentous developments in new media within the context of globalization and rapid urbanization of post-developmental India. At a time when critical scholars and philosophers have started debating about new ways of examining the ever-changing relationships between the global, national and local realms of politics, economics and culture, a central question which is often visited in the globalization discourse is how the rapidly-evolving information, communication and new media technologies will change the nature of communication in the complex dynamics of the 21st century. Previous research has explored the Web 2.0 environment and pointed to its democratic potential as well as the possibilities of resistance that can be enacted through presentation of alternative discourses. In India, according to a recent report by comScore the online audience for videos are rising very fast and it grew by 27 per cent in the past one year. According to Google, over 40 million unique users access YouTube every month across India. According to YouTube director of Content Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, thirty per cent of these users access YouTube from a mobile phone. (Online audience, 2013). In a study of YouTube membership examining whether resistance to governance may or may not be effectively enacted within digital spaces, Hess (2009) noted that the “YouTube vernacular exists largely in opposition to the mainstream discourses” (p. 418). In examining the 2007 CNN-YouTube Presidential candidate debates, Ricke (2009) noted that YouTube participation had the potential of engaging traditionally disengaged populations and therefore contributed to increasing citizen mobilization and re-defining democratic participation. **Situating itself within the premises of such findings, this chapter proposes that YouTube is developing as a valuable repository of a society’s cultural history**

---

12 American Internet analytics company
and is capable of providing a potent and meaningful digital discursive space for voicing parallel discourses. For postcolonial India, *YouTube* provides visual representations of arguments that often aim at redefining the nation’s identity by focusing on the transformation of the society’s dominant iconography. With a rapidly expanding base of consumers who not only voraciously consume content but are also complexly engaged in producing content by uploading videos taken on their mobile phones and handheld devices, *YouTube* becomes a prolific platform for examining the new discourse about national identity.

**Contestations of Dominant Iconography**

This chapter examines a group of grassroots-level prosumer video productions listed on *YouTube* under the banner of “The New India,” places them against a background of government-sponsored, Ministry of Tourism videos grouped under an “Incredible India” theme, and tries to understand the construct of this “new India,” originating from the idea of the country as a rising economic superpower. Often articulated through public relations slogans like “India rising” or “India Shining” (Deb, 2005), this imaginary of the nation in ascendance frequents globalization discourses and is situated outside the logic of the traditional mainstream discourse of a nation impoverished by colonial repression and valiantly trying to build its postcolonial identity through a rejuvenation of its Hindu past. In semiological analysis of visual culture, effort is often made to understand how images and the signs they deploy make meanings within a dominant ideological structure of contemporary society (Rose, 2007). Savoie (2009) proposes that while YouTube text is frequently constructed for individual expression and makes visible and tangible the human desire to create and transmit individualized messages, it is also a semiotic construction that utilizes a series of symbols to broadcast to other individuals for whom
these symbols are shared and culturally significant. A Marxist interpretation of how ideology is used to legitimate unequal social relations is especially useful in evaluating the current videos:

In contemporary capitalist societies as in most other social formations there are inequalities in the distribution of power and other goods. As a result there are divisions in the social fabric between the rulers and the ruled, exploiters and exploited: such societies exhibit characteristic structures of domination. In order to sustain these structures of domination the dominant groups attempt to represent the world in forms that reflect their own interests, the interests of their power. (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p3 as cited in Rose, 2007, p.75)

These *YouTube* videos emerge as valuable sites for recording complex contestations of dominant iconography, ideological narratives as well as transformations in India’s national imagination. In the post-Independence era, a focus on the country’s past heritage - “Land of Vedas” or the “Land of the Upanishads” was deployed as a discursive strategy by the postcolonial elite in heralding a divided, discouraged, ethnically diverse nation into a nationalistic mold. This view seems to be overshadowed in the light of its emerging identity as a more Westernized, global economic-power, which thrives and gains momentum with every passing year of the new millennium. As earlier nationalistic themes of “Unity in Diversity” and “Incredible India” are substituted by slogans like “a computer in every village\(^{13}\)” or the more recent one, “the world in India” (Fernandes, 2000), the social, economic, political, ideological and nationalistic undercurrents which are at work in the production and articulation of the videos lend profoundly significant insights into a social critique of the nation by its own citizens.

*YouTube’s archival value*

In examining the embedded messages in these *YouTube* videos, this chapter aims to determine if they are indeed the voice of a technologically-empowered Indian public speaking to the world and through a semiological analysis, I try to raise questions about not only the content

\(^{13}\) This slogan was introduced in the 1980s’ political rhetoric of liberalization of India’s seventh Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.
and the production processes of these videos, but also the subject positions which are involved in the framing, producing and audiencing in these videos. Issues of ownership, control, privileging and silencing, inextricable parts of production, are also explored.

Counter-narratives to the rhetoric of democratic potential of participatory media, citizen journalism and egalitarian functionality of *YouTube* have targeted the organization and presentation format of the service, insisting that it is best understood not as opposed to the traditional corporate media but as reinforcing messages produced and circulated for or by traditional media, especially television (Gulati & Williams, 2009). Scholars have challenged the possibility of *YouTube* taking a place in the same genealogy as existing archives and indexes. The lack of any centralized curatorial authority actually creates possibilities for large media companies and other corporations to step in and assume the function of a “curator of display” (Gehl, 2009) thereby deciding how each unit in the *YouTube* archives will be presented to users. By troubling the notion of spatial fixity as a prerequisite of traditional archives, electronic databases like *YouTube* have certainly revolutionized how some basic archival principles work but its democratized access is not necessarily aligned to subversion or its remediation to fidelity but instead foreground certain aspects of traditional archives which might have gone unnoticed before. Video-sharing websites like *YouTube* with their exceptional mobility and note-book accessibility as also their “non-specialist access, wild heterogeneity, fragmentation of samples and temporal leveling” (Shohet, 2010, p. 68), might lead to possibilities of circumventing traditional curatorial functions of classification and hierarchization, thereby bringing assumptions about democratized participation and subversion of cultural hierarchies but the environment defies any such simplistic evaluation (Shohet, 2010; Wall, 2009). *YouTube*’s open format, its invitation: “Broadcast yourself” and the resultant accumulation leads to a massive
database that has close resemblance to the authentic copiousness of the traditional archive (Shohet, 2010). Just as in the latter’s usage attention shapes the hierarchy of needs and the most used items are the most frequently indexed and retrievable, similarly, in the case of YouTube “use carves meaning” (Shohet, 2010, 73) and this, in turn, also means that its principles for selecting items is based upon the frequency of use and therefore determined by users themselves.

India’s Transformation and Struggle over Iconography

According to media scholars, there has been a marked change in India’s socio-political structure in the recent years and globalization has transformed the image of the nation in popular imagination from one of threadbare self-sufficient economic nationalism to that of a prosperous, financially liberalized India (Fernandes, 2000, p. 614). The Indian national imagination has historically been bound to nostalgia about the inexorable image of a glorious, exotic past with its roots in spiritualism, ancient monuments, rituals, practices, customs and traditions inherited from Hindu scriptural texts and legacies of royal heritage: the Hindu princely states and Islamic sultanates. For half a century after Independence, this imagination clashed with the realities of the Indian nation-state: a failing economy slowly being asphyxiated by regressive regulations, a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy, widespread unemployment, a reprehensible record of women’s and human rights, and finally, impoverishing border conflicts with China and Pakistan.

The Indian mind often struggled with its postcolonial insecurities, its intense need to secure its borders not only in the literal sense – from military aggression – but in the metaphorical sense, from external influence which might distract it from its post-Independence fervor to become “the star of freedom in the east”¹⁴ and an exemplar for postcolonial nations in

---
¹⁴ This terminology was used by India’s first Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, during his “Tryst with Destiny” speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly on the eve of India’s Independence in 1947.
establishing an independent, prosperous, socialist state. While a great deal of energy was devoted to protecting its hard-won territorial sovereignty and maintaining the sanctity of its controversial borders\textsuperscript{15}, the Indian agenda was also keenly focused on fighting off “western” capitalist influences not only because history\textsuperscript{16} was still too fresh in the mind but for many it was synonymous with betrayal of Gandhian and Nehruvian principles of swadeshi (self-rule based on economic nationalism) and swatantrata (independence).

As the liberalization of the economy was initiated in the early 1990s and progressed swiftly, India could confidently visualize itself as a forerunner in the rising Eastern power bloc. Earlier, in the consumer commodities market, foreign companies had to be mindful of “Indianization” of their products if they were to advance in the Indian market at all. The language had to be couched in a nationalistic jargon to make headway in a complex environment qualified by an interplay of desire and fear: desire for the ‘latest’ and the ‘foreign-made’ and fear of losing control to cross-border dynamics eroding the state protectionism and neo-colonial flows with possibilities of effecting, once again, a coup. The general fear was of history repeating itself in the form of western capitalist powers who entered under the pretense of business and soon assumed political control (Goswami, 2011). The advertising world had found its own solution by initiating the practice of nationalizing international commodities (Fernandes, 2000). Following liberalization, the anxieties of the global reaching into India was replaced with the exuberance of

\textsuperscript{15} Indian politics has often been assailed by post-Independence controversy over the borders drawn by the departing British administration of Lord Mountbatten between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{16} The British East India Company entered India to pursue trade but after gaining a foothold, brought the subcontinent under Company rule by 1757, initiating a long era British colonial control. The British Raj lasted in India till August 15, 1947.
the nation being able to reach outside the national, in an effervescent explosion stretching beyond delimiting national boundaries of the license\textsuperscript{17} Raj days.

\textit{The Spectacle of the Advance of Capital}

In his book \textit{Conditions of Postmodernity} (1990), David Harvey focused on visual artifacts like films and photographs which serve as reference points to cultural history of a certain period or society. He discussed that in the era of television and mass consumer culture, visual representations epitomize postmodernity, and the mobilization and incessant circulation of visual images originating in fashion, pop art, television and other forms of media image “have become part and parcel of daily life under capitalism” (1990, p.63). What Harvey noted as a salient characteristic of the “era of mass television” may quite easily be representative of the current times, with the Internet packing more power into such representation with its incessant, diverse and fluid media images: “an attachment to surfaces rather than roots, to collage rather than in-depth work, to super-imposed quoted images rather than worked surfaces, to a collapsed sense of time and space rather than solidly achieved cultural artifact” (Harvey, 1990, p.61).

As a historian, Harvey studied cultural productions related to the reconstruction of Paris (Harvey, 2006) and showed how the politicization of a public event like the February 1848 confrontation at the Foreign Ministry started a chain of events leading ultimately to political upheaval, re-organization of the state’s structure and a redrawing of the political, cultural and social as well as topographical and urban features of Parisian life. The recent transformation of India’s urban landscapes results not from political upheavals but carefully constructed dynamics of economic liberalization and as response to demands of global capital. But the visual

\textsuperscript{17}Nehruvian economic policies were based upon strict bureaucratic controls in which economic enterprises were dependent upon permits and licenses obtained from the various government departments.
representations of this contested terrain of India’s iconography also create the ground for raising profoundly relevant questions about the extent to which the greater empowerment of the nation as a leading economy of the world also reflects national progress and social justice. As Harvey (1990) points out, ‘Bread and circuses’ is an ancient and well-tried formula for social control. It has frequently been consciously deployed to pacify restless or discontented elements in a population… But spectacle can also be an essential aspect of revolutionary movement…. the spectacle has been captured by quite different forces, and been put to quite different uses. (Harvey, 1990, 88)

The *YouTube* videos reviewed here portray architectural, technological, engineering, and artistic projects in rapidly developing urban areas like New Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Mumbai or Bangalore. In fact, in these *YouTube* videos, the commoditization of urban space through Western-style architectures, the spectacles of the malls, office towers, residential complexes as well as bridges, freeways, national arsenal not only reinforce the theme of “progress” so prevalent in globalization rhetoric but provide opportunities to examine crucial, complicated linkages and balancing acts between global consumer capitalism, neoliberal interventions, nationalist pride and also a post-developmental state’s hegemony and ascendancy. 

*Parallel Narratives of Incredible India and New India*

The various dimensions of this struggle over iconography are best understood in terms of “Incredible India” and “New India” paradigms. In examining media productions that fit into the overall “Incredible India” theme (a slogan adopted in official public relations campaigns of the Government of India), one finds a series of more than 100 videos under the banner of “Incredible India”. Also uploaded on *YouTube*, these ensure the clearest dissemination of a message of pride in an ancient heritage. Organized within the overarching narrative of “unity in diversity,” these videos recurrently focus on cultural symbols and events culled from various geographical regions, and also national monuments, traditional art and architecture, religious rituals and
shrines, natural scenic venues and wildlife reserves. While focusing on the incredible beauty of Himalayan orchids or the excitement of a camel race, the videos never veer away from the message that the essence of India is dependent upon an inner core of spiritual wholesomeness. Aestheticized in the depiction of popular Hindu festivals like holi (festival of colors) or Diwali (festival of lights), of religious shrines, ayurvedic spas, and mystical yoga retreats, the Hindu-Indian national identity emerges as the dominant code based on an unconditional acceptance of this protected inner sphere of sacred traditions and customs. These are not only the repositories of India’s life force but they constitute the secure platform upon which to stand and confront, comprehend and ultimately accept the forces of Western progress and development without disrupting the stability of the Indian national identity.

The reiteration of the theme of Atulya Bharat18 translated as “incredible India” or “incomparable India” leaves no doubt as to the national agenda and its attendant ideological framework: India reaching the pinnacle of glory and taking its rightful place of honor in the world stage as “the rising star of the east19”. Even with the understanding that these are promotional videos produced by the Department of Tourism, as the recurrent chanting of the Sanskrit adage Atithi Deva Bhava (the guest is divine) underscores, and their primary target is the international tourism market, the iconography is distinctly representative of the overarching national narrative of an exotic, mystical land rejoicing in the glory of its diverse culture and ancient heritage. Uploaded onto YouTube in the “India” Channel, as part of a concerted public relations campaign by the Ministry of Tourism, these videos are also accessible from the website

18 “Bharat” is the vernacular term for India and in recent discourse is often the signifier for rural India.
19 This terminology was used by India’s first Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, during his “Tryst with Destiny” speech to the Indian Constituent Assembly on the eve if India’s Independence in 1947.
www.incredibleindia.org and mainly focus on portraying India as an exciting and exotic tourist destination. Configured within a discourse of Hindu nationalist imagination, this series deploys Sanskrit slokas combined with Hindi nationalist jargon (Hindustan Hamara – This India is ours) to emphasize the country’s natural beauty, youth, and dynamism as well as its ancient heritage and spiritual essence. It uses iconographic imagery of national landmarks combined with videos representing a traditional but thriving culture. Like the prancing peacock, elephants and tigers, soaring Himalayas or fluttering national flag, there are colorful dancing troupes, smiling brides decked in traditional finery, yoga and ayurvedic centers, Hindu religious rituals and proud celebrity endorsements of some activity or destination. This series, which was uploaded en masse to YouTube on January 27, 2009, (even though they were created much earlier as television or print media advertisements), forms a contrasting backdrop for the “The New India” series selected here for closer scrutiny.

The parallel narrative emerges from videos on “New India” as yielded by a search of YouTube with the terms “India,” “New,” “Progress” and “Globalization.” They emphasize India’s ascendancy in the global sphere and globalization is seen as the dynamics that has carried India to its preeminence in the 21st century world. The frequent usage of “new” may also be traced back to a historic speech given one of the iconic figures of Indian politics, and India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. His “Tryst with Destiny,” speech delivered to the first independent Indian Constituent Assembly right before August 15, 1947, the day of India gained independence from British colonial rule, used the metaphor of a “rising” star and declared the birth of a “new” nation. The metaphor of the Jewel in the Crown had long been invalidated in the effort to erode the legitimacy of the Crown itself in national discourses, and it may be argued that the introduction of the idea of a “new” country and proliferation of “new” and related
terminology have origins in Nehru’s landmark speech and the ideological scaffolding it created. 
In Chapter 3, I analyze a selection from the “Tryst with Destiny” speech that Nehru delivered to 
the Constituent Assembly to show how Nehru used the metaphor of newness, of the contrasting positions of the “old spirit of India” and new India to signify the rising hope that accompanied independence. Here, in the following section of this chapter, I explore the New India group of YouTube videos in greater detail to show how they consistently focus on the newness of the India which is emerging under the globalization era of India’s history.

Methodology and Critical Analysis

An initial search of the YouTube site was conducted by entering the keywords (or “tags”) “India” and “new” into the search window. YouTube offered a collection of more than 150 videos that had “India” coupled with “new” in their titles or keywords. Out of this, it was possible to distinguish two stable groups of videos. The first was listed under the headings “Incredible India” (already discussed above) and the second was called “The New India.” Besides these there were a host of clips uploaded individually by different users. This third heterogeneous group consisted of promotional videos by media corporations or transnational IT corporations doing business in India or video releases of domestic real estate development firms on new properties or Government of India clips for projects like the Delhi Metrorail. This third group was also inscribed within the dominant discourse of “new” India’s rising global prominence. It included laudatory productions on India’s recent economic success and comparisons with other emerging economies like China. Anniversary releases by media companies like the Times of India – for instance, its 60th year celebration featuring popular film icon Amitabh Bachchan, were also frequent. There were several newsreels, cityscapes and new
architectures shown as visions of India’s future progress; and several smaller clips on the burgeoning technology sector of India.

Acknowledging the fact that this group is characterized by heterogeneity and prolificity, a characteristic that usually marks archival information in traditional as well as electronic databases (Shohet, 2010), the chorus emerging from this group reiterates India’s ascendancy in the world stage as the fastest-growing free-market economy. Some of the catch phrases used are: “largest democracy,” “independent judiciary,” “free press,” “free and flourishing spirit of enterprise,” “largest knowledge workforce,” “new face of silicon age,” “huge consumer base,” “open to competition,” “thrust on reforms,” “rapid growth in infrastructures,” “growing aspirations” and “pervasive communication.” They underscore the neoliberal articulations between transnational market-driven forces and ethnic governmentality that scholars have noted as emerging in the political discourse of several other Asian nations (Ong, 2006).

The two stable groups “Incredible India” and “The New India” mentioned above were distinct because both the groups had very specific themes around which their videos were clustered and were uploaded from the same two sources. The New India series was uploaded on September 11, 2007 by user “Indianhillbilly.” His profile shows him as a resident of the United States. The “New India” collection of four videos, identified as Part I, II, III and IV comprises of slide-shows principally portraying urban landscapes, contemporary architecture and business zones across India, and are listed under YouTube’s “Travel and Events” category. They have a strong anchoring in the recent discourse of India emerging as a global power and may be easily seen as legitimizing the recent capitalistic turn that the country has adopted following the 1991 liberalization of the economy by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It has a title line: “The fruits of globalization as India pounces into the global economy,” an introductory on-screen sub-
heading: “The New India: The world’s largest democracy, its fastest accelerating economy, and its next superpower,” and a conclusive marquee: “Invest in India, Tour India, Love India…Jai Hind (Victory to India).” This and the author-supplied keywords or tags leave no doubt that the slideshows are specially motivated to represent the current culture of neoliberal restructuring of national life: “India,” “New,” “Economy,” “Economic,” “Rise,” “Progress,” “Future,” “Globalization,” “Architecture,” “Now,” “Hot,” “Boom,” “Business,” “Outsourcing”.

*Images of Indian Urbanscapes*

In the parlance of critical visual methodology, the closest genre for the New India series would be street photography (Rose, 2007) but for the fact that the photographer has persistently adopted angles that eliminate too close a focus on street-level images. As a consequence, there are relatively few human figures that enter the frame: a choice underscoring the prosumer’s purposeful omission of any engagement with the human costs or grassroots-level articulations regarding these new capitalistic developments. A more suitable genre could be “cityscape photography” since 110 of the 188 slides covered in the YouTube clips are of city skylines, office towers, and other urban landscapes. The lens repeatedly comes back to images of modernistic architecture like skyscrapers, shopping malls, transportation systems, glass office towers and unusual futuristic-design buildings. There are several slides showing a replica of the glass and metal pyramid that stands in the Palais du Louvre and serves as an entrance to the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Here, the photograph is of a similar glass pyramid standing inside the Bangalore campus of Infosys Technologies, a leading information technology services company in India providing business consulting and strategic outsourcing to Global 2000 companies.

The Louvre-lookalike pyramid which houses the Corporate Design Group of Infosys, is a spectacular monument within the Infosys enclave called “Electronic City” and stands as a
reminder not only of Infosys’ achievement as a global business leader, and India’s recent success in information technology solutions but also its expertise in building the face of a “new,” urban India with magnificent architectural wonders. There are several other office towers in these videos closely reminiscent of Western skyscrapers. For instance, the twin towers in the 40th slide of Part III could be fashioned on the World Trade Center towers. Several other towers in Gurgaon bring to mind the Empire State Building in Manhattan, the John Hancock building in downtown Chicago, or the Aon Center in Los Angeles. Whereas it is hard to distinguish many of the night skylines portrayed here from nightscapes in London, Tokyo, New York, Frankfurt, the daytime pictures are clearly identified by markers of their Indian anchoring – the national flag, corporate insignia, street or building signs as well as other symbols of Indianness like the ubiquitous auto rickshaw or scooters plying Indian streets, electrical wires strung across trees and electric poles, or festive decorations for religious events, etc. being sported across the face of these skyscrapers.

Reflecting globalized imaginaries and agendas

According to David Harvey (1990), it is important to understand contemporary economic processes to reach the underlying meaning of messages being inscribed in the cultural productions rising from the commercial and advertising world. Present-day capitalistic mechanisms have the effect of organizing itself so as to create a sense of compressing time and collapsing space (1990). In explaining what he calls “the cultural logic of late capitalism” Harvey points to the mobility of capital and information leading to the increasing flexibility in production techniques, labor markets and consumer bases which, in turn, bring into the focus the rising significance of advertising, style and spectacle in these new and evolving marketplaces.
The modernist, futuristic landscapes of urban India proliferating YouTube videos thus become associated with the image not simply of a new, contemporary, urbanized India but are powerful reflections of corporate and state agendas, of the incorporation of the country into a global capitalistic economic system, and its transformation into a part of the transnational service network of affiliate urban centers (Sassen, 2001), feeding globalized production, distribution and consumption processes. The visual impact of the striking similarity between images of Mannheim Road leading to the Chicago O’Hare Airport and a view of NH8 leading from the Indira Gandhi International Airport to Gurgaon is highly evocative of this sense of collapsing of time-space. The unique abundance of YouTube’s archival database that technologically empowers and enables swift, cross-boundary media searches also serves a unique function of emphasizing this amazing sense of compression.

Marking a transition in India’s Iconography

Media scholars have repeatedly noted how certain images get associated with certain identities and regions and finally are naturalized in visual culture:

(T)he imagery created via various genres such as literature or anthropological observations tends to reappear as potent journalistic stereotypes that are widely redistributed through the reach of news outlets. Repetitive images are echoed to the point where they become naturalized. (Wall, 2009, 394)

These videos from YouTube reinforce this very idea and in evaluating YouTube’s archival capacities, it may be argued that new media’s collaborative culture as well as its frenetic speed adds to the power of such repetition and naturalization. It firmly links the image of the “global city” as portrayed in media images of London, New York, Paris (Sassen, 2001) with that of contemporary India, somewhat dislodging its anchoring in an ancient traditional past and displacing the classic emblem of Indianess, the Taj Mahal, from its pride of place. The Taj Mahal has traditionally been the most representative image for India, its singularity
residing as much in its architectural beauty and status as a historical and cultural landmark as in its pervasiveness in the media world. In fact, among the first pictures that any Google search on “images of India” brings up is a photo of the Taj Mahal.

According to Rose (2007), certain signs perform a connotative function for standing as a symbol for something far bigger than itself, a part representing a whole and vice versa. In this case, the Taj Mahal stands for India itself and is thus a connotative, synecdochal sign for India. The iconic status of the Taj Mahal is hard to dispute and though the YouTube videos on New India also devote four slides to the monument, it is clear that the representational strategies employed here reflect a distinct shift toward the portrayal of a modern India signified by its urban landscapes and looming towers rather than historical mausoleums. Interestingly, the Taj Mahal is portrayed in all four occasions in combination with photographs of India’s war machines and defense machinery. The picture of fighter jets circling the Indian skies juxtaposed with this national heritage site creates a subtext underscoring the prosumer’s awareness of its status, as also the postcolonial insecurities linked to such national treasures. On the other hand, the cityscapes and skyscrapers draw attention towards a narrative that has greater currency: the narrative of globalization and India’s place on the world stage. *These videos capture this struggle over India’s iconography by focusing repeatedly on high-cost, upscale office and residential complexes, transportation systems and fashion malls. They underscore two main bulwarks of the New India – its incorporation into the global economic system as a specialized IT service center and the evolution and consolidation of its new urban communities into a huge consumer base. The videos emphasize the transition of India from the land of history and heritage to a node of a highly complex global economic and urban system.*
A Different Cultural Vocabulary

The New India YouTube series leave no doubt as to the strong visual and textual message of neoliberal restructuring of India in which the country is promoted as an exciting and progressive business destination. The representation is of a country epitomized by its neoliberal enclaves of global business, embellished by modern architecture, urban landscapes and music and images originating in popular culture from Bollywood. It is distinctly inscribed with the insignia of the dominant culture of contemporary India: one of propensity to Westernization architecture as well as importance of global business and culture. What is significant is that these slideshows contain a subtext that also incorporates a deeper set of meanings comprised of an open call to the Indian diaspora to return to their roots and reap the rewards of its burgeoning success in the 21st century. This call, which reverberates through much of India’s recent media productions, especially Bollywood cinema, and the self-identification of the prosumer of the New India series on YouTube as an Indian domiciled in the United States, foreground the issue of diasporic involvement in new media cultural productions. This has been emphasized by scholars in critically reviewing issues of access and the lowering of barriers to communication through the proliferation of social network websites. Wall’s (2009) research on YouTube videos on Africa showed that much of the production was by people in the West and a good percentage of this group self-identified themselves as Africans residing in the West. This reinforces the established notion in media research that diasporic groups play important roles in bridging gaps in technology proficiency between their countries of origin and domicile and also play specific functions in the circulation of cultural productions related to their home country: “the diaspora may be playing a similar role across technologies, redistributing content originally from their home country or region” (Wall, 2009, 399).
Discussion

The New India slideshows are propelled by the momentum of a dual dynamism: at one end they harvest the eternal nostalgia of the homesick diaspora and the intense desire to return to an elusive past and at the other seek to exploit the fervor of a global public which has already whetted its appetite for unfettered neoliberal advancement through their brief soirees in Western societies like United States. Popular patriotic music from Bollywood’s vast repertoire provides the background score\(^{20}\) seeking to rake up nationalistic sentiments, sending strong messages for enthusing and imploring the audience that the time is ripe for India to take center stage and they should rise to the occasion.

Aihwa Ong (2006) talked about how the neoliberal logic of the late twentieth century, acting through major corporations and global regulatory agencies, reconfigured the economic and thereby the political and social landscapes of several developmental states of southeast Asia. Termed “developmental” based upon their ability to sustain high rate of economic growth and structural changes in the productive system, these states have frequently adopted the tenets of a market-driven logic to introduce political strategies which enhanced corporate interests, often resorting to “fragmentation of the national space into various noncontiguous zones” (Ong, p. 77). The special economic zones, urban development zones, residential enclaves and business parks that Ong discussed with reference to countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Phillipines, Singapore, Taiwan and China, are regular features dotting the skyline of several Indian states as well. They are represented in the *You Tube* videos studied in this chapter. In fact, many of the well-protected, high-maintenance real estate shown in the New India slides are those

\(^{20}\) “Dhoom macha de” (Let’s Rock) in The New India Part I and “Rang de Basanti” (Color me in Saffron) in Part IV, and “Its Time,” Part III are among the most popular numbers in Indian Bollywood music in recent years.
created in order to secure the lifestyles of expatriates, foreign executives and high-skilled professionals, and are invariably contiguous to the Indian information technology corridors, knowledge parks and education enclaves. They reflect a very different India from the overpopulated, struggling nation which the postcolonial elite attempted to shield with their rhetoric about a traditional, exotic culture.

What these slides show now is a shining, new country – remarkable in the splendor of its architectural works, the wealth of its malls, the oozing comfort of its residential and recreational spaces. The You Tube videos examined in this project frequently use visual images to reinforce this imaginary of this glamorous internationalist society, the well-oiled machinery of a smoothly organized nation opening its manicured lawns and skyscraper-studded cityscapes to global capital. In foregrounding certain features of the Indian national landscape and borrowing audio-visual media productions originating in the country’s dominant cultural powerhouse of Bollywood, India’s major film industry, the You Tube videos become valuable repositories of “new” vocabulary of India’s cultural, economic, social as well as political transformation. However, if critically analyzed, any review will have to concede that these productions overlook ground reality and gloss over distinctions between Southeast Asian states like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand and a chaotic democracy like India. Questions are inevitable about what processes of “creative destruction” had to be undertaken in order to “rejuvenate” the Indian rural with a dose of the global urban. Whether it was indeed the wasteland which was populated with shining monuments of postmodern architecture or in a resource-strapped nation like India, the land came at the cost of lives and lifestyles of indigenous or agricultural populations are beyond the scope of this chapter but do form grounds for introducing questions for future studies.
Grounded in that understanding, and a dawning realization that “developmental” states of Asia are often being pushed by capitalist tendencies to return to imperialist structures of the pre-development era through a new brand of copycat neoliberalism, (Sassen, 2006), this case study could be a suitable entry-point for profoundly meaningful future discussions on YouTube videos as providing a platform for examination of how postmodernist collages of urban landscapes act as spectacles and are deployed as apparatuses of social control in a societies undergoing tremendous upheavals. Poised superbly to diffuse arguments on how progress comes at a high price for certain populations and publics, and deviate from social justice debates over ““the necessary conflicts of democracy with law, of the necessary collisions of freedom with justice”” (Rowe & Koetter as cited in Harvey, 1990, p. 76), such new media images could be highlighting the carefully-orchestrated representational tactics of the newly empowered hegemonic assemblages in these eastern societies. Reflecting not only a “postmodernist penchant for eclectic quotation, but also… an evident fascination with surfaces” (Harvey, 1990, p. 88), these mediated visual messages on YouTube contribute towards containment strategies perfected by emergent nexuses between free-market capitalism, technological advances, deep-seated ethno-nationalism and pre-existent social hierarchies. Such convergences, which often become potent combinations for anti-populist policies may easily lead to the further impoverishment and disempowerment of already dispossessed groups.

India’s cultural heritage, albeit a colorful mosaic of influences ranging from the Islamic Mughals in Delhi and the Hindu Rajputs in Rajasthan, the French and Portuguese in the south and the British Victorian components all across the nation, has always been grounded in a propensity for the grandiose, the extravagant – arising, in no small measure, from the pomp-and-show of the monarchical and imperialist state structures which dominated the country till the
mid-twentieth century. This penchant for the spectacle has been exploited to its very core not merely in the new transformational architectural projects but even in their media reproductions on *YouTube*, purposefully juxtaposing myriad milestones of India’s glorious past with novel and radical structures signifying a pot-pourri internationalism. Whereas the thematic significance of the narrative of an Indian renaissance and the rebirth of a great nation can hardly be ignored and has often in the past been a recurrent feature in Indian popular imagination, its entry into recent video logs and digital archives gives it a new currency. When examined for subliminal messages, these videos communicate the invariable: the use of metaphors culled from the dominant cultural order (Hall, 1980) are (inscribed through the incorporation of Bollywood music and jargon), embellish, and at the same time, present, the flamboyant trademarks of India’s aspirations.

Conclusion

This essay concludes on the note that cultural productions like these *YouTube* videos provide fascinating entry points into a discussion of India’s rapidly changing national imaginary in the era of globalization, an epoch personified by radical innovations in market and technology, a subservient national agenda to the state’s aggressive pursuit of neoliberal techniques of governance, and fragmentation and chaos in individual life. As state authority fades into neoliberal space and corporate agendas take over, media innovations create the space and fertile ground for spawning trends in which new media provides scope both for promotional tools for and critical narratives against neoliberalism discourses. In the next chapter, I follow up this examination of online archives with a scrutiny of two of India’s prominent museums, attempting a “reading” of its archives much in the way suggested by Spivak (1999, 203) so as to arrive at a re-reading of the postcolonial nation’s historical narrative structured in the immediate aftermath of Independence. The effort is to see how museums of postcolonial India were variously engaged
in political projects like identity formation and creation a “national community” for its newly-emergent democratic public sphere – all within the larger schema of nation-building.
References


Goswami, S. (2011) Media and communication policies in Post-Independence India: Special reference to health communication. Retrieved from:
http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/events/MeCCSA/pdf/papers/Goswami%20-%20media%20and%20Communication%20policy%20in%20post%20independence%20India-1.pdf


**LINKS TO VIDEOS:**

Incredible India:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79OiKkdaSWw&feature=related

New India
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgWedOdUjpU&playnext=1&list=PL9F28DB5EFAD721A6&feature=results_video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GKsHWt5B5U&feature=channel&list=UL
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnnukymoszU&feature=relmfu

New Delhi
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCKJyxYwioo&feature=related

Gurgaon – The “New India” Revisited
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCEPnmGFfUk
CHAPTER 3

READING SILENCES: RE-VISIONING AN AUTHENTIC PAST BEYOND A MAZE OF CURATORIAL CHOICES IN MUSEUMS OF POSTCOLONIAL INDIA

Museums are the medium of our age. As such, the museum world cannot be isolated from political realities. On the contrary, far from their idealized image as institutional constants, innocently engaged in the "collection, conservation, classification, and display of objects," most important museums whether of art, history, anthropology, or natural history-are in a state of change, in management, in motivation, and in their capacities to attract visitors, engage attention, and mediate between what objects ‘say’ and what visitors expect to hear. (McLeod, 1998, 308)

Complex relationships between the past, present and future often call forth the need for a reorientation to the dominant narratives of the times and also lead to opportunities for interventions into historical accounts which have been normalized in standard discourses. In the story of the nation, the responsibility of representing the past often falls on the history museum and on curatorial choices made within such institutions in order to preserve and disseminate knowledge about the past. As pointed out in recent scholarship, such curatorial choices are imbued with the power and authority of the institutions they represent (Perlman, 2011). In this paper, I argue that whereas the archivist’s decisions embody a certain power in the collection, accumulation and representation of archival artifacts, such decisions are not isolated from political realities (McLeod, 1998) and must also be examined in the light of how public agendas intersect with a nation’s political aims, claims of identity and its overall national imagination to influence curatorial choices and thereby contribute to the collective memory of the community or nation.

By critically examining two prominent museums in India’s capital city of New Delhi, I show how museums established by the British colonial powers to realize certain imperial goals for the colonies, were used by postcolonial elite in different ways to secure the project of nation-
building and the cultural construction of India’s core identity at a time of great political and social flux: after the Indian Independence. The museums examined here are the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) (Figure 3.1) and the National Museum (Figure 3.2), both in New Delhi. As the state emerged from colonial rule, the museum developed as a mainstay of the ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 1970) of the Indian state, deployed to garner popular support towards what was discursively constructed as an ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse but philosophically united nation with basic adherence to Indian mystic roots of truth and harmony. Within a “classicization of the past and an appropriation of the popular around reconstructed forms of community” (Chatterjee, 1992, 68), the story of a noble (largely Hindu) past found articulation through institutions like government museums. In the following sections, after a brief look at the establishment of the museum in India as a colonial institution, I study its position in the postcolonial assemblage of nation-building, and through the case study of two Indian museums, I try to understand the inception of the story of the imagined national identity and community of a cohesive, independent Indian nation.

Construction of National Identity in Indian Museums

History museums may easily be viewed as the major institutional medium for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the past: “In conveying portraits of the past, they help construct and reinforce pictures of the nation (or community) and its people.” (Fried, 2013, 388). In the case of new nations, especially those emerging from colonial pasts, such reconstructions are especially meaningful in creating social meaning, legitimizing political strife, initiating national cohesion, forging an understanding of the fundamental meaning of the nation and cementing a full-fledged commitment to a national identity. It is often integral to creating a sense of the national community itself: “the past is an important element in the creation of
identity in the ‘imagined community’ of the nation-state” (Anderson, 1983, cited in Fried, 2013, 389). However, the institutional choices that become pivotal in the construction of a nation’s history itself also ask for careful consideration of questions on what gets retained for posterity as the history of a nation and what is obliterated.

This project is an attempt at parsing through the project of construction of a unified national identity and pointing towards the silent and silenced histories of postcolonial nations through focus on particular sections of their cultural histories emerging from the selection, classification and exhibitionary choices of their prominent museums. In reviewing museums of the Indian subcontinent, this study tries to understand the colonial and postcolonial curatorial decisions which went into the making of the dominant narratives in their major exhibits and also identify breaks in the narrative of the story of the nation so as to find directions towards under-represented accounts or unprocessed archival materials. Almost buried under the weight of dominant narratives, residues of violence inherited from a bloody partition which split the Indian subcontinent into India, Pakistan and eventually Bangladesh continue to bleed into the seemingly pristine Gandhian and Nehruvian non-violent swadeshi movement, putting to question the claims of satyagraha, ahimsa, or sarvodaya. Similarly, the drastic marginalization of indigenous communities which has, more recently, further split the nation’s hinterland, challenges the myth of a prosperous, unified India, threatening to soil its proud national theme of “unity in diversity,” privileged in official discourses of India’s identity.

Close examination of the ethnological choices made in nineteenth and twentieth century have great possibilities of yielding insight into the construction of the “imaginary institution of India” (Kaviraj, 1992) and the construction of a “national community” in postcolonial India. I

21 Independence and self-rule
22 Truth force, Non-violence, Universal uplift
initiate this discussion with a short section on historiography of Indian museums by examining the various dimensions of colonial logic underlying the foundation of these institutions. My aim is ultimately to explore the postcolonial agendas that might have influenced the decision-making in the initial projects of deploying museums as educational institutions leading the mission of constructing cohesive national identities after independence. The paper hopes to arrive at a more nuanced reading of the reason for the exclusion of diverse histories – not only by examining the elite agenda in the post-Independence days but the dilemma that postcolonial administrations faced in their nation-building effort. This intervention comes with the promise of creating differential, yet richer, more textured and nuanced story of the nation than those which earlier emerged from the annals of colonial and newly-appointed postcolonial curators – thus guiding us to re-orientations on center-metropole relations and deeper understanding of the colony’s appropriation in strengthening the mercantilist/capitalist foundations of the British empire.

Critically examining the place of museums as the repository of artifacts and the archive as the “repository of facts,” this paper suggests, a “re-reading” of the same much in the way suggested by Spivak (1999, 203) so as to arrive at a re-reading of the nation’s history.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to find the roots of dominant metanarratives as they circulate in positioning portrayals of national identity. Whereas scholars have deliberated over the evolving project of modern museums from that of representing the dominant social and national identity of nations to representing the diverse histories of its people, this study looks at various decisions that formed the coordinates of the foundation and organization logic in these two Indian museums. By also studying methods of selection and organization of display, it hopes to arrive at the nation-building endeavors after independence. Informed by the scholarship
mentioned above, and also drawing from Tony Bennett’s examination of the museum in two consecutive volumes: *Birth of the Museum* and *Pasts beyond Memory*, this paper proposes that the establishing mission and curatorial choices evident in exhibitionary decisions of these national museums show signs of imbibing the predispositions and unidirectional logics of the imperial project. This interpretive analysis aims to decipher the codes of colonial principles embedded into the basic processes of organization and representation, to show how these museums contributed to creating a public culture in the image of the colonial power’s culture and, in turn, became sites of disavowal of grassroots histories so as to focus on the dominant elite’s construction of the nation as they saw it.

This case study might be positioned within a broader discussion of “identity museums” but I also draw attention to the fact that their initial projects were not concerned with a specific group or ethnic minority but with representing, or even constructing, the identity of the nation it emerged from colonial rule. I suggest that in the representation of national identity, as they were faced with the contradictory narratives emerging from diverse communities and ethnic minorities, the museums authorities had to negotiate the complexities and challenges by having to select from multiple strains of miscellaneous histories. In this, the foundational principles were established within a framework of two dominating principles – firstly it was guided by the predominant colonial logic of privileging the story of the elites and dominant group and secondly, it was guided by the postcolonial agenda of nation-building - both of which tilted in favor of presenting an overarching homogenous historical trajectory. The complexities of having to accommodate many layers of history especially when rebuilding the pasts of marginalized communities has been felt by more recent museums like the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York (Han, 2013). Of interest here are the selective representational strategies
which curatorial decisions employ in shaping and reshaping pasts. Where narratives of colonial repression and domination are inextricably woven into the fabric of the nation, the Empire and it’s politics invariably leave their imprints on the stories of the independent postcolonial states. As such, the collective identity work that these museums often work toward, show signs of being striated with the markers of differential histories.

Research Methods

This study adopted a multi-pronged approach to gathering data on the museums and tried to understand the organizing principles, practices and representation choices made. First of all, I studied the websites of the institutions so as to understand their missions as explicitly mentioned on the websites but also to understand the circumstances under which they were established. I visited NMML, situated on Teen Murti Marg within the Lutyens zone in New Delhi and the National Museum at the crossing of Rajpath (previously King’s Way) and Janpath (previously Queen’s Way). The NMML is housed in the erstwhile official Prime Ministerial residence of Jawaharlal Nehru and is set in a 45-acre garden. The building used to be the station for the British Commander in Chief and is one of the 5 original buildings of British Delhi. On repeated site visits during August and September of 2013 I mapped the site and its grounds which also includes a 14th century Shikara belonging to the times of Feroze Shah Tuglaq. Inside the museum, I did a close reading of the permanent exhibition, mainly concentrating on furnished quarters, signs, posters, artifacts, photographs, captions, textual passages of dignitary speeches and press clippings from pre-Independence era. I studied the organization of various galleries, as also the office spaces, living quarters and gift collections of Nehru's Prime Ministerial era. I also visited the Nehru Memorial Library – housed in a separate building within the NMML grounds – with its extensive archival holdings of historical documents, digital audio and video material and
film newsreels. I also talked to the Curator’s office – specifically to the Director Dr. M.R. as well as junior floor personnel, gift shop and library staff. My conversation with M.R. helped me understand the overall principles which went into the planning of the museum, connect the information gathered during my visits to the ideas behind the exhibits and also helped me understand the importance of the current reviews which were being undertaken so as to update and revise existing display. During the site visits, I recorded the displays on a digital camera for analysis. Except brief exchanges on directions and guidance, the conversations with museum staff were recorded.

**Culture’s Power: A Review of literature**

The public museum, as is well known, acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The process of its formation…cannot be adequately understood unless viewed in the light of a more general set of developments through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power…. (Bennett, 1995, 19)

While grassroots narratives and community oral history projects are being increasingly received as valuable resources by social science researchers, questions on the routes to a knowable past often direct attention towards formal institutions which have traditionally functioned as repositories of public culture and collective memory: like museums and archives. For cultural studies scholars, especially from postcolonial societies, this search for an authentic past inevitably introduces one to questions of power and knowledge, of hegemonic constructions and the politics of representation that frequently guide curatorial decisions in museum organization. In trying to examine the epistemological choices and pedagogical decisions of dominant groups, postcolonial scholars have often had to grapple with “contradictory histories” and “normative narratives” (McCarthy & Sealy-Ruiz, 2010). In critically examining the complexities of colonial historiography, Spivak (1999) has parsed through its principles and
methods, attempting to deconstruct the prevalent norms. Deconstructing the imperial
structuration of epistemology in order to expose several instances of the epistemic violence,
Spivak identified the foundations of imperial construction of the world, or “worlding” of the
colonized world (1999, p200) as a primary weapon that the British empire wielded against the
colonized. Spivak tried to examine, displace and critically analyze the discursive field
constructed in the work of ideological production of the colonizer’s world as well as the
representational efforts of the British archivist in preserving “facts” about the subjugated native.
In bringing forth multifarious questioning of the author’s authority, the historian’s authenticity,
as well as issues of agency, representation, subjectification and objectification, Spivak re-creates
the complex ground upon which to critically examine imperial historiography.

*Origins of British museums*

The consideration of the museum as a special space for representation of the nation and
its identity, differentiation among cultures and the manifestation of postcolonial organization of a
national culture is predicated here on earlier scholarship about the emerging topics of European
and British classical liberalism, governmental power, aesthetic discourses and cultural
technologies within the context of European self-governance. My special reference is to
Bennett’s discussion on how the museological practices developed in the public museum in
nineteenth century Britain. With their objective to “make pasts visible” and knowable, such
endeavors were also aimed to translate the museum experience into a significant component of
the nineteenth century public culture (Bennett, 2004, 2-4) thus enlisting it in the project of
exploring and classifying scientific and anthropological projects and deploying knowledge thus
derived towards new strategies of cultural governance. Bennett’s use of Foucauldian analysis of
the modern museum as a repository of high culture is particularly useful in understanding the
underlying logic of museums as educational institutions, especially in his evaluation of the museum’s deployment of culture as a vehicle of power.

It is…in the mid to late nineteenth century – that the relations between culture and government came to be thought of as organized in a distinctively modern way via the conception that the works, forms and institutions of high culture might be enlisted for this governmental task in being assigned the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole… (Bennett, 1995, 19)

The new liberalism that was emerging in nineteenth century Europe and Britain was deeply concerned with both, the “architecture of the modern self that was poised in a restless tension between its archaic and progressive components” and also the lessons of the past (Bennett, 2001, 13). It led proponents to advocate limited forms of state intervention in the cultural sphere. According to Bennett,

… the museum as a storage vehicle – a memory machine – which, in some formulations, displaced, and, in others, complemented the muscular mechanism of habit in providing a cultural means of accumulating the lessons of the past and, in bringing those lessons to bear on the present, acting developmentally on the social. (Bennett, 2001, 13).

The museum and its attendant ideology were thus connected originally to a discourse of aesthetics and emerged in the West in response to the need for strategies of “new forms of self-regulation” which the development of markets and civil society and their interaction demanded.

As times have passed, the discussions within the area of museum policies have risen from concerns on contemporary museum usage. Contemporary multicultural curatorial efforts are more directed at creating space for multiple voices as has been shown in the evaluation of the Museum of Chinese in America, where focus was directed at reconstructing a “bottom-up” history (Han, 2013). Whereas some have pointed to possibilities of the study of museums leading to valuable insights into the colonial endeavour in South Asian nations, and into chronicles of nationhood and the representation of history (Dudley, 2005), more recent scholarship shows an
increased emphasis on roles of museums as spaces for representing postnational, transcultural, hybrid identities where the move is away from homogenized, nation-based narratives (Han, 2013, Message, 2005). Message (2005) notes a specific movement away from the traditional in her study of the National Museum of Australia (2001) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (1998): The “rejection of the more traditional museum and its historical commitment toward an array of singular or non-compromising representations of identity” that Message talks about, is much more in tune with the concept of globalization that is projected by the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001). More closer to the topic at hand, communication with the Director during field visit reflected the same spirit in the NMML. As for the National Museum, the museum authorities were also geared towards making for a more spectator-oriented display, emphasizing on incorporating more participation from local as well as national communities in the interpretation of history.

Colonial museums in India: Constructing a New World in its Image

For the British colonial administration, India needed “a new form of knowledge” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 155). The vast country, with its rich diversity and milling population, could not only be mined for new knowledge but it provided a fantastic opportunity for the unhindered pursuit of the sciences - and museums provided the scope for scientific naming, display and classification. When India’s first museum was established in Calcutta in 1814, it was seen little more than a warehouse for rare objects. However, as it became clear to the British administrators that by following established museological practices, museums could be exceptionally useful in creating their own order of things in a culture which they read as being in epistemological disarray, colonial machinery was deployed in promoting the project of the museum. Realizing that museums “organized objects to make them speak a language, reveal an order” (Gyan
Prakash, 1992, 155) – the colonial administration soon devoted careful attention to the establishment and systematic functioning of museums. Within this project, ethnological efforts were frequently directed according to the colonial conception that India provided a fertile ground - it was close to nature, its inhabitants lived close to the soil, it was home to numerous tribes and races, its state of knowledge was chaotic and required persistent classification. As colonial pedagogy aimed to instruct peasants by exhibiting their products and knowledge, it also emphasized on the principle of function so that the viewers could learn the functioning and benefits of machinery and technology thus displayed. For the British, museums became integral part of the state apparatus through which to disseminate their systems of knowledge and an overall Eurocentric worldview on their native subjects. However, this calls for a closer look at the heterogenous nature of the imperial “subject” (Chatterjee, 2004, 27-51). In India, not all were British subjects and distinction must be made – and was made at the time – in administrative documents, between the indigenous elites and the subaltern masses. Whereas the British were keen to enlist the former as intermediaries (McCaulay Minute\textsuperscript{23}), museum displays and demonstration were particularly important for the masses because the viewer population in colonial India was mostly illiterate and the privileging of the visual over the textual in museums were seen to serve a special purpose in training this population towards more gainful positions: “in the absence of a reading public, the museum could substitute for a book, and the observing eye could stand for the reading eye.” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 160). Thus, not only did the museum evolve as an instrument of education but visuality of objects and standards of display as

\textsuperscript{23} Macaulay’s Minute on Education. (1835). Retrieved on December 9, 2012, from \url{http://www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay.html}
pedagogical strategies evolved and gained in importance in the context of the British Empire’s project to transform its largest colony’s into a new world after its won image.

In the initial stages of the establishment of museums in colonial India, the standard of knowledge and representation that formed the underlying principles were according to the imperial agenda. As McLeod points out, many colonial museums were part of the project of progress of the Empire or expansion of Europe:

These colonial museums formed a deliberate part of the Westernizing project – not identical to the civilizing mission, but sharing much of its agenda. Collecting and display were based on the principle that the “world is ours,” and the natural world belonged to science. (McLeod, 1998, 311)

On looking back at the establishment of museums in colonial India, it is hard to overlook the museum’s deployment as an educational institution for the training and civilizing of the native. To the British, India provided a rich diversity that could be mined for knowledge on scientific phenomena and anthropological resources on one hand, and on the other, the colonial perspective was also that museums could become valuable resources for providing an order of things by naming, classifying and displaying Indian artifacts for British mercantile interests. By the nineteenth century, this had led to the widespread establishment and expansion of museums in the Indian subcontinent and had also encouraged related exhibitions in Indian cities and back in England, especially in London, spurred by the fervor for promoting commerce and advancing a scientific knowledge of economic resources. Of course, the final authority on the emergence of relevant artifacts and articles worthy of entering the colonial discourse rested on colonial officials: “the emergence of these artifacts as objects of discourse, however, entailed the authorization of colonial officials as experts responsible for collecting information from ‘native informants’” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 156).
Visual representation as education

Since majority of the Indian masses could not read at the time, visual media and presentations found their mark on an especially receptive audience: “The superior standards of display enhanced the importance of visuality in museums as an instrument of education.” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 160) But the privileging of spectatorship in a culture already imbued with various indigenous performative traditions (Freitag, 2001, 35) as well as traditions of charm and magic gained a double meaning in this context: the colonial project was to train the indigenous eye for scientific wonders, conquer ignorance and superstition as also erase the influence of indigenous magic. However, museum displays and the utilization of instruments to create exhibits of scientific marvels aimed to show the efficacy of science also evoked a sense of awe at the miraculous, magical powers of science – and “became enmeshed in the very effects that were targeted for elimination” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 163). More importantly, this also “opened up an ambivalent space for the subjectivity and agency of Western-educated Indian elites” (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 163-164).

In colonial India, visual representations of natural science, agricultural resources and cultural artifacts were primarily aimed at instructing the masses, especially the peasants. By exhibiting their products – organized and classified according to Eurocentric scientific knowledge – and by imbibing the principle of function manifest from the production equipment on display, it was thought, the common peasants would be instrumental in improving production from the colonies. While such ambivalent functioning of museums – strung between education and colonization – reformulated conquest as translation, it also led to the Indian elite surfacing as the subject-agent with a “second sight” which claimed an insight into the space between the representational content and its staging. Thus, the indigenous elite re-established their power as
they distinguished their visual power (imbibed with greater understanding) from the untrained superstitious eye of the subaltern masses, whose education was their task (Gyan Prakash, 1992, 164).

**Constructing national identity**

The anti-colonial discourse, originating in elite circles, performed another magic in eliding the newly-literate, newly anointed elite’s Eurocentric knowledge system and orientation and constructed the story of Hindu Universalism and non-violent civic self-rule, thereby contributing to the anticolonial platform. This reconfigured itself into nationalism, and, in turn, was endorsed fervently by the masses. Within South Asian history, colonial historiography was replaced by nationalist historiography, with the latter reproducing the former in certain fundamental ways: “A different elite was offered for contemplation, but it remained an elite” (Dwyer & Pinney, 2001, 4). In the public culture that thus developed, westernization was frequently associated with development, Eurocentric knowledge as advanced, western societies forming an orderly foil to eastern chaos. The postcolonial alternative was to incorporate local, more embedded views of society, culture and natural phenomena, but the postcolonial elite - inevitably imbued with Eurocentric knowledge biases, instead chose to overlook representations of subaltern views, (Gyan Prakash) and in the project of constructing the identity of the new nation-state, used the power of visual representation, whether in the form of posters, or photographs, or statuary or live enactments in public spaces to augment the spoken and the performative (Freitag, 2001) with museums presentations. An elitist view of Indian culture, already prominent in colonial discourses, not only gained prominence within the postcolonial design, but they often became pivotal in directing the course of the creating the course of a coherent national culture.
As pointed out by Appadurai & Breckenridge in their discussion of culture, (1988, p6), the postcolonial condition often spurs new contexts and spurns conventional hierarchies so that not only are categories more fluid and mutually imbricated but the dialogue between the various classes of elites and masses become infinitely more complex and call for new and correspondingly complex theorization. Taking from their suggestion that public culture remains a zone of contestation, it is useful to see how certain dominant norms were elevated within the overarching ideological representation of the times at the cost of certain aspirations and practices of marginalized groups: “There is thus, at one level, ample evidence of erasure, of the elevation of particular dominant norms, alongside an ongoing debate about the nature of personal, community, and national identity. (Pinney, 2001, 9).

Just as the British established museums to create a world according to their worldview, the elite ruling class in postcolonial India also used the museum to display their accomplishment in attaining freedom, to articulate the story of the nation, and to instruct and educate the masses, and win consent of the citizens of the new democracy. In short, the museums became an integral part of the state ideological apparatus. They targeted adult citizens, many of who were uneducated but who would be called to vote, who had to be educated about their democratic responsibilities, and who had to be trained in their loyalty to a unified Indian nation. They targeted students and scholars. They hoped to garner popular support by attracting urban as well as rural populations. The nation was their project and they crafted nation-building strategies with the help of museums as educational institutions which would train their publics – especially gearing their exhibition policies to inform and educate the vast uneducated masses. The NMML focused on the emergence of the new nation and the National Museum focused on a glorious ancient past as well as more specific anthropological displays of specific areas of “evolution”
and “progress.” Both the museums deployed cultural and political resources to symbolize a coherent, cohesive national entity – a project, which scholars have insisted, was imperative in postcolonial politics of the subcontinent, given its unmanageable diversity.

For the newly-independent colonies, which proclaimed themselves to be parliamentary democracies around the middle of the twentieth century, the making of a public, culturally and economically savvy and suitably accomplished to function within the new nation’s representational politics was obviously considered an important goal. In the postcolonial reorganization of the state, such forms of self-regulation, education and social means of accumulating lessons from the past gained new meaning. Culture was seen as the most appropriate means of incorporating India’s diverse populations into the narrative of a unified, sovereign India, inculcate in them the sense of a national identity, hitherto non-existent/unrealized under the overwhelming pull of regional, ethnic, linguistic or cultural allegiances. In training them to emerge into the public sphere as accomplished citizens of the new democracy, the indigenous elite used the power of visual media in abundance (Freitag, 2001) to send forth their messages of anti-colonialism and nationalism.

In postcolonial India then, museums became one of the principal cultural ideological state apparatus positioned within an assemblage especially deployed for consolidating knowledge about a glorious past and constructing the narrative of the nation. However, as mentioned before, this was again, an elite project. For instance, in the NMML displays, whereas the fervor and euphoria of Independence is undeniable, the colonial propensity towards an elitist culture is privileged over a nuanced history of the contribution of a richly diverse populace and variously subaltern populations. Within the National museum’s schema, culture, in so far that it referred to the lifestyles, art and artifacts, manners and habits of the elite, especially useful for setting
examples for the subordinate classes, became an object of display and museums became the tangible space for showcasing this. As the nation became a project of elite statesmanship, the museum re-molded the past. In observing the display and organization of the various sections of the museums under review, this underlying principle seems to have found the greatest penetration in the postcolonial context.

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

*A Tribute*

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), founded in 1964, may be understood as being within the category of heritage sites called “house museums” and was the official residence of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, till his death in 1964. Within the contour of Nehru’s life story, the NMML also incorporates aspects of living history museums including reconstruction of a particular time period in India’s independence struggle, specially focusing on the birth of a new nation and emergence of India on the world stage as a sovereign, democratic republic with particular attention to Nehruvian contribution to it. Despite the fact that a substantial portion of the freedom struggle was conducted under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and the NMML sections leading up to Independence place ample focus on such, and Nehru’s relationship is projected as that of Gandhi’s self-professed disciple, the overall museum message may be most appropriately seen as disseminating Nehruvian politics and ideology in the project of constructing the nation and its identity. The historic building and its statuary, cited as being part of India’s heritage sites, was designed by British and French artists: sculptor Leonard Jennings, and architect Robert Tor Russel. It was known as Flagstaff House during colonial rule and used as the residence of the British Commander-in-Chief till after Independence, when it became Nehru’s home from 1947.

---

24 Institutional communication and interview with M.R.
The site has been largely maintained as it was - to give the public an insight into the life, philosophy and politics of the person who had lived in it. According to the Director, M.R., the founding principles were organized to reflect three main ideas: a) a memorial to the life of Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India’s first Prime Minister, b) portrayals of the Indian Freedom Struggle c) milestones of the emergence of independent India. Indeed, the impression that one gets from a site visit is that it has been preserved to give a keen impression of the public life of Nehru as the first Prime Minister of the Republic of India as it emerged from colonial dominance, passing through protracted periods of intense struggle, various ideological configurations, and synthesis of power relations.

*An Elite Project*

This complex field has to be studied within a perspective of how power and dominance was doubly articulated under India’s historical circumstances: “on the one hand Britain’s power to rule over its South Asian subjects, and on the other, for the power exercised by the indigenous elite over the subalterns amongst the subject population itself” (Guha, 1992, 69). The NMML museum is superbly positioned to represent this uniquely dichotomous aspect of the postcolonial cultural and political project. Curatorial choice of exhibits focus on one hand, on the long and hard-won freedom from British rule, and on the other build an overarching narrative of a unified nation coming to replace a long-colonized subcontinent of loosely affiliated princely states, various diverse demographic groups, multiple religions, ethnicities, cultures as well as linguistic and regional differences. In its choice of artifacts, in the spotlighting of national-level freedom activists, in highlighting the primacy of English as an official language as well as a lingua franca in postcolonial India, it is clear that not only is the museum, but also its subject matter, i.e. the story of the Indian nation, was an elite project.
The NMML has two distinct aspects - it is a museum but it is also a highly-regarded and well-equipped library that aims to preserve and reconstruct the history of Indian independence and is geared to foster academic research on modern and contemporary India. While this aspect of the NMML also calls for critical analysis, it is the residential quarters housed in a separate palatial building with its material belongings that is of particular interest here. Much like other house museums across the world, for instance like the Harry S. Truman National Historic Site in the United States (Harrison, 2010, 31), the NMML stages the “tangible evidence” of Nehru’s lifestyle and events from his life as a statesman, for public viewing. In this, the focus on the material evidence of the premier’s life, set within the grand space of the majestic building provides an insight into his Western educational background, his political positions and philosophical and cultural preferences.

In drawing the spectator into the narrative of Nehru’s premiership of the new state, with all its grandeur, its dignity and its ceremonies, it inspires awe and admiration for the project of nation-building. In this, the NMML follows some western standards as is noted by scholars of western heritage discourses – of focusing on material things rather than intangible practices and of portraying the powerful, the ceremonial, the celebrity status (Harrison, 2010, 32). The carpeted interiors with expensive upholstery and the various objet-d’art – metal sculptures on the coffee tables, the prize paintings on the walls (Figure 3.7), all point in the direction of a quiet elegance and high culture which the Western-educated Indian elite took as part of their lifestyle. In keeping with the colonial projects, the museum building, frequently recognized as a masterpiece of British and French architecture and woodwork, focuses on the elite, western lifestyle of Nehru - not merely because the visitor tours through the plushly decorated living rooms, bedrooms and parlors (Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.6), or in the exquisite artwork that line the walls
and adorn the coffee tables but also in the displays of the gifts collections (Figures 3.8 & 3.9) which were given to the premier as tributes and souvenirs as he toured the world. They give the visitor a first-hand exposure to the opulence at which life was lived at this level but more importantly impart a sense of grandeur by tangibly presenting the material evidence of the international recognition accorded to the new nation.

A reconstructed Prime Ministerial office takes up the central space on the main floor of the museum and the materiality of this seat of power (Figure 3.5) effectively garners the attention of the visitor towards tangible space of authority and bestows a sense of concreteness and incontrovertibility of the newly emergent Indian nation. If we view space and time as social constructs (Harvey as cited in Fairclough, 2003, 151), and consider that constructions of space and constructions of time are interconnected, then this presentation brings one closest to that historical time through a reconstruction of the physical environment of Nehru’s prime ministerial power. Ironically, the hallway which leads to the Prime Ministerial office has a huge poster on the wall which reads: “They call me the Prime Minister of India, but it would be more appropriate if I were called the first servant of India” (Figure 3.10) This language of democratic governance, and this emphasis on service of the nation is frequently adopted in his political discourses to imply that the greatest authority lies in the people. It indicates Nehru’s orientation towards a socialist approach to power relations and may be seen to ideologically draw the reader into becoming a stakeholder in the governance structure of India. On the other hand, the same floor also exhibits books from Nehru’s personal library, mainly comprising of Western authors thus directing attention towards his elite upbringing. They give the viewer a keen insight into how Nehru’s political economic philosophy was influenced by socialist writers from the West, like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Dobb and Albert Schweitzer. Sartre’s “Literary and Philosophical
Essays” in which the French philosopher “brilliantly analyses the American scene,” or Gunnar Myrdal’s “Value in Social Theory” as well as Dobbs’ “On Economic Theory and Socialism” were among the books displayed here. The fact that Western books and treatises had influenced the premier from a young age is no surprise since most of the elites in 20th century India had considerable exposure to western education. What is noteworthy is that despite the anticolonial, nationalistic fervor amidst which the new nation was born, the transfer of power was into hands that had been inspired and trained far more by western traditions than indigenous customs.

In examining the various galleries, it is evident that NMML’s original curatorial orientation might have been inspired by early twentieth century Western models of house museums but it has certainly evolved from its original status. In executing its professed aims of “portrayals of the Indian Freedom Struggle” and “milestones of the emergence of independent India” the NMML’s focus seemed to have been doing the work of building the new nation’s identity as it emerges from a long and difficult struggle with colonialism. A closer look at two specific exhibits: the Constitution Room and its “Appointed Day” artifact, and the Gift Gallery and its Commonwealth Crown, helps us gauge the extent to which these principles were captured in curatorial choices of positioning specific artifacts. A textual analysis of one of the archival scripts displayed here would help one see how identity work was performed by the elite to advance the agenda of postcolonial nation-building. Both the form and content aimed at creating a grand history of the Indian freedom struggle follow a distinct trajectory from colonization, emancipation, and emergence as a “star of the east” under the guidance of stalwarts like Nehru and Gandhi. Specific exhibits in the Constitution Room show how the various stages of the struggle for independence progressed and textual material, photographs, artifacts and archival documents have been organized so as to take the audience through a visual history building a
powerful narrative specifically directed to towards the ultimate climax of the “The Appointed Day”.

*The Appointed Day*

The Constitution Room is housed on the Upper floor of the museum and displays the first Constitution of the “sovereign socialist secular democratic Republic of India” at the center of the room in a glass showcase. It has the air of a sanctum sanctorum – an ambience of sacred presence. Amidst pictures of Nehru signing the Constitution as the first citizen of India and the various versions of the development of the Indian flag, an exhibit that clearly was singled out for special notice, is “The Appointed Day” (Figure 3.11). It is a selection from the text of the “Tryst with Destiny” speech that Nehru delivered to the Constituent Assembly on the eve of India’s independence – August 15, 1947. The curatorial preference for this speech is obvious because not only is Nehru’s address to the Constituent Assembly, marking the momentous day and time of Independence, the subject of an elaborate re-enactment sequence in an adjoining room, but here, the black plaque engraved with the speech is positioned in a prominent central floor space (Figure 3.13) with walls around it lined with various mementos and souvenirs of the short period leading up to the moment of Independence. “Appointed Day” is flanked by a collage of photographs of refugees crossing the newly-demarcated borders between India and Pakistan and the trains plying the displaced, dispossessed populations of the Partitioned nation (Figure 3.12) They merit attention in that they provide the visual vocabulary to communicate the bloodshed and heartbreak contributing to the subtext of the “non-violent” Quit India movement.

A majority of the artifacts around this are press clippings which, in addition to creating a spectacle of the momentous events through glimpses of media coverage also send the message of a Fourth Estate clearly aligned to the cause of anti-colonialism and nationalist agenda of an
independent India. The “Tryst with Destiny” speech is arguably one of the most powerful and influential nation-oriented rhetoric in modern India. Accordingly, this Janus-faced invocation ushering in a new India while searching for inspiration in India’s classical history, is positioned to be the climactic moment in the museum tour circuit. The momentum in this section almost parallels the momentum of the last stage of the struggle for freedom. Here, it is built up in a series of press clippings with banner headings announcing the different stages of evolution of the Indian freedom struggle. Even though the various historical events like the “Simla Conference,” “Unprecedented Crisis in Congress” “Britain and Germany at War” have found their place in this section, as the exhibit matures, of specific interest is the period leading up to the actual independence: “Quit India Movement 1942-44.” Newspaper articles announcing various stages of this Movement build up the expectation. There are reports on Mahatma Gandhi’s individual “satyagraha:” “Mahatma plans short and swift action25,” “India’s last fight starts today26,” “Congress rejects British Proposals,27” “Equality with Britain for India – BUT…,28” “Resolution passed by A.-I.C.C.: Indian should feel they are free men,29” “Mahatma Gandhi begins three weeks’ fast: Govt. disown responsibility,” “Release Gandhi Immediately,30” “Gandhiji Released.31” Finally, we come to announcements that the struggle is over and the press declares the doors opening to self-rule in India: “Pandit Nehru invited to form interim government,32” and

25 Banner headline in the front page of The Bombay Chronicle.
26 Banner headline in the front page of National Herald.
27 National Herald
28 The Bombay Chronicle
29 All India Congress Committee – The national committee for India’s largest political party, the All-India Congress.
30 Banner headline in The Sunday Tribune
31 Banner headline in Bombay Sentinel
32 Banner headline in Amrita Bazaar Patrika
“Door to Purna Swaraj open at last” (Figures 3.14 & 3.15). The single artifact in Hindi is a leaflet, perhaps distributed among the masses to mobilize support for the movement: *Karo ya maro*: Do or Die (Figure 3.16). The other leaflet is targeted at students, exhorting unity among students from all high schools and colleges: “An Appeal to Students: Come and Join. United we stand; divided we fall.”

The “Appointed Day” exhibit from Nehru’s speech is framed within the emerging postcolonial ideology of a rising India – an old civilization taking birth as a new, progressive nation. In examining the speech, I draw from Fairclough’s discourse analysis method and his proposal on a critical view of ideology being engaged with relations of power and domination between social groups: “Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation” (Fairclough, 2003, 9). The “Appointed Day” is placed close to the announcement in the press: “Birth of India’s Freedom: Nation wakes to new life.” In this masterpiece of an oration, Nehru uses the metaphor of a new nation being born – “India will awake to life,” “pains of labor” - to articulate foundational ideological premises, lay down the power relations between the new ruling class and the governed and also represent the imagined nation to the common masses. He frames the rhetoric within a trope of “newness” – “when we step out from the old to the new” – drawing from spectacular images to imprint the new nation in the audience’s mind: “A new star rises, the star of freedom in the East, a new hope comes into being, a vision long cherished materializes. May the star never set and that hope never be betrayed!” There are subtle references to the contingent nature of this new India – always in the making, a project under construction, a work in progress – and Nehru underscores this by

---

33 Banner headline in the front page of The Bombay Chronicle.
34 The Times of India
pointing to a continuous search - the country’s “quest” for its identity: “Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again.”

As the speech unfolds, we notice the Action, Representation and Identification processes (Fairclough, 2003, 27) that carry the audience through the highs achieved and the lows to be avoided. The Action is outlined: the moment of suppression by colonial powers has passed forever and despite the harsh conditions of a bloody Partition between India and Pakistan, independence has been achieved and the nation is emerging into a new reality. This new reality, interestingly, has not yet been achieved but is on a continuum which will unfold as a sacred mission only upon undertaking “a quest” as it brings with it the exciting opportunity of “greater triumphs and achievements”; in this, the emphasis is going to be on putting an end to inequality and communal or ethnic divisions; freedom has been achieved through the successful mobilization of the disenfranchised Indian population and service of all should become the motto of the new nation. Subtly inserted into the uplifting rhetoric is the subtext that the full accomplishment of a unified India is obviously still pending and has to be achieved by marshaling all the diverse groups into the folds of the nation. However, this is buffered early in the speech by a striking stellar image of the nation as a star in the Eastern firmament.

The image of the nation as a rising star is clearly deployed to catch the national imagination and is distinctly different from the earlier colonial image of India as a jewel in the Imperial Crown and firmly pegs the nation’s identity to a more celestial order than the imperial one. It is also one which has endured through the decades with subsequent political factions
using it to frame India’s progress. In the process of identifying what the nation and its identity is, who the leaders are and who the followers who have to be won over, Nehru uses the metaphor of newness, of rising hope, of freedom as a torch which banished the dark past, of the contrasting positions of the “old spirit of India” and new India - “the awake, vital, free and independent” national future and finally of a nation dedicated to service of humanity.

Though Nehru encapsulates the long colonial history in one phrase: “we end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again,” what is of paramount importance here, is how in the next few paragraphs he uses a background of colonial domination (without using the term) to articulate the social relations of the postcolonial rule within the identity of the imagined nation. He demarcates between the two entities who are implicated in this speech through Representation of, the Speaker (and the group he represents) on one side, and the Audience/Constituent Assembly members, on the other. The latter is placed in double articulation because Nehru’s “we” encompasses them in a literal sense since he was speaking as the leader of the Assembly and also addressing the Constituent Assembly. But the audience is also the people, citizens at large, since the postcolonial administration, consisting of various political leaders, were naught but representatives of the people, “the people of India, whose representatives we are.” So the entire citizenry on a broader scale are being interpellated in this speech. As he creates an elaborate ground for future action toward this sublime project of construction of a new India, he establishes the unequivocal authority of the legislators who are included in this Assembly. He delineates that these positions are imbued with great responsibility – to dedicate oneself in the service of the nation much in the lines of Gandhian philosophy. This is an Identification process (Fairclough, 2003, 27) in which the Speaker makes a commitment or gives

---

35 The Bharatiya Janata Party used this image in its “India rising, India Shining” public relations campaign.
an undertaking. Nehru makes a commitment to realize the dreams, fulfill the pledges which were taken over the years of freedom struggle. There is no doubt that this speech also at the same time, marks the distinction between “we,” on one side – “we” who are, like him, the leaders, those who have made pledges, who have responsibility to “to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation”, the chosen few who have the been entrusted with the task “to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell,” and on the other side, “the common man,” “the peasants and workers of India.”

The Althusserian argument underscores that Ideological State Apparatuses operate not through violence but through ideology. And, as we learn from Althusser, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1970). From the critical standpoint of ideologies as representations of the world deployed in establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power (Fairclough, 2003, 9), this speech becomes an exemplar of how texts may transcend their political bearing and impact ideological structuring of a society for generations to come. In this instance, the museum study allows us to understand how the events celebrating Independence became the platform to interpellate the common masses into the ideology of the postcolonial elite in India and afforded a smooth transition of power from colonial to postcolonial elite hands under the banner of building a cohesive, unified nation (Figures 3.17 & 3.18). It also provides opportunities to study how the museum becomes a site and vehicle for the circulation of such ideological discourse even as it is retained for posterity. In his speech, Nehru, the Prime Minister-elect of the new Indian state, was not merely extolling the birth of the nation but he was delineating the changing power relations between his group of elite political leaders and the various demographic populations who had helped push the freedom struggle forward. This changing power relation from where they were compatriots
confronting British authorities together to where they were now the ruler and the ruled is enacted through the ideological representation of the state as being born anew, a star rising, an enterprise which is struggling to make a fresh start in a global environment and needs the cooperation of the elite and the masses. This ideological construction is not only imbued with the honor and stature of Nehru’s personality, but repeated reference to Gandhi and his investment in the project imparted it a stability and durability far transcending the dynamics of independence celebrations making a permanent place within the Indian national imagination. In his speech on the Sixtieth anniversary of India’s independence, the Prime Minster, Mr. Manmohan Singh referred to these ideals, to “An India that is united despite its many diversities...An India that is not divided by caste, creed or gender” (Singh, 2007, as cited in Allen, 2010, 199).

The Gift Gallery

If the Constitution Room and its “Appointed Day” exhibit builds upon the construction-of-the-new-nation theme, the Gift Gallery places that newly formed nation in a global perspective – it places the nation within its international community. More importantly, these material art objects, a feast for the eyes of the culturally uninitiated, draws from two specific traditions of ancient Indo-Persian courtly culture to build the power relation between the premier and the citizens. In South Asian courtly traditions, which the subcontinental traditions were imbued with, a) the ruler appears before the public giving them an “opportunity to gaze” (Freitag, 2001, 40); b) the monarch is presented khillat or nazar by way of offerings of exquisite gifts, frequently reciprocated. Here, the gift collections do the work of creating a vision of the nation and its ruler, represented in the unified modern Indian state by the nation’s premier, being welcomed and honored on the world stage by presentation of gifts. This display of the finest craftsmanship from all over the world underscores how corporality and visuality are deeply
intertwined in the NMML’s presentation. As Freitag notes with respect to South Asian culture, “visual vocabularies operate not as an extension or transmutation of oral or written words, but as basic building blocks in a process of ‘knowing’ that is achieved by acquiring and processing information through the eyes” (2001, 40). She notes that this orientation to vision and the exercise of the gaze, as it is intrinsically connected in the South Asian culture to the relationship between royalty, between the ruler and the subjects, also set up certain expectations about the relationship between the “font of power and the audience” (41). This opening up to the gaze, this exercise of vision, also has a transactional quality in which power is reinforced and acceded, and gifts, as they are presented, accepted and gazed upon reinforce this power relation “the exercise of gaze became part of an integrative ceremonial process embedded with meaning (and, conceivably, layered with meanings that differed for each participant)” (Freitag, 2001, 41).

In this instance of the Gift Gallery, the gifts deploy the spectacle in the work of a triple articulation: the political relation between the premier and his international counterparts; the relation between the Indian state and the other nations; the relation between the premier and his subjects. The several chambers which combine to form the Gift Collection Gallery are lined with glass showcases containing souvenirs: golden key to the city of New York from the United States of America; golden key to the city of Tokyo from Japan; marble elephant sculpture and finely curved silver Buddha statuette from Burma; porcelain vases, carved ivory gift boxes from China; silver tea services from Tehran; silver filigreed box from Jordan; stone-inlaid metal temple sculptures from Nepal; silver-and gunmetal leafed work from Lebanon and Poland; Czechoslovakian crystal vase (Figure 3.19); marble cases from Afghanistan; silver filigreed wine casket from Romania (Figure 3.20); silver bowl from Laos, carinated Lotus-design silver bowl from Turkey; silver bowl from America; metal sculptured holder from Norway, ornamental
sword from Cambodia; wooden crest-engraved box from Somalia; silver plate with Chilean emblems of the Coat-of-arms; Cloisonné enameled plate from Italy; Egyptian artwork; silver coinage from France, precious stone-studded jewellery box from USSR; stone and inlay worked metal sculpture of elephant form Ceylon; a silver model of Shalimar Gardens from Pakistan. Of particular interest is the trophy that occupies a certain pride of place within this gallery (Figure 3.21) – it is a Crown replica and sits at the center of the main Gift exhibit and is inscribed with the insignia of the Commonwealth of Nations. Each of the ten facets of this Coronation Crown replica represents each of the countries or sets starting with the crest of the Commonwealth: Ceylon, Republic of India, New Zealand, Canada, England & Ireland, United Kingdom & Republic of India, Scotland and Wales, Australia, South Africa, and finally, Pakistan. The trophy is mounted with a replica of the Coronation Crown and decorated with the national symbols or crests of each of the countries. The placement of this emblematic Commonwealth insignia trophy at a premium location in the gallery carries with it a subliminal message of the Indian republic still being connected in some way to the British crown and also it being a relationship which is valued and cherished by the new Indian state.

The National Museum, New Delhi

But a just world must entail normalization; the promise of justice must attend not only to the seduction of power, but also to the anguish that knowledge must suppress difference as well as differance, that a fully just world is impossible, forever deferred and different from our projections, the undecidable, in the face of which we must risk the decision that we can hear the other. (Spivak, 1999, 199)

The residues of an imperial worlding and molding process that are often evident in the privileging of dominant ideologies within an elitist postcolonial culture, are, of course, predicated on earlier colonial epistemological and curatorial practices. In questioning the authenticity of imperial historiography, Spivak’s critique draws attention to archival records that
“showed the soldiers and administrators of the East India Company constructing the object of representations that becomes a reality of India” (Spivak, 1999, 203). In troubling the often blurry boundaries between colonial history and postcolonial literary exercises, Spivak insisted that under such conditions of history-making, the “reading of literature can directly supplement the writing of history with suspicious ease” (204). The ruptures that the project of nationalist literature or history had to contend with, in trying to access authentic “historical” accounts from the archives of imperial governance, are multiple. Curatorial decision-making was thus imbricated in a complex relationship with the authority of the author contesting the control of the archon, the “official custodian of truth” (Spivak, 205).

*The Making of History and National Identity*

The postcolonial elite, who had a strong hand in fashioning a new cultural identity of the new nation, in constructing the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) as well as the founding policies of major national museums, had emerged from “a class… produced of indigenous functionary-intelligentsia who were not-quite-not-white and acted as buffers between the foreign rulers and the native ruled” (Spivak, 1999, 359). They were always already imbricated in the myriad dilemmas arising from the contradictory cross-currents of colonial or indigenous heritage agendas. Within an understanding that “elite ‘postcolonialism’ seems to be as much a strategy of differentiating oneself from the racial underclass as it is to speak in its name” (Spivak, 1999, 358), the postcolonial project of building the grand narrative of a unified Indian history and identity became imbued with claims of cultural and ethnic specificity and continuity.

Foregrounding this postcolonial agenda against the earlier British understanding about their imperial role in India would perhaps recreate to the closest, the contested ground on which the National Museum of Delhi was initiated. Among the immensely complex and variously
apportioned aspirations of the British in India, one strand involved “taking on an imperial duty to modernize a culture and a country that had an ancient history and tremendous spiritual value but that had slipped into decline under the later Mughal rulers” (Allen, 2010, 208). Exhibitions of Indian arts and crafts had grown in popularity in nineteenth and early twentieth century England, and recent museological scholarship locates the origin of the National Museum in an exhibition at the Burlington House, London in 1947-48, called “Exhibition of Art chiefly from the Dominions of India and Pakistan.” The catalogue described the display as such: “The technical and aesthetic qualities of Indian art…its deep spiritual significance. It is the visible expression of the life, thought and religious experience of the peoples of India, (Royal Academy of Arts, 1947, ix, as cited in Allen, 2010, 208).

The events leading up to the creation of this museum were thus initiated outside the country, in England. The project was a joint project of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Royal Society of Arts and the Royal India Society and the exhibition title reflects not only the foundational British idea to represent India through the display of arts and crafts underscoring the Hindu spiritual component of Indian heritage, but also to present India and Pakistan as part of British dominion heritage as late as in 1947-48. Whereas the title recognizes the division of the subcontinent into two countries, it fails to move past their status as dominions of the British Empire. In their aim to foster a better acquaintance with India among British citizenry, as well as present objects in a broad chronological sequence, organizers of the Burlington House exhibition brought objects of very different kinds and from a wide range of sources to be displayed in the same spaces (Allen, 2010). In the use of art from public and private collections this exhibition reflected a pattern of collection and appropriation of Indian objects deemed of value by British administrators. Thus it reveals the museum project to be imbricated in various
ways with colonial ideological as well as mercantilistic interests. Whereas the public presentation of the exhibition was professed to disseminate a cohesive narrative of Indian heritage based on its spiritual and aesthetic traditions, the curatorial positioning could not but reveal an overriding colonial construction about the largely Hindu spiritual nature of Indian heritage. Set amidst these myriad aims and agendas, it is not surprising, then, that the initiation of the National Museum and its final establishment in December 1960 was also imbricated in various complicated transactions. Despite an initial enthusiasm for it within the nationalist project, its project “to serve as epitome of national identity” shows the strain of having to deal with conflicted national heritage discourses.

The blueprint for establishing the National Museum in Delhi had been prepared by the Maurice Gwyer Committee in May 1946. An Exhibition of Indian Art consisting of selected artifacts from various museums of India… was on display in the galleries of Burlington House, London during winter months of 1947-48. It was decided to display the same collection in Delhi before the return of exhibits to their respective museums. An exhibition was organized in the Rashtrapati Bhawan (the President’s residence), New Delhi, in 1949, which turned out to be a great success. This event proved responsible for the creation of the National Museum. (Website, National Museum).

Not merely the cross-currents of colonial agendas but postcolonial aspirations, geared toward “presenting a unified history of a unified Indian heritage,36 indicate the various contradictions which were inherent in the project despite its initial success in London and New Delhi. India had achieved its independence in August 1947 and the subcontinent’s history and heritage had been marked forever by the Partition of an India and a Pakistan: the former constructed as a mainly Hindu and the latter as a dominantly Islamic nation. In this light, the postcolonial curatorial decisions bear the mark of equally complicated and often historically and politically inappropriate representations contributing to the identity-building work that the museum purports to do. Allen (2010) points to a few instances of the various controversial

---

36 Institutional literature
representations that mark the curatorial project of the National Museum. In the next few pages I will summarize the exhibits of the National Museum with particular attention to a few situations which focus on the contested ground of national identity-building.

*Repository of a Rich and Diverse Culture*

The National Museum boasts of having in its possession over 2,06,000 exquisite works of art covering more than 5000 years of Indian cultural heritage: “rich holdings of various creative traditions and disciplines which represent a unity amidst diversity, an unmatched blend of the past with the present, strong perspective for the future, brings history to life” (Institutional Literature: National Museum brochure, 2013). The museum space is apportioned to 16 different permanent exhibitions: Harappan Civilization, Archaeology, Buddhist Art, Indian Miniature Painting, Evolution of Indian Scripts and Coins, Decorative Arts Galleries, Manuscripts, Central Asian Antiques, Coins, Paintings from Tanjore and Mysore, Indian Textiles, Pre-Columbian and Western Arts, Wood Carving, Musical Instruments, Tribal Lifestyle of North-East India, and finally, Arms and Armour. Each of these permanent sections incorporate several other sub-categories of exhibits. There are sections on Ethnic Art, Maritime Heritage and Mughal miniature paintings. Of course this does not include the various temporary exhibitions that are staged every year – for instance the “Rama-Katha: The story of Rama through Indian miniatures” held August 16 to October 13, 2013 or Musical Landscapes and Goddesses of Music Recent Advances in Interactive Art to be held in November 2014.

The introduction to the National Museums’ various exhibitions is through a set of galleries on the main ground floor just off the foyer. The galleries and the hallway leading from it, feature a huge exhibit on ancient Indian Hindu religious sculptures, very extensive in nature and ancient in origin (Figure 3.22). In this first section, the museum tries to present the story of the ancient
culture of India and the great civilizations that contributed to it – constructing a national heritage the modern India can be proud of and can build upon: “the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance” (Nehru, 1947). In building the story of ancient India the curatorial choices go back as far as 3000 BCE to show artifacts from the Harappan Civilization and then swing forward to more recent samples from around 6th century A.D. The relics represent Mauryan, Shunga and Satvahana art (3rd century B.C. to 1st or 2nd century A.D.), the Kushana artifacts – the Gandhara, Mathura and Ikshavaku art objects – as well as the Gupta Dynasty legacy (4th to 6th century A.D.) with their legendary terra cotta and medieval sculptures (Figure 3.23).

Building a Homogenous Identity

In finding the clear context for artifacts, one comes upon the realization that a substantial percentage of the exhibits are focused on showcasing India’s Hindu religious heritage. The Gupta period is particularly important and in highlighting it elaborately, the museum presents an Indian heritage story as it is founded in a Hindu culture that was successful and widely recognized for its prosperity and tolerance (Allen, 2010, 211). It perhaps reflects the sentiments of the original British exhibition from which this museum evolved where they envisioned representation of Indian heritage by spotlighting its Hindu spiritual art. The organizers of the Burlington House exhibition had resorted to Hindu religious iconography as the key to one of those overarching labels for a cohesive Indian heritage. In the postcolonial endeavor, this orientation towards privileging Hindu art, whether in the permanent sections or in special exhibits, has retained its centrality as a key to establishing an early history for the newly independent India’s identity. Though there are scanty references to Jain or Sikh art, the only other major religion represented is Buddhism and that has been seen (Allen, 2010) as a political position within the postcolonial reasoning. This is not merely because Buddhism had some
degree of its origin owed to the Indian Hindu ancestry of Gautam Buddha, but also because of two major national connections. First of all, scholars have seen Buddhism to have a certain “importance in the nationalist struggle and the history of independent India” (Allen, 2010) with regard to Gandhi’s non-violent satyagraha and his stand against caste-based discrimination, especially the repressions of the “untouchables” or the Dalits. Secondly, India is complexly engaged with the issues of Tibet and it’s largely Buddhist refugee population in India, its struggle for sovereignty and India’s non-committal political stand on Tibet. India’s position has been seen as problematic - especially in steering clear of a direct confrontation with China and acceptance of Tibet at a part of China on one side and also allowing asylum to Dalai Lama, Tibet’s spiritual leader, and thus facilitating an informal Tibetan Parliament in exile in Dharamsala, in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. In devoting an elaborate, richly-endowed and highly-attended section to Buddhist art, the curatorial position is seen to be regulating “the contemporary authorized discourse…to manage more volatile meanings” (Allen, 2010) with a view to circumventing the inconveniences of these complex, contested grounds while tacitly supporting the Tibetan cause.

So, inscribed in the story of the Indian nation and national identity that the National Museum tries to disseminate, is also the political project of eliding the Muslim component of the nation and its construction as an imagined community descended from Hindu classical roots. That Islam could, within the same classicizing mode, claim “an alternative classical tradition” seemed to have been, not overlooked, but gainfully appropriated by the nationalist planners. In deploying Islam as a foreign incursion into a pristine Hindu heritage, the nationalist planning effort seems to have again bypassed a contentious topic and inconvenient truths about Indian Islamic traditions and co-opted a certain sanitized version of popular Islam (Chatterjee, 1992).
Indeed, besides the sole Decorative Arts Gallery and a small miniature painting section, the Indian Islamic traditions are conspicuous by their absence. The Decorative Arts Gallery displayed about 304 artifacts to “unfold the material culture of later Mughal period (from 17th century onwards)” - ornamental engravings on silver perfume trays, silver huqqa, bidri candle stand, marble-inlaid plate, or painted glass bowls.

The only other section that prominently featured Islamic art was Mughal miniature paintings, curiously listed as one of the “sub styles” relating to the period from 1000 A.D. to 1900 A.D. In the chronological sequence of the museum, this section seems to represent the post-medieval era, one of great ascendance for the Muslim Mughal Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries when miniature art peaked to an exquisite finesse under Emperors Jahangir and Akbar. However, the Mughal miniatures are oddly presented here as a sub category within a wider genre of Jain, Pahari, Tanjore and Mysore, Rajasthani and Deccani miniature paintings (Figure 3.24):

“the National Museum’s collection of Mughal paintings are put into the context of a much wider range of paintings, including a particularly fine collection of Pahari paintings from the Punjab, many of which have explicitly Hindu subjects” (Allen, 2010, 213-214). Also in this section, amid an extensive parade of Hindu themes based on Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagwratpurana, Durgasaptasati, Jaidev’s Gita Govinda, Ragamala, Baramasa, Panchatantra and Vishnu Purana, insignificantly positioned are “a few Indo-Islamic manuscripts such as Shahnama and Baburnama.” (National Museum Brochure, 2011). One way to view this would be that in reconstructing the period as an era of broad national unity, differences of religion and styles have been drawn in under a broad overhead genre.

This history of the nation could only accommodate Islam as a foreign element, domesticated by shearing its own lineages of a classical past. Popular Islam could then be incorporated in the national culture in the doubly sanitized form of syncretism. (Chatterjee, 1992, 66-67)
In eliding the diversities of religious and political foundations to the Indian nation, the postcolonial project and the National Museum planning seem to be complexly engaged in controversial presentations of Indian ancestry, its national identity in the present as well as the identities of its imagined ideal citizenship. In the next paragraphs, I would like to focus on the controversial presentations of the Harappan Civilization as well as the normative framing of the Tribal Lifestyle in North-East India to problematize the museum space as a complex site for creating new discourses or reconstructing older narratives within the new order.

I try to show how the National Museum’s position in being originally predicated on decisions taken by British authorities has created tensions within its current project of constructing a coherent national identity. The Harappan Civilization section, and representation of certain objects within this now-controversial exhibition, has been recently challenged by epistemological advances leading to new interpretations of the artifacts. Until the 1950s the dominant view was that creation of modern Indian civilization was initiated by an Aryan invasion, which originated in Central Asia and entered India via Afghanistan. Based on clear evidence that it had displaced the indigenous Harappan civilization, dominant features of Indian culture – especially Vedic roots of its religion – were traced to this Aryan culture which came from outside. Thus, Aryan ancestry was stabilized in India’s discourses of spiritual heritage. Moreover, since the original sites of the Harappan cities like Mohenjo Daro had passed to Pakistan after Independence, this disconnection seemed to be appropriate. In the latter half of the twentieth century, archaeological discoveries of the existence of extensive Harappan communities within India not only challenged the story of its demise in Aryan hands but have initiated new alternative story of Indian origin with discussions of the Harappan society being the font for India civilization: “Now, it can be argued that the ancient origins of Indian religion and
culture lie within its own borders and within the Harappan civilization” (Allen, 2010, 214). This trajectory finds greatest support from fundamentalist organizations who promote “an India whose essence in law and everyday practice is Hindutva (or Hindu-ness)” (Allen, 2010, 214), finding some support by interpreting prominent Harappan artifacts as Hindu religious icons – for example Shiva Lingam-shaped stone sculptures. Notwithstanding the intense contestations of Indian heritage origins that this would create, the placing of Indian ancestry within the coordinates of an indigenous past with strong Hindu components on one hand and geographical locations within boundaries of modern India presents profound challenges to constructing a national identity based on Vedic origins and disavows a racial entity essentially homogeneous in nature. In trying to retain the chronological heritage narrative as its central project, and stay focused on the official line, the National Museum handles this by relabeling the controversial Phallic symbol as “Ritual Objects” thereby eliding any stand on the Hindu-ness or otherwise of it. Granted that the antiquity of the Harappan objects and the indecipherability of their inscriptions make any clear identification impossible, the museum’s stand is seen as engaged in avoiding contested grounds.

Silenced Histories

The section “Tribal Lifestyle of North-East India”, is on the other hand, clearly presented according to established traditions in European museum practices - representing the Orient or postcolonial societies with focus on the primitive, the underdeveloped, the exotic with the greatest potential to illuminate the trajectory of progress, evolution and racial hierarchy (McLeod, 1998). It is also framed within the dominant discourse of mainstream Indian history and politics and the title of the exhibit is strikingly worded to imply that the North-East region of India has a tribal lifestyle. The Northeastern region of India, consisting of a group of states like
Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland has been constructed in a binary opposition with the rest of India. The positioning of the Northeastern tribes as a racialized “Mongolian Other” of the Aryan-descended Indian race originated in colonial discourse and Northeasterners have been traditionally viewed as incomplete citizens of India (Bora, 2010).

Colonial discourse represented India and the Northeast (or colonial Assam) as binary opposites and the Northeastern tribes emerged as the ‘Mongolian other’ of Aryan India in this historiography. … While India was represented through the categories of caste and religion, the Northeast was primarily understood through the category of racialized ‘Mongolian’ tribes who migrated from China and South East Asia. This anthropological narrative constituted the Northeastern tribes as different from the tribes in rest of the country who emerged as adivasis or as indigenous to India. (Bora, 2010, 346)

The marginalizing of the Northeast originated from the thwarting of British capitalist interests in the tea plantations of Assam. As the communities there rejected ideas of British political liberalism, it led to colonial discourses constructing the Northeast tribes as “savages” who could not be disciplined into modern ways and were incapable of participating in modern institutions of self-government. The colonial powers then discursively constituted the hill tribes of Northeast India as being in the periphery of British civil and criminal law and instated the Inner Line Regulation, preventing contact between hill tribes and plains people. Though the postcolonial nationalist discourse tried to dismantle the colonial racist narrative on the Northeastern tribes by giving more autonomy to tribes to govern themselves through tribal customary laws and institutions (Bora 2010), the language used was couched in nationalist terms of the primacy of the Indian nation, built on the cultural nationalist narrative of Indian history, which did not include the Northeastern tribes within the category of ‘Indian.’ Under the postcolonial administration, then, the Northeast remained a wild region, which needed martial laws to be governed. They initiated the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives
the Army inordinate powers in the interest of maintaining law and order – in aid of civil power. Consequently, the Northeast region has become the most militarized region in the nation with Northeast inhabitants constructed as incomplete Indian citizens falling short within the schema of mainstream nationalist discourse. More importantly, nationalist historiography, incorporated the above Orientalist narrative without dismantling the distinction between India and the Northeast, and constituted the Northeastern tribes as belonging to another civilization, located in South East Asia, and different from Indian or Indic civilization (Bora, 2010). Recent scholarship has shown how Prime Minister Nehru tried to dismantle the colonial racist narrative by giving more autonomy to the Northeast tribes in organizing self-government according to their customary tribal rules, institutions and laws, but the language used in this respect was almost always couched in the nationalist discourse in terms of primacy of the Indian nation based on the dominant cultural narrative.

The spectacular displays of tribal lifestyle in the National Museum goes a long way in illuminating these positions adopted by colonial and henceforth postcolonial administrations, ultimately reflected in its curatorial decisions. The exhibit consists of primitive weaponry, masks, rudimentary garments, handwoven baskets and fishing or hunting implements (Figure 3.26a & 3.26b), jewellery or tribal art, and photographs of tribal leaders in various primitive ornamentations and headdresses (Figure 3.27). Just as the primitive hunting and fishing implements pointed to hunter-gatherer livelihoods still caught in the medieval period (Figure 3.28), the reconstruction of the interior of huts pointed to basic minimums of an indigenous lifestyle (Figures 3.25a & 3.25b).

The exoticism of the natural- often represented in the body, especially the partly unclothed, brown female body, but also the male in warlike pose-became conversational icons of European fantasy, transported from Oceanic fact to Western fable. Representing indigenous peoples as both hostile and welcoming, exotic and
savage lent an emphasis to the primitive, the barbaric, and the heathen that accorded well with both pre-Darwinian natural history and Victorian evolutionary theory. (McLeod, 1998, 311) See Figures 3.29a & 3.29b.

The walls lined with glass cases containing fearsome masks, when juxtaposed with photographs of tribal people wielding dangerous weapons, cannot but be construed as a chronicle of dangerous, primitive communities. The simplistic definitions and captions hardly achieve a greater understanding of the deeply cultural and spiritual significance of the practices which are represented in these masks, weapons, or warlike rituals. Even the musical instruments presented here are framed as rudimentary and this is accentuated by the fact that the North-East exhibit shares a gallery with the exhibit of Sharan Rani Backliwal Musical Instruments. Sharan Rani was an accomplished President award-winning musician, whose private twentieth century collection is combined with various European instruments from the nineteenth century – quite a witness to the “high culture” that the postcolonial elite inherited from their colonial counterparts. Neither the miscellaneous apparels, headgears, ornaments, paintings, basketry, wood carvings, smoking pipes or personal adornments nor the simplistic captions blurbs on tribal rituals speak for any culture but a barbaric, violent and conflictual ethnic composition with hardly a distinction between one tribe or the other (Figure 3.30).

While a Naga armlet is captioned and distinguished from a Karbi ornamentation (Figure 3.31), hardly any other text adorns the walls thereby forming a sub-text which conflates these widely diverse and culturally endowed communities. Their religion, definitely not portrayed as Hindu, by default is relegated to some primitive practices of which only indications that the viewer receives is in the form of some reconstructions of primitive rituals performed at festival congregations.

Discussion and Conclusion
Whereas this exclusion or marginalization of multiple identities and histories within these postcolonial societies could easily be examined as racialized patterns of classification and exhibition within particular historical, social, political and cultural conditions or marginalization of diverse indigenous communities and their histories, the current project was oriented to view the organization of the collections discussed here within the schema of larger epistemological projects in which the effort is to draw from the past iconic figures and landmark narratives so as to serve as a means of educating the masses (Figure 3.32 a & 3.32b). The actual life events of the masses and grassroots histories of the times, which have been, to a certain degree, preserved in oral histories emerging from community narratives, media archives and literary treatise, could have been unearthed through careful historical exploration. This might be outside the purview of this study. But it is not too far off to suggest that at the time and place selected for this museum study project, the initial selections were regulated to represent much more an overarching narrative of national identity and a classical past rather than the diverse struggles racking the innermost cores of these postcolonial societies in their emergence as free nations. The museums examined in this project need to be recognized as being operated within the specific cultural and historical contexts of their founding principles and yet being caught up in the currents of the present, looking for “revisions” which might help them to re-envision the past. In doing such, they could guide themselves out of a maze of past curatorial choices which obfuscated grassroots histories and re-create the contemporary museum as a space for creating collective memory of a nuanced national past. Whereas the museums connected to colonial and postcolonial nation-building narratives clearly concentrate on the elite rather than the masses, the current study marked that contemporary curatorial decisions, at least in NMML are increasingly made in alignment with recent trends to incorporate more multiple strains of histories within the
overarching narrative of the nation. Eventually this leads to the hope for possibilities of exploring and initiating discussions of obliterated chronicles on indigenous histories, with exciting prospects in future studies leading us towards throwing light on suppressed histories of marginalized populations.

The postcolonial elite carried forward many of the strategies of governance instated by colonial powers. Among these, prominent was the deployment of spatial action in the exercise of power. In the next chapter, I examine how the postcolonial administration positioned the City as a display window for the newly-emergent nation right after Independence and aimed to create a “Machine City” out of New Delhi. How the capital city and the NCR then shaped up as a post-industrial globalized metropolis, complexly configured under the uneven touchdown of globalization, in the first decades of the 21st century, is examined in Chapters 4 and 5.
References


CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING A NEW INDIA: THE CITY AS THE FACE OF THE NATION IN TRANSFORMATIONS OF URBAN LIFE FROM INDEPENDENCE THROUGH FIRST DECADES OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

“The past is unsettled, not in the sense that it yields only imperfect knowledge or data, but in the sense that it lives” (Sassen, 2000, 223).

History leaves its indelible impression on civilizations and one of the most tangible and identifiable markers of such development finds expression in the city. Urban development and indeed the dynamic structuring of man-made environment thus become crucial entry points into the discussion about a particular society, its historical flows, its culture, its political processes and power structures. For cultural studies, the realization that recent cultural transformations, often arising out of latest technologies attended upon by novel processes of production, circulation and consumption did not solely come out of developments in the communication and media world, brought home the significance of studying the processes of the material world, especially with central attention to the city as a unity. Social sciences scholars noticed the effects of a world economy as it evolved through years of western-centric planning and management with operations mainly centered in the U.S. or European cities, to move into an era of spatially dispersed organization of a complex globally-integrated economy which was administered through massive networks of production, supply and management – dependent on a transnational urban system.
Building a New India

This current discussion focuses on spatial action as it was initially embarked upon in colonial and postcolonial India, and expressed in urban planning and architectural decisions. It reviews how the theme of urban physical construction has consistently circulated in old and new narratives of nation-building. Thereon it proceeds to a closer study of the contemporary Indian city as representing national identity in the age of globalization and liberalization. With closer attention to the Indian National Capital Region, especially Gurgaon, frequently referred to as India’s version of a “global city,” or the Millennium City, I try to understand the transformations in the national imaginary that gets persistently expressed through the changing face of the Indian city. I examine its emergence from the underlying logic of specific social, cultural and political-economic positions taken by a society where spatial action may be described as follows: “the physical and spatial arrangements characterizing urban development – indeed, the entire man-made environment – are the unique products of a particular society and culture, operating within a given distribution of power” (King, 1976, xii).

In examining the concept of spatial action within the contemporary globalized vocabulary, this paper looks at the emergence of the “global city” construct in India foregrounded against conditions already configured by initial colonial urban development, postcolonial urbanization and nation-building. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, focus group participation, government websites, citizen’s network websites and email communication as well as newspaper coverage, this essay shows how the transformations in the Indian urban has signified changing national identity through the decades following Independence.

37 National Capital Region of India: Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Faridabad and several adjoining areas are combined to form this huge urban area. The exact area is hard to specify because incorporation of newer satellite towns and suburbs keep expanding its actual size.
Wyatt (2005) points to economic constructions of India’s national identity where physical infrastructure-building became the metaphor for construction India’s national economy - the central trope within which the narrative of the newness of the nation was articulated following Independence. The years following the independence from British rule in 1947 saw the construction of New Delhi not merely as a site for nationalistically-inclined cultural events, or for staging of socio-political campaigns but also as a symbolic space which showcased the national imagination: “remodeling the face of urban India was another nationalist priority” (Wyatt, 2005, 468). This was a transition from the colonial city the British administration had mapped out with help from Lutyens for display of colonial sovereignty and mobilization of ceremonial power of the Empire over the colonized.

Modernist depictions of Indian national identity made free use of the theme of physical construction. The construction of infrastructure and plant to build capital goods was a leading element of the First Five Year Plan. The nation was literally being constructed under the watchful eye of Prime Minister Nehru. …. They saw a new nation coming into being. (Wyatt, 2005, 468).

The inception of what is now called the Gurgaon may have been initiated by private sector’s drive, especially companies like Delhi Land and Finance (DLF), to develop real estate outside the boundaries of the city of New Delhi as the state pushed for land monopoly following the formation of the Delhi Development Authority in 1957. However, it is also easy to see how it played out a particularly postcolonial propensity to deploy iterations of the capital city as representation of a new India – an attribute inherited from the postcolonial elite’s emphasis on building a new nation with essentially a new urban identity. The Nehruvian preference for newness as a defining characteristic of India and Indianness had found expression in creating new urban spaces in the postcolonial nation-building when urban planners were charged with
completing of medium-sized projects, including several industrial townships like Bhilai, Bokaro, Durgapur and Rourkela in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that “were upheld as exemplary national spaces of the new India” (Roy, cited in Wyatt, 2005, 468). These were cities that would enable the birth of new citizens and could become spaces in which the state could foreground activities undertaken on behalf of the nation. Whereas these steel townships combined the urban ambitions of the nation with the emerging postcolonial project of industrial development, the plan for such development did not hold and this imaginary underwent a transition in keeping with the changing priorities of the nation. In the years following the liberalization of India’s economy in the 1990s, the information technology sector coordinated with the global economy to create a knowledge economy and its affiliated service sectors. As this took center stage, so did the urban spaces which provided them the geographical anchoring, thus emerging as the dominant iconography representing the latest iteration of the new India.

(However), there has been a transformation in the nationalist imaginary. The steel towns did not live up to modern nationalist expectations. Newness is still esteemed, but the new India is now differently located and understood in other ways. Steel, once a totemic product, has been displaced by software in the national imaginary. … Rapidly growing Gurgaon and prosperous Bangalore are the favoured urban metaphors for a globally oriented India. (Wyatt, 2005, 468).

In the last two decades of twentieth century, especially as liberalization and globalization-initiated boom came to bear effect on space as a commodity, the development of the Global City as a face of this new emerging India acquired a new currency. I argue that in postcolonial societies such as India, while globalization has definitely initiated rapid urbanization of a novel kind – leading to narratives of a new India – closer scrutiny reveals that some of the logic under which the current national capital city region was developed can be traced back, in some form, to exist even during the post-Independence and colonial eras as well.
In this, the most important spatial action that one notices in the organization of colonial Delhi, New Delhi and Gurgaon is the use of space to mark and establish power over the governed. On the other hand, though the use of space/spatial organization as a containment strategy, and a method of stratification of population and segregation according to culture-specific values is undeniable, it continues to be challenged and resisted in postcolonial settings like India, by what scholars like Chatterjee (2004) call the “politics of the governed” – where marginalized subjects resist oppressive, negligent or non-egalitarian governance strategies of the state. Therefore, in addition to the city and related spatial politics pointing towards interesting developments in power relationships and issues of differential citizenship, this ethnographic study of the city and its citizens sees a greater promise in exploring the “new culture” side of the new India that is shaping up under our eyes: not merely the urban anxieties, insecurities or the vulnerabilities noted in earlier scholarship (Srivastava, 2012, 2013; Moodie, 2010; Das, 2011) but also a sense of carpe diem evident in the lives, lifestyles and worldviews of citizens in these new urban areas of Gurgaon in Indian NCR:

    Earlier the culture used to be: you need to save for your retirement and whatever you do, your first priority was your savings and then you spend. But now it’s totally opposite: you earn today, you spend today and retirement goes for a toss. We’ll see what happens when we retire … It’s: live for the day. (Tamas, senior executive in multinational firm in Gurgaon.)

*Tracing the City*

    Taking cue from scholars like Dhillon (1994) and King (1976) on how heterogeneous influences of the past come to bear on urban developments, I argue that the city at the intersection of the postcolonial and the global\(^{38}\) is a dichotomous social and spatial form, which, on one hand, reflects the processes and core dynamics of the current age while, on the other, re-

\(^{38}\) “Global” is used throughout this chapter to signify both a historical temporality as well as the spatiality inherent in the term
constructs an alternate life by integrating into the present all the processes and materialities which have gone on before:

If the global is indeed rich in content and characterized by a diversity of conditions, then its insertion in an institutional world that has been historically constructed as overwhelmingly national is eventful. Indeed, it is what gives meaning to the notion of overlap and interaction among the multiple spatialities and temporalities of the national and the global. (Sassen, 2000, 218).

The multiple “spatialities and temporalities of the global” that Sassen (2000) argued for, contribute to a heterogeneous time and space, forever challenging any effort at essentializing and resisting appropriation into the current discursive. Space, thus is not only used to mark power, or in the production of relations of power, but spatial action as represented in the urban form, is recycled within a trope of India’s progress - in keeping with the work of constructing the nation’s age-specific identity. The City, thus, has now become the ground for acting out the multiple and evolving relationships between the state, the citizen and the global market.

Before this discussion delves further into the multiplicities and diversities which qualify the new Indian urban experience, especially as seen in Gurgaon, I briefly examine the crucial linkages between colonial urban development which led to the formation of the city of New Delhi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (King, 1976), and the technological modernity deployed to create a modern Indian metropolis by the postcolonial state (Sundaram, 2010). While postcolonial spatial action was a manifestation of the vivid aspirations of the newly-independent Indian state to take its pride of place as the “star of freedom in the East,” it was also qualified by the principles of control and management through stratification and segregation which was evident in colonial urban planning. That this effort was quickly unraveled by the messy resistance of a “political society” (Chatterjee, 2004) vibrantly active within India’s peculiar civil society, is also important for this discussion because such organic movements
represent the unique influence of past heritage of civic mobilization on the global present. Even though it might be outside the scope of this study to undertake a detailed examination of how the origins of such political society movements lay in Gandhian Civil Disobedience or were evident in the seventies’ citizens’ engagement in New Delhi, (challenging most of the machinations of western-styled linear “modernization” and developmental planning), this chapter does look at how continued civic engagement in Indian urban life frames the city differently from eulogizing accounts of the government’s millennial achievement.

The following section starts with a brief discussion of the development of Delhi in the colonial and postcolonial Nehruvian eras. The final part of this chapter, which is more extensive, traces the somewhat unique urban life of Indian NCR, especially Gurgaon, through focus on three areas: first, a look at the Haryana government’s website to examine how the state deploys globalization discourse to promote Gurgaon as a consumer haven and mecca for foreign investment. In this, I use critical discourse analysis or CDA (Fairclough) to parse through the branding exercises followed by the government. Then I examine the globally-oriented worldviews adopted by various national and multinational corporation executives who articulate other dreams, other desires and other visions within a discussion of a New India. In doing so, I explore the possibilities of them representing the “consumer-citizen” noticed by earlier scholars on New India (Ray, 2006; Srivastava, 2012). The final section deals with the “non-political39 citizen’s movement,” Saksham, which spearheads the numerous residents’ welfare associations (RWAs) in the area to examine dynamics of a political society organization which differentiates itself from civil society non-governmental organizations (NGOs) but is focused on a unique type of community-building both in physical and digital space, canvassing for support from its

39 As described in institutional communication.
various stakeholders in real and virtual life. The citizens’ views, drawn from focus group discussions, run through the essay and highlight the multiplicities of intersections between the global, the national and the local, all the while contributing to some degree to arrive at a somewhat unique urban culture that qualifies the NCR and contributes to the contemporary national imagination.

While acknowledging the common thread – the use of space in the project of power – which runs through the multiple systems of stratification and segregation inherent in each of the colonial and postcolonial and then global phases, this essay tries to move further into the profound transformations which qualify the new Indian urban move – a globalization-driven culture of the twenty first century. In pursuing this, I try to address a few basic questions about the determining principles which might have contributed to the peculiar dynamics of India’s NCR – a mega metropolis40. Did the colonial and postcolonial spatial action prepare the ground for the life of a city like Gurgaon? Is Gurgaon a global city, specifically removed in spirit from its surroundings and exhibiting new spatialities and temporalities within its ground, or is it vibrantly different in representing the New India, despite its ambition to become a “global city41”?

In the Colonial Mold

The study of space and spatial organization had led to critical insights about colonialism especially in the Indian context where industrial phase of colonial urban development manifested itself most explicitly (King, 1976, xii). Reviews on how the organization and lifestyles of the colonizer’s metropolis transmitted to colonized societies like India, thus became crucial in formulating ideas on colonial power relations because “environments manifest the distribution of

---

40 Approximate details on NCR from 2012: Area: 16,609 square miles; population: 22,157,000; GDP:$128.9 billion (2011-12)
41 “Global City” as a 20th century urban form analyzed by Sassen 2001, 2006, 2012
social power and express it in a culture-specific way” (King, 1976, 278). Dhillon argues that the logic of spatial action or expression that has developed in Delhi is a projection of the spatial relations that developed during the colonial period. It is critically important also to understand the nature of that space in terms of the multiple identities and traditions that are sedimented into the consciousness of the inhabitants, and are pivotal in such spatial expression. The culture-specific historical influences that flow through the city intersect in novel ways to create a layered space: “the coming together of personal, institutional, and world histories” (Dhillon, 1994, 139).

The proposal of three levels of “temporal flux” – level of world time, level of institutional time and finally, the level of personal time (Dhillon, 1994, 48-49) – leads one to conceptualize a national historical reality based on layered and heterogeneous time, as well as space. It is possible to follow Braudel’s tri-level model of understanding the differentials of time and space and how it leads to a valuable insight of history emerging from ground up – from the structures of everyday life, from institutions like the market place which become the locus of human interaction and finally from the rhythms of world movements like imperialism or capitalism. The story that emerges is contingent upon the intersubjective dialectics between local and world processes and strongly qualified by the interconnectivity of the political, economic, social, cultural, and the traditional (Dhillon, 1994, 48-49). The value of such a reading of time, which focuses on the long-term approach, longue durée – and tries to emphasize on the slow effects of space, climate, or technology on human beings is that it gives urban historiography the momentum to incorporate the energy of here and now with vaster, but less perceptible processes, which connect the local to the global. Here, it prepares me to engage with what Sassen (2000) proposed about various spatialities and temporalities of the global city arising from “the insertions of the global within the fabric of the national” (219).
The colonial planning which was the precursor of, and laid the foundation to the urban development in New Delhi and the NCR is best reviewed by looking at the cultural assumptions and knowledge systems that colonial planners of New Delhi, like Edward Lutyens, brought into the process. Influenced by his upper middle-class bearings in the metropolitan society of Great Britain, Lutyen’s Delhi expressed British power in the “consumption of space” (Dhillon, 1994) and has often been said to incorporate “Baroque” ideas and “garden city” principles of urban planning (King, 1976, 238) long inscribed within the colonial urban traditions. Again, for the British, from the beginning of the 19th century, there were no limits on space and as such, the planning of colonial cities like Delhi represented that penchant for consumption of space.

Whilst a combination of technology and economic forces were pushing urban forms upwards in the metropolitan society, in the city of Delhi, colonialism was forcing them outwards. When time is short, space is conserved. When time is plentiful, space is consumed. In the industrialized West, people increasingly saved time: in the colonial East, Europeans spent it, consuming extensive urban space in the process. (King, 1976, 265)

So Lutyens’ Delhi represented this propensity for huge arches and statuary, broad roads, massive architectural structures and low residential density – built according to the values of power and dominance. It was to signify colonial ascendance and reflect European-style state architecture as the referent aesthetic – to guide and be interpreted for use of colonial culture.

However, as New Delhi developed, other aspects of colonial power, connected with control of the environment under its dominion, became manifest in the initial planning. A measured, symmetrical grid was adopted to facilitate three levels of colonial control (King, 1976) – a total control over the territory, with power to demarcate boundaries and order the enclosed spaces; control over the social structures and power to regulate and organize the communities and social relations within them; and finally, complete control over processes of allocation. This was marked so that the new urban spaces could be filled exactly according to the
plan of social and racial segregation. According to King (1976) the logic inherent in the spatial action deployed by British architects and planners were in keeping with the colonial power’s most immediate goals of control and management of spaces and populations under its jurisdiction: “an abstract ‘social structure’ existing in the mind and expressed in behavior, was literally concretized into reality by the physical-spatial forms on the ground” (264).

Commenting on the socio-spatial structure of the city, King (1976) indicated that there was a “dualism” inherent in the planning of the city: “The Delhi which had been created was one built for two different worlds, the ‘European’ and the ‘native’, for the ruler and the ones who were ruled” (263). Therefore, an important part of understanding the spatial allocation is in paying attention to the nature of relationships in the colonial society and the criteria determining them. Particularly after 1920, whereas most of the key decision-making positions in the government were still occupied by representatives of the metropolitan society, or British officials, an increasing number of senior government offices were being managed by “acculturated indigenes,” (King, 1976, 240) especially in two crucial areas – in the army and in the elite administrative services – the Indian Civil Services.

Significant for the current discussion is that under colonial traditions and its overarching principle of a dominance-dependence relationship, this emerging situation of a contact zone, where representatives of two cultural traditions met, was marked by the stratification systems of both the colonial power as well as the indigenous culture or a combination of both – thereby leading to a highly stratified environment. However, in the maintenance of their lifestyle, the indigenous elite who were incorporated into the role of commanding officers or administrators were expected to modify much of their own cultural traditions and adopt the language, values, behaviors and other lifestyle patterns of the colonial culture.
From the beginning it was accepted that the behaviour and life styles of the metropolitan society, though modified by the colonial culture, should be continued. This necessitated spatial provision for a wide range of cultural objects and equipment to continue these activities. (King, 1976, 146)

This included adopting the attires, food habits, and many other living conditions like items of household furniture, as well as the type of residential accommodation from the British colonial officials. Physical surroundings thus shaped up not on “purely ‘Western’ or metropolitan models, but on the interpretation of these by the colonial elite” (King, 1976, 240).

Since the largest spatial requirement rose from having to accommodate the residential needs of “the colonial administrators, their immediate kin and the indigenous employees of the government,” the form and location of official residences were determined by the occupational, social and racial criteria dominating these societies. Therefore, multiple systems of stratification and segregation based on the metropolitan culture, Indian caste hierarchies and administrative ranks qualified the planning and organization of the city:

Because of inter-locking of racial, social and occupational indices of stratification, a clear pattern of social and racial segregation was established throughout the city. Beginning at Government House, this followed an anti-clockwise direction running round the centre and finishing on the boundaries of Paharganj. It began as white (or pink) at Government House, continued – with the addition of some acculturated, senior Indians – as white round the south side of Kingsway, became increasingly brown on the north side of the city until, with the addition of European and Anglo-Indian clerks in the north-west, it shaded fully into brown in the Indian clerks’ quarters, and into darker shades, with the peons’ and sweepers’ section to their north. (King, 1976, 251)

South Delhi, as it developed in the postcolonial times, as a repository of official colonies for the Civil Services and Army retirees, came also to signify power. Its spatial attributes reflected the colonial logic, with specific attention being devoted to affluence of space, especially as the location took an economic and cultural life of its own. Succumbing to the pressures accommodating various social statuses, Delhi stretched out further and further south into the green belt of Haryana’s farmlands. As Dhillon (1994) points out, this southward
extension is a product of the “interaction between local and wider historical processes” (p146). This could be a number of factors starting, in post-Independence era from mass migration of people displaced from Pakistan to the most recent phase of globalization related migration: evident in Haryana government’s initiative of “transforming Haryana into IT driven economy” (banner heading for the website, “Government of Haryana”).

Colonial culture was manifest in the formation of “colonies” or neighborhoods for people in postcolonial India who had once been associated with colonial processes of government and management and had come to identify and define themselves through their professions. Dhillon (1994) shows in her examination of Sonam Nagar that in the construction of the homes – usually individual dwelling houses for one family – the plans incorporated colonial features of architecture. These were redolent with elaborate landscaping features resembling the “lawns” of colonial bungalows, wide tree-lined streets and adaptation of the indigenous courtyard into western-style terraces or front yards. Included were separate living areas for different activities just in close imitation of the colonial bungalow, even though the compound size for this latter group of buildings might have been reduced from the typical colonial bungalow of the early twentieth century. King describes the colonial bungalow:

The ‘ideal type’ bungalow had a verandah on either one or two sides and frequently all round the house, a large ‘sitting’ room, ‘dining’ room, sleeping or ‘bedrooms’, each of which usually had its own attached room for bathing, the ‘bathroom’. The size of the bungalow, and particularly, of the sitting and dining rooms, was much larger than prevailing norms in the metropolitan culture allowed….(King, 1976, 146)

Sonam Nagar officers’ colony homes also reflected distinct colonial standards in the planning of the interiors, in allocation of space and continuation of the residential norms of the dominant culture (Dhillon, 1994, 148). The postcolonial elite followed colonial norms of marking power, solidarity and hierarchy through organization of space and movements flows within their homes.
There were different entrances and seating areas reserved for visitors of different statuses: ornate entrances for dignitaries and formal guests as opposed to more simple direct doorways for family members and tradespeople. Seating arrangements ranged from drawing rooms for formal company, to lounges for more relaxed gathering of family friends and private terraces for the householder’s more intimate and private moments.

*The Postcolonial Ambition for a Modern City*

The articulation of Delhi as a national-federal space within which postcolonial ambition could be reconciled with divergent logics of democracy, development and regional interests, was initially effected at one level through the establishment of a coherent cultural policy in the post-Independence context and at another through the implementation of modernistic and technocratic urban planning. In 1947, when the postcolonial elite class took power, they saw the city as a display window for the new, nationalist sovereign authority (Sundaram, 2010): a site for staging of nationalistically inclined cultural events, focal point of socio-political campaigns, a space for showcasing the various national imaginaries (Figures 4.3 to 4.6). Nehru’s ambition was “to recreate the city for its own purposes - to make it not only the symbol of a new sovereignty but an effective engine to drive India into the modern world” (Khilnani, cited in Wyatt, 2005, 468).

The monumental aspect of the colonial city was never forsaken but it was rearticulated and found reincarnation as a “utopian dream site for the new nation” (Sundaram, 2010, 31). Through the decades, it was repeatedly circulated in media (Figures 4.1 & 4.2) as the visual representation of the postcolonial state. As Delhi shaped up into a space of mediation over key cultural and political issues, and its spectacular architectural monuments served as loci for generating the nationalistic fervor over an ancient heritage, the city planners deployed a new imaginary.

---

42 Though designed by Lutyens and built by the British, India Gate is one such image that has been circulated in the media as the visual representation of national space and architecture.
contributing to the founding myth of a “new India” awakening - in the liberal modernist urban planning of the capital region. In March 1959, a conference in Delhi brought together many architects from across the country to discuss the future of Indian cities and the urban form. It also marked a significant and decisive turning point in the urban history of this new India when architects spoke of the need for new materials and technologies, freedom from government regulation and new educational strategies for architectural expression.

In his inaugural address, Nehru sketched out his preference for 20th century architectural modernism and its transformative potential, its critique of the past, the alignment of form and function, the creative-destructive potential of the new materials and an urban form suitably abstract to realize all these goals (Sundaram. 2010, 31). Whereas Nehru’s speech did not directly address the question of what form this new city would take, the cultural elite of the capital initiated the idea of urban planning as a way of realizing this dream, with emphasis on international modernism projected through the lens of postcolonial modernity. Initial stages of discussions also emphasized the need for mitigating the vast inequalities of colonial times and as such the plan was seen as a rational model of management that would combine claims for social justice and hopes of a “technological dream-world of the future” (Sundaram, 1976, 37).

Nehru’s manifesto for a new city emphasized the “new,” and his frank distaste for urban darkness gained centrality in postcolonial India with the advent of the Masterplan of 1962 which exhibited a rationalist modernism, qualified by attention to pragmatism and the technical. Its workings were reminiscent of Enlightenment-era efforts to eliminate dark, uncontrollable spaces.

‘Dark space’ constantly invades ‘light space’ through the fear of epidemics, urban panic, the homeless multitude and criminal activity. For the best part of the twentieth century, modern urban planning and architecture has sought to stake out the idea of transparent space free from superstition, disease, myth and non-rational behavior. (Sundaram, 2010, 19)
In keeping with the Nehruvian vision of a healthy city with attendant technologies of welfare and shelter, the Masterplan, drafted by American experts and qualified by a core value of “modernization” sought to mobilize the idea of the “machine city” (Sundaram, 2010, 19). The city was to be regulated by technocratic apparatus: use of glass and light, grid as a rational mapping of the city, decentralization with cellular neighborhoods, zoning, district centers, factory areas, technical dissemination of urban knowledge and counter-magnets to the core urban zone for containing inflows. The Masterplan was careful to delineate the forms of subjectivities that were seen as “appropriate” to modern urban life in this “new” India. All those who did not fit the model and failed to assimilate into urbanism could be open for displacement (Sundaram, 2010, 73).

The norms and forms of modern urban governance would separate the civic from the criminal, the public from the private, the human from the non-human, putting in place a model that would promise the visible and healthy interaction of human beings and things…. within the American planners who worked on the Delhi Masterplan, the fears of density and an uncontrollable city were paramount. (Sundaram, 2010, 19)

Seeking balanced growth and equity, and working towards mitigating density and an uncontrollable city, the Masterplan initiated a double displacement: first, it transformed the colonial city to a machine model of U.S. urbanism; secondly, all aberrant forms of urban life (economic proliferation, mixed land use, rural industries) were set up for legal control and dispersal. The Masterplan of 1962 aimed at a congestion-free urban environment with separation of work and industry, legal and non-legal habitation in the city. Its “political thrust was abstract and vertical to assure sovereign control of the political elite over the city. This proximity to centralized power allowed for the emergence of “bureaucratic planner elites with authoritarian fantasies” (Sundaram, 73).
However, within the next decade, the aberrant forces rebounded in full gear: economic proliferation, non-legal manufacture and commerce, migrant population in-flows, squatting, regularization of unauthorized colonies, informal infrastructures - all combined to unravel the Masterplan (Figure 4.7). The same infrastructural capabilities aimed at modernizing the city – electricity, roads, water supply, health services – became fields of contestation and political mobilization. According to Chatterjee (2004), the political dynamics that dominates the terrain of postcolonial India, has its roots in the pre-Independence split between an organized “elite domain” and an unorganized “subaltern domain.” In practice of politics, this materializes with a distancing of the marginalized groups from the ambitions of a postcolonial elite riding the “high ground of modernity” (41). In reviewing the mobilization and incorporation of Indian masses, especially the peasantry, into the non-cooperation anticolonial movement against the British administration, scholars saw the politics of the masses as distinctly different from that of the elite: “peasants in their collective actions were also being political, except that they were political in a way different from that of the elite” (Chatterjee, 2004, 39).

To explain the workings of such population groups, Sundaram (2010) refers to “the routine practices of urbanism” (70), and Chatterjee uses the term “political society.” Here, politics emerges out of reactions to the developmental policies of the government that are aimed at specific population groups and often incorporate welfare programs that leave vast sections out. That many of these informally constituted groups emerge from the lowest sections of society and engage in political agendas not always within strict legal parameters in their desperate struggle to ascertain the bare minimum for life and livelihood, sets them apart from the relatively small civil society comprised of culturally-equipped and intellectually-endowed citizens. However, these groups often acquire a peculiar legitimacy in the eyes of governmental agencies based on their
ability to push for matters of subsistence regarding which “governmental agencies have an obligation to look after the poor and the underprivileged” (Chatterjee, 2004, 40). In the exercise of their political rights in postcolonial India, they often tread uncertain terrain, make instrumental use of the fact that they can vote in elections, and even use the “vote” to negotiate for better living conditions: “They may live in illegal squatter settlements, make illegal use of water or electricity, travel without tickets in public transport…they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right” (Chatterjee, 2004, 40).

Case Study of Gurgaon: City, Citizen, and the New Urban Imaginary

Gurgaon’s development actually deviated quite significantly from the initial logic of the Masterplan of 1962. The Lutyens zone – consisting of the government complex and an elite cluster of cultural centers, national museums, embassies, hotels, etc. – remained an area for showcasing national and international events but access was limited effectively to the political, bureaucratic, and a small body of cultural elite. Outside this well-policed zone, strong currents of public life of the city, originating from the heterogeneous influxes of population into the capital region, configured New Delhi into something not quite foreseen by the planners despite the fact that the Masterplan had sought to “build a defensible urban core, cemented by law, and a highly centralized command structure, to address the demand of the political regime for control over Delhi” (Sundaram, 2010, 178). Since the Masterplan had distinctly sought to deflect migration flows away from the city center into various suburban nodes, displacing all forms of life that were thought not to conform perfectly to this capital city region, cities like Noida and Gurgaon, initially incorporated as counter-magnets, grew rapidly, acting as receptacles of the massive population influx through the decades. This greater New Delhi metropolitan region
eventually morphed into a configuration of unmanageable urban spaces that belied all established norms to represent what Canclini calls “incomprehensibility of the city” (Canclini, 2006, 423).

“A surreal mix of time zones. … As the rural rubs shoulders with the urban, cows slumber on the pavements outside high-gloss skyscrapers as ‘neutral-accented English speakers of the call center industry walk past migrant labor from the interiors of India.” (Shukla Sawant, Art Historian\textsuperscript{43})

The City

Gurgaon, widely known as the “call center capital” of India (Figure 4.8), developed rapidly also as a repository of the real estate and construction boom of the late 1970s. The supersonic land development mode worked in tandem with India’s globalized economic landscape to transform the Haryana farmlands.

The most significant difference between 20\textsuperscript{th} century city-making and those of the 21\textsuperscript{st} is the large-scale involvement of private enterprise. In both the colonial era fashioning of a new imperial capital, and the postcolonial construction of “steel cities,” the state was the key actor. This began to change by the mid-1970s. In the National Capital Region, for example, the most significant reason relates to the state becoming a land monopolist, forcing private interests to move beyond Delhi to nearby areas in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. (Srivastava, 2013)

In spatial action, huge private subdivisions and gated apartment complexes have taken the place of the officers’ colonies and colonial bungalows of New Delhi, with residents’ welfare associations (RWAs) deploying novel exclusionary politics of space and a high-end mall culture pandering to the 21\textsuperscript{st} century citizen invested in global consumerism. These coordinate in establishing the newest system of population segregation through spatial action - effectively limiting paths of access to vast functional and recreational spaces from sections of marginalized populations. Here, consumption of space is strictly according to global urban standards, reflected more in vertical skyscrapers rather than in sprawling horizontal mansions seen in colonial Delhi.

\textsuperscript{43} On the website of Devi Art Foundation, opening its newest art museum in Gurgaon, Sawant described the collision of the new and the old in rapidly expanding Gurgaon.
Urban Gurgaon now has little in common with its contiguous areas of Manesar, Hissar, Rohtak or Kurukshetra or even neighboring Mewat, Badshahpur and Nuh, (Figure 4.9a & 4.9 b) but neither does it bear much resemblance to many distant SEZs, SUZs of other Asian nations or western industrialized spaces belonging to the same global network (Macomber, 2013), as exhibited in a recent Harvard study.

Gurgaon was largely promoted by speculative real estate developers, with little attention to master planning and little investment in roads, water, and electricity. As a result, its landscape today is a mishmash of spectacular office buildings, large vacant areas populated by stray cows and goats, decrepit low-rise buildings, and slums. Major users draw water from the ground through individual wells. Traffic jams and smog are legendary; power is so sketchy that virtually every commercial building regularly relies on costly and polluting diesel generators; and the water table is receding by up to one meter a year. (Macomber, 2013, 50)

The development plan of Gurgaon was prepared by the Haryana government and was supposed to have been executed by the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA). Whereas private developers could purchase land from private citizens, and develop according to the regulations of HUDA, their role and authority was to be confined to their sites, with HUDA providing all civic amenities like electricity, roads, water supply, sewerage, waste disposal. However, neither did the state furnish the development plan with all relevant details, nor did the actual development of the city work according to the requirements of the plan, with government agencies frequently granting permission for all kinds of irregular developments. According to Raj Vir Singh, Chief Town Planner, Haryana: “There is no coordination between the government department granting permission to private developers and other agencies such as HUDA, which is meant to provide urban infrastructure. With the result, infrastructure has lagged behind.” (A good example, Times of India, 2013). Gurgaon’s management has been made cumbersome and inefficient through a non-adherence to basic tenets of urban planning, with the urban landscape portioned out along crisscrossing, often conflicting lines of authority between Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon
(MCG), Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC), Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) as well as a formidable number of private developers. This multiplicity of authority creates bottlenecks in urban planning and has a crippling effect on maintaining infrastructures which in turn lead to perennial problems in civic upkeep with intractable problems in traffic, roads, power, water and pollution issues (Figures 4.10a & 4.10b).

With the influx of global capital and the area’s incorporation into the SEZ network of HSIIDC, it became the hub of business process outsourcing (BPO) and back-office operations in the region soon after liberalization of the Indian economy in 1990s. Its strategic location with respect to Indira Gandhi International Airport and the National Highway 8 acted in combination with the state government’s favorable tax policies, and encouraged major transnational corporations (TNC) to relocate their sub-continental operations into this booming neo-liberal space. It aspires to be a global city with a very high concentration of service-sector networks handling BPO work for many of the Fortune 500 conglomerates. One of India’s major “outsourcing hubs, Gurgaon houses the regional offices, and often headquarters, of transnational corporations like Alcatel, American Express, British Airways, Coca Cola, Ericsson, Fidelity Investments, Genpact, General Motors, Gillette, HP, Google, Hewitt, IBM, Microsoft, Motorola, Nestle, New York Life, Nokia, Pepsi, Xerox.

Though Gurgaon has evolved as one of India’s premier knowledge corridors – a business hub boasting the presence of most Fortune 500 companies – the vibrant and volatile formations creates the ground for a new discursive terrain to be added to the dialectics of globalization in India. In this, the discussion needs to be predicated on an understanding of the hyper-prolificity

---

44 Gurgaon Government website description
of this area and the innate contradictions of a postcolonial society, attendant upon such rapid expansion. In the next section, I draw from online and ethnographic fieldwork data, of focus group dialogues, email communications and community websites, to examine the discursive construction of Gurgaon as a global city, a “Millennium City,” once called an “insignificant Punjab town” in the Masterplan of Delhi 1962.

The Citizen

As suggested by earlier scholarship, the spirit of the new India is best represented in the changing visions of its citizens: the “new” (urban) middle class is thus seen as a “central agent for the revisioning of the Indian nation in the context of globalization” (Fernandes, 2000). So, the figure of this new middle class Indian, the citizen, is what I focus on in exploring the vision of New India which emerges in the intersections of the novel globalization-initiated spatio-temporal order (Sassen, 2000), neoliberal governance, political society engagements and euphoric “live for the day” worldview of the executives of multinational and national corporations in this area. My review first engages in articulations of the “global city,\textsuperscript{45}” here, highlighted by the local government body on its website - District of Gurgaon’s online presentation on Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon. Then I look at the unique culture that attends the contemporary discourse on New India through the lens of its citizens - some as participants of my focus groups and others as members of the citizens’ movement. The former group’s views are in direct dialogue and the latter’s derived from their website and email communications. From hereon, my chapter will show a specific orientation towards capturing the life of the city through focus on its citizens.

\textsuperscript{45} Originally proposed by Sassen (2000, 2001, 2012)
The direct dialogue below is pulled from two different focus groups: one consisting of senior executives employed in the technology enabled services sector and the second of new professionals who have entered the economy recently by joining banking, financing, technology consulting or fashion, and made Gurgaon their home. The senior executives, Sharmee, Tamas and Ram all work for the same MNC, are friends and co-workers. Even though based in Gurgaon, they frequently travel between India and the USA for work. Sharmee has grown up in Mumbai, been educated in Pune and has been based in the NCR for more than a decade, working from her office in Gurgaon. She frequently compares her viewpoint on the recent transformations to that of the other generations – her mother on one side and her grown-up children on the other – creating a balanced, inter-generational narrative. Tamas, originally from Siliguri, a small town in the northeastern part of West Bengal, has grown up, been educated and is settled in the NCR for over two decades. He is single and is enthusiastic about the recreational opportunities that the newly-liberal NCR offers to his generation. Ram, is the only one in this group who is originally from Delhi, but he is also the only one who completed his high school in the United States and was able to compare post-liberalization lifestyle changes in India, throwing light on the transformations in media, communication, fashion from the India in the pre-liberalization era in comparison to the US. Back in India and working as an ITES professional in Gurgaon, his engagement was as a family man – most concerned with the home, the safety of his family and security of two little daughters in a drastically changing environment.

The MNC executives respond energetically to questions about the transformations which signify New India. Questions on whether it really exists or is just a myth, an exercise in image consulting which does not play out on the ground, bring strong assertions on the transformations

46 All names of focus group participants have been changed.
which signify this New India in wider recognition of relationships between the citizens, and the local, national as well as global economy. Whereas the title of “call-center capital” brings with it a negative connotation of low-skill, lower-authority operator and telemarketing jobs, (Vira & James, 2012), a fact strongly disputed by the local executives, the discussion below shows how they remake their sense of themselves as global professionals within the new context. Here, Sharmee, Tamas and Ram, senior executives in a US MNC based in DLF Cyber City, Gurgaon, outline the expanded opportunities in the “new” India and insist on distinguishing their work from call center work.

*The New India really exists.*

Sharmee: (The new India) It exists. It really, *really* does exist. Yes. I can definitely tell you from the past, there is so much of change in the way, the generation which has come up, with the way it looks at professionalism, the way it looks at self-development, the way it wants to live life... So whatever is projected of new India, is upcoming, in whatever genre you want to say, is really true, its really true.

Tamas: It is true, because today people have become more competitive, … because if we talk about imbibing west culture, yes, we are doing that, but if you go back ten years, from ten years to now, I think western adaptation has been more in terms of the good values, rather than taking up all things that is western. So there is a very good mix of Indian values and western values, both. … So that’s what India is now.

Ram: I don’t know whether to call it “New India” or not because it’s been in the making for a couple of decades now. And slowly and gradually there’s a lot of movement. Things have changed for us, *for the better* in terms of the time probably for me, … Since the time I started working, and I started working before the ITES industry had taken shape… about late 90s, I started my career with tourism because that seemed to be rewarding at the time … If it wasn’t for IT-enabled services, I wouldn’t know where I would be today. I’ve seen a sea of change in the way professions are looked at, the way opportunities have opened up, the way people have grasped the opportunities, faced challenges, mitigated *risks* if there were any. And there’ve been quite a few. I’ve worked with companies which have grown from 200 to a 75,000-people company. That can only happen if there is true potential. The kind, amount of work… that we transition from all over the world is no longer just, you know, call center work. We are doing high-end

---

47 Information technology enabled services
processes now. We’re doing work in medical, we’re doing work in legal. … So the complexity of work is huge…

Sharmee: It is no longer just a low-cost call center, I like what you say, it’s no longer just a low-cost center, which is one of the criterion, probably, but it is also capability and potential-driven now. So they see the capability, they see the potential in having people get up the curve in terms of the complexity of the type of work you do? Even a small example, in terms of the benefit for the New India: so the way of looking at academic opportunities if I go back to earlier years, if you thought of going into media, other than being a doctor other than being an engineer, those were the standard ones you would want to do. But now you look at more and more parents exploring and supporting children in going in for alternate careers: so journalism, media, film studies, image consulting.

*District of Gurgaon’s Branding Exercise: The City as a Consumer Mecca*

These ITES professionals are ones who emerge as the iconic citizen figures or “emblematic subjects” (Sassen, 2000) representing the drastic changes initiated in India in the new millennium due to globalization and also privatization, deregulation, digitalization, and liberalization. While their work connects them to complex functions of the global economic system, their everyday lives are lived within what Sassen has called the frontier zone, infinitely revised through the contacts and flows which pass through it. The exposure of the country’s erstwhile closed national economy and its increased participation in global markets have led to the initiation of new constructs like the global city or global city-region, which the NCR, especially Gurgaon, with vast areas dedicated to the IT sector, is quite uniquely positioned to represent. According to Sassen (2000), the global city itself is an emblematic subject, with “vast capacities for controlling hypermobile dematerialized financial instruments and (its) enormous concentrations of those material and human, mostly place-bound, resources that make such capacities possible” (218). While the material resources are anchored to local and national territories, the exponential growth in flows of capital, labor, business deals, work opportunities mentioned by the executives above articulate a vision of a new India strikingly different from the
earlier images of India’s identity, invested in self-sufficient nationalism. Imbricated in dynamic cycles of hyper-consumerism and “transnational urbanism” (Srivastava, 2012), this India is the story of a consumerism-led renaissance fueled by a western-oriented civilizational narrative.

The global city represents a strategic space where global processes materialize in national territories and global dynamics run through national institutional arrangements. In this sense the model overrides the zero-sum notion about the global economy and the national economy as mutually exclusive” (Sassen, 2001, 347).

In the postdevelopmental, neoliberal environment of the NCR, close examination does exhibit the same negotiations between the state and the market to create urban zones according to “deliberative neoliberal calculation as to which areas and which populations are advantageous or not advantageous in appealing to the global markets” (Ong, 2006, 77). The mechanics of such neo-liberal calculations in the SEZ of Gurgaon have been instrumental in raising this space to a different plane – a global urban plane – a movement noticed by Sassen with respect to formation of global cities where “the economic fortunes of these cities become increasingly disconnected from their broader hinterlands or even their national economies” (Sassen, 2001, xxi). This elevation is, however, not uniform and is attended by profound contradictions inherent in the processes of uneven touchdown of globalization.

Though Gurgaon’s growth acts out and is in correspondence to Sassen’s hypothesis on the growth of transnational network of cities dependent upon growth of global markets, financial facilities and specialized services, and is triggered by the need for transnational servicing networks due to increase in foreign investment, the changing role of the local government in the Gurgaon’s developmental projects, and the national agenda alternating between sluggish development, accelerated urbanization, populist measures and nationwide civil mobilization has created a checkered environment. But first, a look at the official website of the District of Gurgaon hosted by state government of Haryana at: http://gurgaon.gov.in, shows how the
administration orchestrates its messages according to the spirit of the times to alternate between discourse of globalization and narrative of hyper-growth, civic governance and urban planning. In 2011 the website showed how the District of Gurgaon deployed the language of globalization in the dispersal of its political or economic activities, functions and duties and also in legitimizing the consequent incorporation of these dispersed centers of economic vibrancy into a transnational urban hierarchy. This incorporation has become instrumental in creating the discursive for the city being beyond the political jurisdiction of the nation-state of India, thereby eroding the boundaries which anchors Gurgaon in an Indian soil. However, it cannot be seen as the erasure of the border but is rather a reconfiguring of the national imagination, which is attendant in the seamless assimilation of its population into a transnational culture of consumption that is evident in this. In 2014 the same website, seems to be geared towards more populist measures, in view of the recent demands for civic engagement by local RWAs and focus on “people power,” by the emerging politics of the anti-graft Aam Aadmi Party.

The banner heading for the website accessed in 2011, “Government of Haryana: Transforming Haryana into IT driven economy” left no doubt as to the overall positioning of the government’s agenda and governance policies for creating a special zone conducive for promoting a knowledge based economy. Under the second-level heading of “Modern Gurgaon”, the Government of Haryana website on Gurgaon creates a distinction between “old” Gurgaon and “new Gurgaon” with the latter being highlighted as a space full of promise and competence – “emerging as the corporate capital.” Globalization theorists have deliberated over the proactive stance of government agencies in promoting the transformation of national space into the global. When global actors interact with the national, they produce a “frontier zone” (Sassen, 2000, 227) within the territory of the nation. This zone of political-economic interaction sees new
institutional forms taking shape and old forms altered. In this frontier zone of highly-charged interactions, not all of which are initiated by the market and the corporations, states themselves often shape interactions and in the process get reconfigured. According to Sassen (2000), this is not necessarily attended by an attrition of local governance or reduction of regulation, neither does it point to a simple thesis of a decline of the significance of the state – which would be too simplistic. In fact, the government website shows a continuous engagement of the Gurgaon authorities in promoting the complex interactions with citizens, market and the global economy.

According to (Fairclough, 2006) globalization is in part a discursive process but it is important to distinguish between the actual processes of globalization and discourses about globalization and to critically analyze the relations between “discourse and other elements of the changes associated with globalization, including the constructive effects of discourse on material changes” (13). Fairclough (2006) elaborates the construction of a discursive environment by competitive post-developmental states within the 21st-century framework of globalism, knowledge-based economy (KBE) and cultural political economy. In the context of this current paper and its focus on Gurgaon, this construction is in the folds of the Internet – in government websites and state-funded videos.

The first few promotional phrases on the District of Gurgaon website are strewn with keywords pulled from the globalization discourse - “economic growth,” “public-private sector partnership model in real estate development,” “connectivity,” “corporate hub”, location for “BPO companies” and “IT companies”. The graphic designing is mainly propped up by the picture of shining skyscrapers and malls – “Gurgaon boasts of over half a dozen operational malls like MGF Metropolitan Mall, MGF Plaza, Sahara Mall, DLF Mega Malls, Gold Sauk” (Figures 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.14). The text which carefully intersperses the pictures bolster the
claim about the unique organization of the city as a special space for promoting consumerism and creating specialized and demarcated zones for employment opportunities in the transnational KBE. Under the glaring heading “Outsourcing Hubs” are listed names of TNCs including almost 250 of the Fortune 500 companies, adding new names every passing day.

In keeping with the times, politics is now effectively played with help from commercial strategies like “branding” – to reflect one’s strengths, commitments, attitudes and values. Branding exercises, initially applied to commercial goods and services has now been extended to less tangible things like political parties, public figures, universities and even cities.

The remarkable extension of branding from commercial goods to virtually any institution, to persons such as politicians and to spatial entities like cities, can be seen as part of the operationalization of neo-liberal discourse, specifically of its representation of virtually all areas of social life as markets or potential markets. (Fairclough, 2006, p. 106)

The Divisional Commissioner’s message (2011) also emphasized the preponderance of ICT-based economy and global information systems leading towards the creation of a KBE. It highlighted the permeation of globalization discourse into Internet-based governmental and official releases:

In the present era of Information Technology, a website is increasingly important source of information dissemination and communication. This website will be another milestone in bringing the administration to the citizens’ “doorsteps” besides ensuring transparency. The National Informatics Center, Gurgaon, has done pioneering efforts in developing and hosting this official website of District Gurgaon for which it deserves kudos. (gurgaon.gov.in)

The Consumer-Citizen

Indeed, many of the executives participating in this project have been swept into this exuberant narrative of hyper-consumption but many also consistently try to retain a balanced perspective, framing their own upward mobility in the vocabulary of middle class progress and personal, family and social aspirations. Here I start with viewpoints of two young professionals
Narain and Reeta who present the perspectives of people who have arrived new to the scene as contrasted with those who have already been acculturated within the frontier zone. All the focus groups participants, the senior executives as well as the younger group of entry-level professionals were migrants to the NCR. Even though each of the participants brought in their unique perspectives to the conversations, the story of economic prosperity and enhanced ability to take part in India’s newly-acquired consumer culture was evident in all of them. Narain, who moved to the NCR from Shantiniketan, West Bengal, is a Highways and Transportation engineer from Indian Institute of Technology\textsuperscript{48} Kanpur, is in his late twenties and works as a consultant in the NCR in a company, which was also founded by an IIT alumni. Apala, in her late twenties, is originally from Chandigarh,\textsuperscript{49} but has spent most of her adult life in the NCR- she first attended fashion school, then trained as a fashion designer and finally was recruited by an export house dealing in carpets, all in Gurgaon. Reeta has a similar background but is originally from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, and works for a Gurgaon branch of the India-incorporated multinational bank, ICICI\textsuperscript{50} which is known for its wide range of banking products and financial services to retail customers. Hema, was the only person among the younger set of executives who was a Haryana native. She was from Kurukshetra, educated in one of the local engineering colleges there. She was employed as a Human Resource manager in the NCR.

\textit{The kind of market India has given to the world.}

Narain: It starts from the education which we have. Our parents, the kind of education they had, like, a simple B.A. or Bachelor’s Degree. In normal middle class society, but they were able to send their children to good schools and then to good colleges.

\textsuperscript{48} Indian Institute of Technology or IIT as it is commonly referred, is the premium State Engineering University with campuses across the country.

\textsuperscript{49} Union territory between Punjab and Haryana which hosts the legislatures of both the states and is one of the best-planned cities in India.

\textsuperscript{50} Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India is second of the four major banks in India. The first is State Bank of India.
Reeta: Only 40% of India is like this. The next 60% is entirely different. Like, in my hometown in Gorakhpur, malls are there, but people don’t like to visit malls. They feel that better than Tanishq, Radhakrishna Jewellers which has been there for a very long time, that will be better for us.

Ram: It’s happened over the last couple of decades. It’s not just that people have got new money, people have had money, but the slight change in culture where people have started living life differently. There’s a lifestyle change of sorts. So you see the amount of people in terms of going out in a week… We don’t just go out on Fridays, we go out almost any day of the week. If you see places like this, post-10 p.m., it’ll be full. (See Figure 4.15, 4.16)

Tamas: With exposure comes how you spend it (money). With a lot of people traveling, with the airlines opening up, with the global community coming and living in India and the exposure that they get, the way you spend your money is becoming a new trend. For example today, in this building, you have a Le Marche, which sells international poultry. I think 5 years back also we couldn’t have dreamt of having a store which sells international poultry in India. And it sells!

Sharmee: Even the concept of having meat in portions… very US concept… I could never think of getting different type of cheese here, the entire variety!

Ram: Or wine, for instance.

Tamas: Or wine for that matter.

Ram: I had a few years’ schooling in the US. So when I came back, when I used to talk to friends and neighbors, there was this huge gap in terms of the kind of life I was exposed to because of the travel versus what they had. Within, I think, by the time it was late 90s or early 2000s, it was a complete difference, in terms of the kind of media we were exposed to now, there were programs, like shows like Friends, which came to us much later than the actual time it was being aired… but series like Lost, it was aired at the same time. Now we have movies premiered in India before they premiered in the US. Hollywood movies.

Tamas: For example a Mission Impossible 2 or a Mission Impossible 3, or a Bond movie - it releases in India way before, at least a week in advance from when it releases in the US. Because that’s the kind of market the New India has basically given to the world. … In terms of consumerism, in terms of livelihood, in terms of anything, you name it, fashion, for example if you walk into a mall right now, you’ll have all the big fashion houses in India right now, apart from one or two in the pipeline to come in.

Throughout his focus group discussion, in which Narain engaged as a leader, he methodically outlined the various logics of his and his peer group’s participation in the

51 A bar and lounge called “Buzz” in Gurgaon’s fashionable Golf Course Road.
52 Grocery chain selling imported and gourmet food
ambitions, aspirations and consumer currents of this New India. Each of the participants, their ages ranging from mid to late twenties adeptly described not only their behavior as shoppers in the malls but also the various financial decisions they make, options which are offered to them in terms of commercial and financial products and how they negotiate family and community connections despite their super-busy urban lives, in the process indicating some foundational changes in the construction of what family and community means for them. In contrast to the senior executives of the MNC, the younger group was employed in Indian firms and export houses and as such gave a good impression of how the globalization had changed lives for professionals even in Indian firms.

Money is made easier for you to spend.

Narain: Money is made easier for you to spend…. Like now you have come at the right time…there’s the “15th August discount,” you can see there’s 50% off. They do it on 15th August and 26th January.
KMG: Why 15th August?
Reeta: Actually all the festivals start from Eid, Rakhi.
Hema: On 15th of August is a holiday and everyone goes out for shopping – and they can get 50% off. Most of them go to malls on holidays.
Apala: I work in the Grand Mall. The footfall is very less on the weekday. But if you talk about Saturday or Sunday… the footfall is more because of the movie shows. Nowadays people got for the multiplexes rather than going to the single theaters. The timings are so flexible….they go for shopping also, or for eatables like in cafes or food courts.
Narain: Our earnings are, maybe, 3-4 times higher than what my parents’ earnings were at that time... Because a normal government job will not give you that kind of salary which I am having. So lifestyle has increased, a LOT,… we are staying in Delhi, and cost of living is higher. Even then, we are going movies every weekend, we are traveling, shopping has also increased, we are buying branded things, we are eating out... Money has changed our lifestyles, obviously, but at the same time, it depends, like you are also investing, in properties ... Lifestyles have increased.
Apala: Lifestyles have changed dramatically.

Narain: People know the value of brands. Tanishq (Jewelry store) is a Tata brand. So brand value is also considered. … One more thing is accessibility. Tanishq, you go to any mall, you will get Tanishq, but if you want to have a local jewelry, go to some local jewelry, you have to go to some small lanes, you can get into jams, get stuck, you don’t know the address. … Since I am not living here, I don't have any connections here, like which jewelry is trusted. Either I have to contact a local person, who is local here. Otherwise I
can go to any mall, which is accessible - you just choose. … We want more freedom in choosing our things and doing our own. Nowadays, we are going to online shopping also. Apala: One more thing, for example Pantaloons. Pantaloons showrooms are everywhere. If you have bought something from Chandigarh, and you have to exchange it, you can exchange it from Gurgaon also. … The branded chains provide this facility also.

*It’s all because of Facebook.*
Tamas: One of my friends has 70 handbags and about 85-90 pair of shoes. ... Because it’s required. … The balcony is gone because now it’s converted into a cupboard. ...
Ram: It’s all because of Facebook. Because the pictures you see there… if you see five days ago, I wore the same shirt…
Tamas: You can’t wear that, you can’t repeat. If I go out I would not like my t-shirt to be repeated on FB pictures if I go to different clubs.
Ram: Or you don't tag yourself.
KMG: How often do you guys do FB?
All: Everyday.
Ram: It’s on our phones, our laptops, our home computers, everywhere.

*Market replaces the State, New Trusts replace Old Trusts*

While the participants mostly agreed on the explosion of opportunities and the changed circumstances in which their lives are taking shape, there also emerged interesting perspectives about generational differences in lifestyle, worldviews as well as some of the logics which moved provincial India, thus revealing the underlying currents of what has been addressed as the divide between Bharat and India. This dynamics has pulled a few millions in and left the rest of the 1.2 billion of India’s substantial population outside the rhythms of the New India. This mention of the “60%” who has been outside the current ideology of globalization-fuelled progress forms a sub-text in some conversations between the various groups but is never pronounced enough to form a theme about the “Bharat” which is usually framed as the rural counterpart of the new urban India. It is more pronounced in the next chapter where most of the protagonists arrive from rural India and remain invested in the rural lifestyle.

Globalization in India has often come to mean that the “market” has almost replaced the state in fulfilling the developmentalist dream. However, the foregrounding of the “market” as a
significant determinant in the shaping of global neoliberal societies has to be presaged in the Indian context by the concept of “bazaar,” the indigenous market, and also the informal sector which comprises a big portion of the Indian economy. This is attended by a concomitant ubiquity of piracy, fluidity and proliferation (2010, Sundaram) in hyperflows of people, land tenures, technologies, neighborhoods, small businesses, financing networks, new types of real estate contracts, transportation, roof rights, interminable configurations of low-cost, cross-media digital productions, and ubiquitous indigenous innovations in making financial headway (Figures 4.17 to 4.23). In the dialogues quoted below, the key themes are about the new citizens being configured within the intersecting vectors of hyperconsumerism, multiple mobilities and resource flows: Private versus public sector opportunities, new articulations of work experience, global flows in work leading to more informed investments by young professionals, special knowledge in financial and economic sectors and material effects of this knowledge, educational leverages, generational differences in lifestyles, and older systems of trust in rural and suburban areas versus new trusts in larger, branded consumer chain.

*Issues of trust.*

Narain: The recent trend in banking is also like that, that private banks earlier they had policies like life insurance etc. But people didn’t know exactly about what life insurance does or how much return you should get and all that. But nowadays, due to, as you can say in New India only, people know more about markets, people know more about returns, what are the policies, how much return you will get.

Reeta: They know the profits AND the losses.

Narain: So it becomes difficult for them (the banks) to sell products. … Mindset of people used to be that private banks generally don’t give what they promise - as much returns.

Reeta: ICICI-Prudential has many plans which give 10% rate of return. But people still think that we must put our money in LIC\(^{53}\). We will invest in LIC plans in which for years even 10-15 years we will get 8% or 7% - but they will do that for their trust in the older company.

Narain and Reeta: Mainly issue of trust.

\(^{53}\) Life Insurance Corporation of India – public sector company
Narain – In Shantiniketan, ICICI has come up only for 4 or 5 years. But LIC was there when my father was working, he used to do LIC, so that agent, that knowhow is still there and at least he has seen that o.k. I have done LIC and I have done well. …

Apala: The new India is a reality. For instance, in banking, my mother is in banking, but frankly speaking I don't know ABCD of banking but now when I am working I have to do certain things regarding the company. And banking is made so easy for us. For example, my bank is Axis Bank, for my company. They have their slogan: “Bank is coming to your home, you don’t have to come to your Bank.” When I had to open an account in that bank, the bank guy came to my place, and then he helped me fill up the form. He always comes to give the cash or take away the money. All the formalities are done at your place. This is so new. Because when I was a child, I used to hear: “O.k. today is going to be a bank holiday”, or, “I have to take a holiday from my office to go to the bank and do certain things” and “I had to stand in the long queue”. … Now I think, it is a new India. 

*Investing made easier, and so is risk-taking.*

Ram: A lot of people who are in their late twenties, or early thirties who possess or own properties… for their future.

Sharmee: It is also a selling point in the marriage market. So if you look at a guy today. A guy *settled*, has added on a home, which was not existing in the earlier days. You would build a home or get a home … later on in your age.

Ram: Or it is passed on.

Sharmee: Yes, but now, owning a home - you start to work and within a couple of years you buy a home and multiply.

Ram: It’s no longer a need for a shelter.

KMG: So people keep investing in a second or a third home?

All: Yes!

Sharmee: (People own) multiple properties. Across multiple locations. If you look at real estate now, I get so many messages through the day – for properties which are everywhere except in Delhi. Ajmer, Jaipur, Bhiwadi, the hills, Mussourie.

Tamas: That’s how the marketing has developed. Earlier, you wouldn’t even have known if there was a project coming up, let’s say, 30 km down from Gurgaon, let’s say Bhiwadi, township developing, and with media coming in and so much of buzz happening, you know anywhere in the country, if there’s something happening, you get to know.

Sharmee: Its no longer whether you can afford it or not, it's the other side which is going to make it available for you. They’ll make it available for you and they’ll make sure its accessible with all the amenities etc. … I might not be able to buy a home in Delhi now, because of the cost, but I can buy a nice villa in Hrishikesh, at quarter the cost, but awesome place.
Tamas: At least you have some investment. And moreover, in today’s term, … youngsters invest.
So what they do is you start to invest, there’s a down payment happening, you book it,
and you sell it after six months or seven months because you get royalty etc. You re-sell
it. And that's how you churn your investments.

KMG: People do that?

All: People do that, a lot!

KMG: So you’re buying real estate, actually, … the concept of futures, right?

Ram: So you just have a project plan, you see on paper, a blueprint of sorts, they haven’t even
done a foundation or excavation yet, you just have a site and a project plan which has X
number of approvals and some are pending. You buy against that, because that’s the best
time to buy. It’s called a “pre-launch.” Then there’s a formal launch. By the time of
formal launch, you see at least 25-30% appreciation. If you hold on to it longer, then you
can re-sell it at the time of construction. Then there is a stage where you are about to get
possession. That’s when it touches it peak in industrial value … that’s when you make
maximum profit. For that you need to have patience to hold on to it for about 4-5 years. If
you have that kind of capital, that’s when you get maximum rates. So 20% of X amount,
30% of X amount or 40% of X amount.

KMG: Who are these people?

ALL: Not at this table! (Laughter)

Ram: You also have stocks, they have gold, … they diversify their portfolio… churn your
money.

Tamas: It’s the new exposure. Earlier on it would have been a fixed deposit, or a Provident Fund
account, or a PPF account. Or buying bonds, or NSCs or Kisaan Vikas Patra. Now,
they’re gone! They still exist, people still invest. But if you talk to any person – where do
you invest, its either mutual funds, or stocks, or real estate, gold.

Sharmee: You have your jewelry shops give you schemes now. You can do a gold kitty or a
diamond kitty. You decide to pay X amount, say you’re paying 10 k every month, and
you pay for 12 months, and the shop-owner will pay two installments in there, And at the
end of the period you have the choice of taking back cash or god or diamond against your
plan.

Ram: The meaning of risk for me has been changing. … When I shifted to working for GE, I,
of course, had a great jump in terms of my earning capability, my remuneration. … With
that money, I don’t know where it came from, … so all of a sudden when I got this hike, I
got this money to invest, I didn’t know what to do with it. … The fact that I had the extra
money which I was not expecting, it gave me the capability to take risks with that.
Because of this money which I never had, so I never valued it as much as I would have
valued it today. Over the years as responsibilities grew, for example, now I am a parent
of two kids, my wife doesn’t work any more… Then my risk-taking capabilities were
much higher versus today. Which can again change (if my wife starts working again). Its very dynamic - this outlook toward risk.

Theorizing the New Culture of Transnational Urbanism

*Multiple Mobilities and Class Transitions in New India*

Once articulated as such, Gurgaon provides the material scenario for reviewing the effects of globalization on the postcolonial 21-st century India, making it possible also to highlight the perspectives inherited from the earlier socio-historical matrices inscribed into this globalized space. Against this backdrop, the urban space dominated by the logic of this capitalist society becomes a symbolic threshold to enter into an analysis of the spatial action inherent in globalization. Most of the NCR residents who participated in these focus groups were migrants into the area. While none of them were much invested in their home communities, they enthusiastically articulated their lives within the framework of their urban lifestyles more as citizens of a metropolitan city intensely focused on their upward mobility, without much reference to their specific ethnic or regional connections. Most of them communicated very well in English, about their goals, dreams and visions, which colored the world around them. The senior execs used perfect, idiomatic English. They outlined lives in which they navigate between grueling 6-day work-weeks and enthusiastic weekend recreations of malls-movies-restaurants cycles within the same logic which was voiced early in the conversations, “live for the day.” The younger executives followed closely on their heels, while also conceding that a certain attrition of what has long been central in traditional Indian life, the family and community circle, was an inevitable outcome of their lives in these global spaces.

Narain: Because of our fast lives, we socialize very less. …We don’t make new friends, like, suddenly I met someone in my neighborhood and started making friends. That kind of time is not there, first of all. Six days in a week if you are going out at 8 o’ clock and coming back at 8 o’ clock then you have no time to socialize. Then you have one day left
– Sunday - and that day also, you are going out shopping and movies and all. Your circle is very small, that too friends and colleagues.

While most recognize that they are living in a special time and space, which many call New India, they are also careful to moderate the commoditized vision of New India with a perspective to the “rest of India,” “the next sixty percent” which is entirely different. Their multiple mobilities – where they are upwardly mobile in lifestyle, vertically and horizontally mobile in professional life, spatially mobile from provincial towns to metros, or educationally mobile between national to international education systems – configure their lives within a world which is overloaded with sensations, fluidities and mobilities. The group conversations also yielded distinctly new views about family, community and friends emerging among the younger generation of executives, with the frenetic pace of their urban lives often foreclosing all rhythms of their provincial connections from their current urban routines:

Narain: Our participation is less. If, somebody, my mother is ill, maybe then I am not able to go at that moment, my father has to take care of that. Because I don’t have leave, and I have to get ticket to travel to West Bengal, then that doesn’t suit me. If someone dies then I may visit or may go after two days.

By their admission, their home-town communities and even families were being replaced with their current friends, which itself was a changing and amorphous group. They are able to constantly evaluate their status as consumers on various issues based on new knowledge emerging from constant circulation of information through media exposure. They are also capable of weighing out their multiple perspectives, in new scenarios. For instance, their position on their consumer culture is seen being configured within systems of “old and new” - “old trust and personal connections” versus “new trust and brand value,” or “old times in media” and “current times in new media.” Their dialogues are replete with constant intergenerational comparisons, while there is also admission of lost ties with home communities and even of receding family connections.
Earlier scholarship on the “new” middle classes emerging under globalizing circumstances of the new millennium have argued in favor of the newness emerging from economic success in the technology sector and a change of ideological orientation. Some have proposed that the newness often bestowed on this population stems largely from an increasing incorporation of people into the new economy based on the information technology-oriented sector, that has re-segmented the Indian labor market (Fernandes, 2000). Other scholars have argued that recent economic liberalization has led to creation of an empowered elite, not middle class, among workers in the tech sector (Ray, 2006). Occupations in this sector, configured by their connections to large MNCs and incorporation into wider global cycles of life and livelihood, have replaced the earlier coordinates of middle class occupations as teacher, bank employees or government officials and also reconfigured the economic and cultural capital needed, in fact, the criteria required to participate in middleclass-ness.

On the other hand, in tracing India’s recent economic success to reasons beyond just the tech sector, some scholars (Radhakrishnan, 2007) have traced the route back to India’s education system. The alternate views about the construction of this middle class, examine the roots of India’s economic progress to arrive from not merely liberalization and the foreign investments in the tech sector, but also in the world-class technical training of India’s elite educational institutions, like the IITs, which produce a highly-qualified workforce. Whereas members of this group frequently used to seek better professional opportunities abroad, recent economic progress has anchored them in new India’s global business spaces. An alternate view is in seeing this segment as an elite class of formidable economic and cultural strength who (Radhakrishnan, 2007), re-imagine and negotiate the meaning of Indian-ness through their wider engagement within a worldwide culture. Deshpande (2003) focuses upon ideological orientation, arguing how
nationalism in India was a creation of urban professionals, who were already members of the social elite. Under a post-independence Nehruvian socialist developmental regime that emphasized a scientific and technical training, and the Indian middle classes acquired a powerful sense of moral legitimacy, emerging from the high-mindedness of social democratic ideals. The government job, which supported national development, became a prestigious signifier of the middle class in the service of the nation. However, this is a position that has recently lost its resonance, being replaced by an ideology of globalization. What is significant to this current discussion is how most of the scholars in the area propose the centrality of this middle-class in fashioning the vision of the Indian nation within a context of globalization (Fernandes, 2000; Despande, 2003;). Often the transformation of their positions from “worker-citizens” to “consumer citizens” (Srivastava, 2012; Ray, 2006; ) indicate not merely their political choices and their engagement in civil society organizations, but also portend macro shifts in the ideological positioning of the nation itself.

Gurgaon’s activist citizens: Urban politics of space in the age of globalization

As the political society formations organize themselves into grassroots movements, they also deploy the new terminology of social inclusion-exclusion and employ new information and communication technologies as well as media formats to reach out to their publics. Here, we take a quick glance at Saksham, a “citizen’s movement” in the Sohna Road area of Gurgaon and its program (as proposed on its website), to highlight the workings of India’s political society and the “politics of the governed” (Chatterjee, 2004). This section is based on ethnographic work in Gurgaon, as well as an analysis of the Saksham website and email communication which was sent out by the citizen’s platform targeting potential voters from Ward 26, Sohna Road, for the first election for the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon in May, 2011.
Srivastava (2012) studied how middle class residents of apartment complexes initiated spatial action in the Delhi area through the formation of Resident’s Welfare Association (RWA), and in doing so became instrumental as “key vehicles for articulating an exclusionary urban politics of space” (Srivastava, 2012, 59). In reviewing the transformations of spatial narratives in India since 1990s, he focuses on how the RWAs articulate an exclusionary politics of urban space by initiating and promoting gated communities across Delhi. While these gated communities may be placed within “a discursive promise of a ‘new India’” Srivastava enumerates a set of values which need to be examined before understanding the roles of these gated communities in forming the terrain of this new India: focus on internal spaces; focus on the consumer citizen; the transnational identity of the residents; their association with modern goods and services contribute to making of the modern Indian identity; reformulations of older structures of power and normative standards of family and lifestyle and finally, a curious mix of transnationalism and localism. What is unique about the life within these private spaces or what may also be seen as the expansion of private sector into the public spheres are the everyday practices of life. These incorporate the rhythms of transnational urbanism and is evident among the MNC executives studied earlier in this paper, including all the markers of hyper-consumption associated with the new India. In addition, there is also a certain commitment to civic engagement with roots in the freedom movement or Gandhian Civil Disbedience among the citizens who participate in civic movements. While studying these spatial and personal transformations as a part of the cultural confidence in Gurgaon’s DLF City, Srivastava (2012) noticed also a process of how residents distanced themselves from the local laboring classes. This dynamics, though not fully realized in this part of my study, was fairly supported by
ethnographic work undertaken for this study among domestic workers of the Sohna Road area –
covered in the next chapter.

Here, in this section, I also draw from my ethnographic presence in India as a resident of
a gated community in Sohna Road area (Figure 4.22) and a member of the Nyle Resident
Welfare Association. Though not fully participating in any active capacity of a member of the
Nyle RWA, or a member of Saksham, my position as an apartment resident made me part of the
communication cycle of the RWAs’ various projects. Especially focused here is the way
Saksham, the umbrella organization for the local RWAs in Ward 26 of District of Gurgaon
(which includes Sohna Road), located its mobilization against “builders and government
authorities to get rightful dues to the residents”54 within a wider narrative of need for greater
accountability from civil and governance agencies.

This engagement with the working of the government of District of Gurgaon and election
of officers for the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon might not exactly be representative of the
many struggles of marginalized subaltern populations in India, but Sakhsam’s mobilization still
goes a long way to show how political society challenges, contests, and resists claims and
machinations of the government agencies in articulating Gurgaon as an advanced node of a
transnational system. In direct contrast to the government website’s claim about Gurgaon, that “it
has modern facilities and a planned infrastructure,” the first few words one encounters upon
entering the Saksham portal is that it wants to mobilize all those who are concerned about “the
mess our city is in.” By outlining some of the crucial needs of the city, Saksham creates a
polemical discourse, highlighted by demands for the very basic needs and amenities. Its demands
of “safai, sarak, pani” (sanitation including sewage, roads, water) starkly points to the lack of

54 Saksham email communication
basic amenities for ordinary citizens in the city of Gurgaon. While being ambitious that they “want to make Gurgaon a world class city to live in” their demands about “garbage collection,” maintenance of roads,” rainwater harvesting,” “schools and primary health care center,” “parks and playgrounds” “vegetable and fruit haats” and “curbing illegal constructions” underscore the sorry state of the city of Gurgaon - especially in the pockets which are not included within the corporate zones of the SEZs or rather the “brown areas” (Ong, 2006).

It is evident that the government’s elevated claims about “air-conditioned malls” or super-fast connectivity to New Delhi and the international airport are slogans meant for powerful business interests and not ordinary citizens. While “residential, commercial and retail developments,” and “connectivity”, figure high on the government’s agenda so that Gurgaon can become a “corporate hub”, simple hygiene and well-being of the less-affluent sections of its citizenry - clean environment, clean water supply, fresh-food delivery, and comfortable conveyance needs, are the priority of the citizens’ groups. Like New Delhi in the 1990s, “as millions come into contact with a rapidly changing city” (Sundaram, 2010, 147) the perception of a city rapidly descending into chaos, seems to become the central narrative within which the activist citizens of Gurgaon voice their concerns. The endless proliferation in all forms of transport, circulate fears and unusual levels of urban anxiety, with roads viewed as “dangerous, polluting, and debilitating.” The efficacy of government initiatives in projects like the Delhi Metro rail is promptly overcome by population explosion. The hyper-proliferation of taxis, private cars, private and chartered buses, trucks, scooters, motorcycles, cycle rickshaws and other hybrid forms of transportation like “lorries” and tractors fitted to carry people, and auto-rickshaws carrying cargo, all add continuously to the urban disorder (Figures 4.23 – 4.28).
Saksham’s mission statement as posted on its homepage [www.saksham-gurgaon.org](http://www.saksham-gurgaon.org) reads as follows: “To achieve effective local governance, by mobilizing citizens and local communities to actively participate in the political process for improving the delivery of civic services and serving the needs of the constituency.” Its goal to create a citizen’s forum so as to initiate “effective local governance” by “mobilizing the collective power of Gurgaon’s urban voter” is juxtaposed with its insistence that it is “not a political party and does not have any political affiliations.” Saksham’s self-positioning as a “pressure group” and a “watchdog” for lending a “voice” to the ordinary citizen in order to ensure the delivery of civic services, bolsters its claim that it does not intend to be part of any political party or “duplicate the work of different NGOs by executing projects in partnership with the government.” It is evident that this dialogue it wants to create among Gurgaon’s citizens is definitely a dialectical stand against the government’s focus on favoring businesses and is solely geared towards empowering citizens to wrestle their civic rights and needs from the administration. The movement is interested in getting people to act responsibly on their own behalf while mobilizing them to act in attaining basic civic and human rights. In its email communication to member RWAs, Saksham repeatedly underscores this: “Interestingly, government and administration have collected more than sufficient funds to make Gurgaon a truly Millennium City, but it is unfortunate that a city of promise lacks the most basic of civil amenities like safe drinking water, sewer system, storm water management, encroachment-free good roads, street lights, etc. It’s time to send our right representatives to MCG to develop our city!”

Saksham’s narrative is geared towards construction of a counterpublic, mobilized to act in the complex and contested space of the rapidly urbanizing SEZ. It is aimed at “identifying citizen’s with leadership qualities” so as to fight “urban apathy” and initiate induction of
“progressive individuals” who can steer election away from leadership for “undesirable motives” and work through a strategy of civic improvements and responsible community-building through active participation in political life in the city. Within this is framed the ideal citizen or the activist-citizen who is intellectually and morally capable of representing Ward 26, as Saksham’s independent candidate for the MCG elections. It presents a local civil activist, Raman Sharma, a Post Graduate in Geography and Diploma in Business Administration, as the fair and capable citizen’s candidate who “also believes that people power is the only power which can make it happen.” Shaksham’s careful analysis of several aspiring candidates in the ward places Raman as the ideal candidate for the Ward Councillor because with his integrity, competence and leadership qualities, he has already won the support of a large majority of residents of Ward 26. The communication also mentions the various issues which he has fought for and thus created a proven track record as an office bearer of Malibu Towne RWA:

As an office bearer of the Malibu Towne RWA… Raman has been instrumental in mobilizing various RWAs on Sohna Road and its vicinity to fight with the builders and the government authorities to get rightful dues for the residents. Through the use of the RTI Act, the information thus gathered, and persistent follow up with various competent authorities, he has been instrumental in initiating the process of regularization of violations by their builder including steps to be taken for restoring roof rights of the residents for accessing their water tanks and doing regular cleaning and maintenance jobs. (Saksham communication, May, 2014).

Gated communities are not the most dominant residential forms across Indian cities. And yet, they have emerged at the forefront of citizen’s residential aspirations which the promise of globalization has given shape. In the citizen’s engagement with RWAs, some scholars have seen

55 Ward 26 is described in Saksham literature as follows: Eldeco Mansionz, Nirvana Country, Omaxe Nile, Orchid Petals, Park View, Park View City, Parsavnath Green Villas, Rosewood City, Sishpal Vihar, South City 2, Uppal Southend, Uppal South End Floors, Vatika City, Vipul Greens, Wembley Estates, SECTORS 34, 35, 48, 49, 50, 71, 71, 72A, 73, 74 and 74A.
56 Saksham group email May 14, 2011.
57 Right to Information Act
the middle class citizen’s lack of confidence in the state’s ability to provide security, as well as
the strong sense of being under threat from urban underclasses and search for localized solutions.
However, in examining the Ward 26 movement, I also think that this political engagement shows
not merely an erosion of confidence in the local authorities but also an awareness of the need to
respond to a situation of urban crisis through citizen activism. As the citizens are faced with local
governance issues related to water, electricity, security, roads, water-logging, sewage disposal,
discharge of sewage effluence into storm water drains, they drive for greater accountability and
efficiency in the government agencies. In their role as the activist-citizens, they show
engagement with the state, not a turning away, as noticed by Srivastava (2012) and while an
analysis of the outcome of the MCG elections might be outside the scope of this study, it would
be interesting to use these citizen activist agendas as grounds for future studies: arriving at an
analysis of how certain transformative actions within the consumer-citizen’s specific subjectivity
becomes the ground for emergence of the activist-citizen. As mentioned by Narain:

Narain: People are more aware of the political system; (young people are interested in politics);
people are in jobs and they are paying taxes, when all these scams came out… people
thought “they are using our money and not giving us the facility”…. Now people are
more politically aware. Now voters are young people… earlier people were in villages…
people nowadays are educated… this is what we are paying to the government but not
getting back from the government.

Conclusion: Stratified Citizenship and Segregation Systems

Gurgaon presents a unique case study of the urban form in today’s capitalist market-
driven world order but it also allows a fairly representative example of how machinations of the
local government agencies deploy the “discourse of globalization” (Fairclough, 2006) to create a
competitive space ripe for investment of international capital initiating an exuberant celebratory
discourse of a consumer culture. However, critical scholarship has linked neoliberal governance
to differential treatment meted out to different groups of population based on their compatibility
to and their efficiency and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions. Ong has structured her discussion within the theory of “neoliberalism as exception”:

On the one hand, citizenship elements such as entitlements and benefits are increasingly associated with neoliberal criteria, so that mobile individuals who possess human capital or expertise are highly valued and can exercise citizenship-like claims in diverse locations. Meanwhile, citizens who are judged not to have such tradable competence or potential become devalued and thus vulnerable to exclusionary practices. (Ong, 2006, 6-7).

Ong’s theory on “stratified citizenship” forms valuable grounds for concluding this recent discussion on the diverse population segments in Gurgaon. Issues she examined related to how globalization has reconfigured the national spaces in developmental and post-developmental states of Southeast Asia. This essay has aspired to fulfill, to some degree, the need for similar research on communities developing in India following the country’s incorporation into a global economy and the resultant urbanization, by giving an integrated and penetrating look at India’s “global city” Gurgaon, and its community and all its economic micro-processes, resource flows, political alliances and individual subjectivities, to conclude that citizenship experience is filtered through various levels of privileges. In India’s postcolonial democratic environment this has led to political society mobilizations.

Hardt & Negri (2000) argue that the contemporary global order that has accompanied globalization, along with the global market and global circuits of production, may be best understood in the light of a new form of sovereignty that is emerging. According to them, Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world. In current global cities, public spaces have been privatized so to prevent meeting of different types of populations (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Davis, 1990). Hardt and Negri (2000) mention the disappearance of public spaces in the postmodern world through urban planning, policing and architecture in ways that instate insurmountable borders between different
publics in complex ways so as to initiate segregation even without any deep investment in legal strictures.

“In the process of postmodernization, however, such public spaces are increasingly becoming privatized. The urban landscape is shifting from the modern focus on the common square and the public encounter to the closed spaces of malls, freeways, and gated communities. The architecture and urban planning of megalopolises such as Los Angeles and São Paolo have tended to limit public access and interaction in such a way as to avoid the chance encounter of diverse populations, creating a series of protected interior and isolated spaces.” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 188).

Hardt and Negri’s claim that racial segregation has adapted itself to this new reality of the late 20th century gives a valuable insight into Gurgaon’s unique spatial organization extensively built up with gated residential enclaves, business parks and malls. According to the authors, “racism has not receded but actually progressed in the contemporary world, both in extent and in intensity. It appears to have declined only because its form and strategies have changed” (p. 191)

Whereas dominant modern racist theories were based on biological essentialism, the contemporary racist configurations highlight differences among “races” or disparate publics based on social and cultural differences.

With the passage to Empire, however, biological differences have been replaced by sociological and cultural signifiers as the key representation of racial hatred and fear….behavior of individuals and their abilities and aptitudes are not the result of their blood or genes, but are due to their belonging to different historically determined cultures” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, 191-192).

Whereas the models and theories remain geared to the logic of space and spatial relations corresponding to relationships between states and the scale of the state, there is a burgeoning number of non-state actors and cross-border processes which call forth for changes in the competence and expanse of state powers (Sassen, 2006). While these have far-reaching consequences for the nation-state’s powers, they also have tremendous impact on marginalized sections of the population especially in their potential to revolutionize the concept both of the
city and of citizenship. In the next chapter, I will examine the effect of such social relationships of difference and the new transformations arising from globalization on the marginalized, subaltern population in India. Even as scholars explore the problematic of coordinating the multi-sited, non-linear, disparate and organic dynamics that cities in the developing world frequently exhibit, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the fact that every culture and every society is distinct in its own way and correspondingly their cities are bound within specificities that arise from such distinctions. In this, the logic of spatial action is often re-configured through local circumstances, which have unique and specific manifestations in societies like India’s with a long history of colonialism and also a deep, abiding investment in a traditional, caste-based social structure. In my next chapter of Gurgaon’s marginalized domestic workers I show how the workings of globalization processes intersect prevailing conditions of postcolonial and indigenous stratification to create an intensely heterogeneous space and time. In concluding this chapter, I propose that in India various combinations of social, economic, political and cultural circuits configure the urban landscape in ways that often go toward constructing a contemporary urban life quite different from that envisaged in western-style urban planning, thus contributing to the “incomprehensibility of the city” (Canclini, 2006, 423).
References


Vira, B. & James, A. (2012). Building cross-sector careers in India’s new service economy?

   Tracking former call centre agents in the National Capital Region. In Development and Change, 43 (2), 449-479.

CHAPTER 5

AWAKENING TO A NEW INDIA: AGENCY, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION
AMONG INDIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE NCR

“The food that you waste is enough to fill our bellies. You let it sit and rot. You throw your leftover in the trash but never to us. With a day’s worth of your leftover, we could keep our hunger at bay for days. You make us toil but turn away when we ask for little more pay to keep our body and souls together.”
(Mira, domestic part-time cook in Gurgaon, from West Bengal)

“Humne to tarakki nahi dekha, barbaadi hi dekhe hain. We have not seen any progress at all. We have seen only lives being ruined. There’s ruination all around us”.
(Vanity, Migrant domestic labor in Saket, from Assam).

“…if the world is a performance, not a text, then today we need a model of social science that is performative.”
(Denzin, 2003, 11).

This chapter evolved out of my ethnographic fieldwork in India’s NCR and is connected to an oral history project which examines a community of migrant domestic workers in India making meaning of their lives in a changing national landscape. It tries to see how they appropriated ideas from the globalization discourses proliferating their surroundings to evaluate their positions as part of India’s globalized imagination and further to empower themselves in innovative ways by incorporating old and new methods of communication and activism. As they negotiated a highly contested terrain fraught with tensions over their rights as workers, their rights as citizens, and their profound marginalization in this struggle for basic human rights, they are seen not only exercising greater engagement and agency in order to attain better wage structures but also mobilizing activist agendas for improved conditions of work and community life.
In trying to address the relatively fragile position of Indian domestic workers within the burgeoning economic status of a globalized, post-liberalization India, I beg for a more nuanced reading of their condition that is layered with contradictions and incongruities as well as certain possibilities. The position of urban migrant domestic workers lies at the heart of India’s urban paradox, where the city, which has become the most visible façade of a “New India” and its recent global ascendance, is being built and maintained by migrant populations who are made increasingly vulnerable by the society’s effort to catch up to global standards. This chapter is approached with an intention to interrogate this ambivalence within India’s recent progress into the global economy where social security for marginal and migratory populations has decreased despite the fact that their economic status has improved. This essay deploys the strategies of performance ethnographic texts in order to privilege the voices of the women and men whose lives we try to understand here. It is thus guided by “a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings.” (Madison, 2005, 5). This chapter comes last in the story of New India, but is not the least. It is, in fact, the last word.

My effort is for my writing structure to provide an academic scaffolding for their narratives so that the storytelling is done mainly in their voices. In this chapter, my experiences during ethnographic fieldwork in India’s NCR during 2012-2013 form the backdrop to the oral history narratives emerging from two specific communities of domestic and household workers, some of whom were also employed as housekeeping personnel in local call centers. Whereas several hundred families were part of the communities portrayed here, my paper mainly draws from dialogues and my participant observation in focus groups held during this time period and engaging nine different members of the communities – seven women and two men. However, the
overall narrative is also influenced by our actual lived experiences even outside the frame of these semi-structured focus groups and informed by experiences of various other members of the service community in their everyday interactions with me.

Methodology and Relevance of Critical Performance Ethnography to My Work

My position as a brown woman whose childhood, early marriage and child-bearing experiences had left indelible questions about gender justice imprinted in her mind, and my situation as a first-generation U.S. immigrant trying to make it in the academy, had prepared the ground for me to take a special interest in critical theories. Deeply committed to work on women’s rights, human rights and development studies on subcontinental India, I was always already an activist, waiting to be interpellated into a research tradition that was committed to deploying all its resources in an incessant search for a better world. Norman Denzin’s work and his Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and successive conferences on Qualitative Inquiry introduced me to a new world of the “critical sociological imagination” where I sensed the reverberations of approaching breakthroughs in social science research emerging from a new turn in qualitative inquiry – “performing culture as we write it” (Denzin, 2003, ix). As I got drawn into my work in the field of critical cultural studies, performance ethnography was the one branch of this area of inquiry, which seemed to me most suitable to approach the intensely layered ground I was planning to study.

In this chapter, critical performance auto-ethnography becomes my method of inquiry in which my aim is to prepare a performance-based oral history text that most faithfully captures the lives of the marginalized sections of the population in the NCR’s Sohna Road and nearby Saket area. This is positioned within a study of Gurgaon’s evaluation as a global city and how the city is framed as the face of India’s transforming identity. Most of the performance texts are
drawn from video and iPhone audio recordings of focus group participants speaking about their experiences. Through their oral history narratives I try to historicize the intricate and layered realities of the urban spaces of contemporary India. I try to situate my work with help from D. Soyini Madison’s discussion of performance auto-ethnography as a strategy of inquiry into local activism in the service of human rights and social justice in Ghana. I draw from her observation that traditional patriarchal structures do not alone determine grounds for oppression of women in postcolonial countries. I propose that in understanding the devastating marginalization of this population, it is necessary to construct a performance-oriented narrative to elucidate the multiple structures of domination, the various political systems, differential economic and political development strategies that have contributed to the matrices in which the lives of these workers are imbricated. According to Denzin (2003, 33), “Performance ethnography represents and performs rituals from everyday life, using performing as a method of representation and a method of understanding.” By visiting some of the seminal literature in the area I try to show the importance of performativity and how it creates “an improvisatory politics of resistance” (Denzin, 2003) which then helps bolster the basic principles of this kind of academic work - ethics and advocacy.

There are several logics that I followed in determining the relevance of performance ethnography to my research work on domestic workers population in India. In this study, I use the term “domestic worker” to include all people who are employed in doing menial jobs in the domestic sphere and also in the housekeeping or maintenance sections of huge residence parks and call centers.

The workplace is an extremely amorphous term in this particular context, as it typically connotes more than one household. The isolated and unprotected nature of the activity exposes workers, more than 80 per cent of whom are women, to greater vulnerability. … A 2013 ILO report shows that the Asia-Pacific region has the
maximum prevalence of domestic labour, about 41 per cent. But it is the weakest in terms of legal protection – only three per cent of workers are entitled to a weekly day off as compared to the global average of 50 per cent. … Rights to minimum wages and maternity benefits that are norms in Latin America are a far-cry in Asia. (Editorial, The Hindu, 2013)

First of all, the volatile and often messy circumstances of the current Indian situation not only calls for critical theoretical frameworks like postcolonialism, feminism, critical globalization and development studies but they also require the deployment of a radical, innovative and improvisatory methodological framework which goes beyond methodology to unearth oppressive formations and create visions of an alternate, utopian reality. Critical performance ethnographic work is seen as the “‘performance’ of critical theory” and has often been called “critical theory in action” (Madison, 2005, 5, 13, 15). Though I use specific theories like postcolonialism to interpret, explain and advance social actions in other chapters, in this one, I use corresponding critical performance ethnography to give meaning to the everyday lived experiences of my participants in real life through its performativity.

Secondly, as a critical cultural studies and media scholar, I agree wholeheartedly that, “We inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture” (Denzin, 2003, x) where the distinctions between performer and audience, performance and real life are blurred as a culture of dramatic performance dominates everyday life. Culture is formed in an ever-complex dialogical environment where everyday performances are hard to distinguish from formal dance, theater, film, music and television shows. Performance and media texts co-exist in complex interplays within discourse where the everyday and the traditional performances interact and co-inform each other (Denzin, 2003). Consequently, it is necessary to deploy a performance-based social science methodology that can respond to the contingent, emergent, mediated nature of contemporary reality with creativity and innovation. Within this form of inquiry, the actual
process of the research, including the act of locating oneself within the world of the Other and implicating oneself into that process (Madison, 2010, 12), is as vital and integral part of the project as is the recording of the other’s world. “Performance ethnography simultaneously creates and enacts moral texts that move from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural” (Denzin, 2003, x). In so doing, one focuses not only on the performance or the “done” but also on “performativity” or the “doing” (Denzin, 2003, 10).

Moreover, scholars have already pointed to the possibilities inherent in this form of ethnography to work out critical issues in which the researcher holds up the light to unearth latent power relations, hegemonic formations and oppressive conditions and enables the Other to see reality from an empowered position.

Ethnography is a not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political…. The pedagogical is always moral and political; by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other. (Denzin, 2006)

Performance-based ethnographic inquiry is more conducive to cultural studies projects than textual ethnographies and have the potential for capturing far more nuanced and compassionate reports of experiences from the marginalized not only in studies of race, ethnicity, identity, but also for indigenous or postcolonial cultures and subaltern populations.

“Performance-sensitive ways of knowing” contribute to an epistemological and political pluralism that challenges existing ways of knowing and representing the world. Such formations are more inclusionary and better suited than existing ways for thinking about postcolonial or “subaltern” cultural practices. (Conquergood, 1998, 497; cited in Denzin, 2003, 8)

My inclination and scholastic intent is to follow Denzin’s guidance to respond to the crises of democracy and capitalism that affects our world with a radical emancipatory effort at representing the injustice, prejudice and violence; and by deploying performance ethnography in
my fieldwork, initiate moral discourse so as “not simply attempt to reflect the world as a mirror but take up the hammer to build and imagine it differently” (Madison, 2010, 25).

As I sit here, far removed in space and time trying to capture the ethnographic experience of my fieldwork, I understand that it will only reach the reader as it is remembered and recounted. But in outlining the routines and rituals of the community I worked with, in trying to capture the drama inherent in “telling the told” stories in “face-to-face ethnographic encounters,” (Madison, 2010, 168), I try my best to present a big part in direct dialogue often juxtaposed with excerpts from media and policy texts. The participants speak in their vernacular - Bengali for the migrants from Bengal and Hindi for the people from Jharkhand or Assam and these conversations are also interspersed with their dialects. As a participant in these conversations, I also recorded the dialogues and then translated them into English from Bengali/ Hindi/ Assamese and transcribed them for the purposes of this study. In some occasions, as I revive the ambience of the actual experience - my presence in the interviews as well as my experience beyond the frame of these dialogues, and in conversations of everyday lived experiences, I move between prose and verse, hoping for the verse to capture the performative aspect of their delivery imbued with the “improvisational, sensory, emotional and poetic import(ance)” (Madison, 2010, 168) of their presentations. That these voices are accompanied by my reflections, my analysis, an ambience of my presence in the interview experience is never far from my mind. But in my work here, I have tried to present the dialogue of the interviews and focus groups as much in direct dialogue as possible so as to include “actual voices from the field in their own terms” in the hope that this is the way I will be able to historicize in the fairest and truest way “the act of women as

---

58 Assamese is somewhat similar to Bengali but the workers from Assam speak in Hindi.
agents and actors in public spheres, as well as agents in both the story (narrative) and event (action narrated) of activist interventions” (Madison, 168).

I focus on the conditions of crises that call for critical, reflexive, compassionate and ethical advocacy in academic work especially in the representation of marginalized populations. (T)his form of praxis can shape a cultural politics of change. It can help create a progressive and involved citizenship…. Thus fusion of critical pedagogy and performance praxis uses performance as a mode of inquiry, as a method of doing evaluation ethnography, as a path to understanding, as a tool for engaging collaboratively the meanings of experience, as a means to mobilize persons to take action in the world. (Denzin, 2003, 19).

The issue of the domestic workers, who are so often referred to as “servants” or “maids” as the gender dictate would be, has rarely been addressed or problematized in recent social science literature on India, especially within the context of India’s transformations in the era of globalization. Among the few studies that do exist, most look at domestic workers through the lens of a power relationship between the employer and employee with some attention to everyday ways in which domestic workers resist degradation. This is despite the fact that the International Labor Organization has called for attention to this section of India’s informal sector with an estimated 10 million maids and nannies working in the country – “an informal and ‘invisible’ workforce where they are abused and exploited due to a lack of legislation to protect them” (With no laws, 2014, Times of India). Ray (2000) has explored how domestic servants negotiate their identities as men and women, and also imagine and articulate their lives as gendered beings given that they perform the most undesirable tasks of society on a daily basis. Moya (2007) examined domestic worker situations across several countries including India to examine the feminization of domestic service, deduce connections between migration and this sector, and also attributed the formation of ethnic niches by domestic workers based on ethnocultural preferences. While finding valuable insights from these studies, I develop the
background of the essay also from literature on Indian economic development by notable scholars like Amartya Sen and Arjun Appadurai, who focused more on marginalization and economic and social exclusion rather than specifically the position of India’s service workers. Earlier scholarship on poverty, effect of globalization on the poor and marginalized populations and oppressive conditions of women, all help in informing this paper. However, my essay is geared to capture much more the embodied experiences of the workers as they live their lives. While my preference for a performance ethnographic text is a conscious acknowledgment of the pitfalls of aspiring to represent a largely subaltern population, my presentation sets up a structure where my voice never enters in any way to “speak for” the protagonists.

Being an advocate is to actively assist in the struggles of others; or (and) it is learning the tactics, symbols and everyday forms of resistance which the sub-altern *enact* but of which they “do not speak” in order that they may provide platforms from which their struggles can be known and heard. (Madison, 2010, 11)

I now visit the different sections that this chapter will be divided into in the interests of organizing the terrain against which I foreground the overlapping narratives of the protagonists. I start with a brief literature review, looking at how globalization has affected the poor the world over and especially in India. This is followed by a reading of the concept of “political society” within the context of postcolonial India’s profound contradictions and interactions between the state, labor, civil society, and local NGOs. The next section focuses on the physical environment of “global city” Gurgaon as well as the Indian NCR, with the myriad heterogeneities and incongruities that form the physical, social and cultural environment in which the migrant populations find themselves. Finally, I include the case study on the domestic workers of Gurgaon and larger NCR of India. Each of these help me historicize not merely the conditions which have contributed to the women’s lives and positionalities but the political developments which have shaped their agentic standpoints despite all their vulnerabilities and fragilities.
Purpose

My purpose is to produce a study that captures the story of a community of domestic workers in the Indian NCR within the globalization narrative but still is locally informed by intricate ground realities, especially finding clear light through the words of the protagonists themselves. In doing so, I wish to further my deepest research agenda of letting the women workers speak for themselves, in the hope of breaking through the silence which often drowns their voices and shrouds their stories in cloak of silence due to their subaltern positionalities. In portraying this community of migrant workers who have moved far from their homes in West Bengal’s Sunderbans region, or Assam’s border areas into the NCR and focusing on the women domestics’ struggles for their rights as workers and privileges as citizens of this nation, I examine how they not only evaluate their own situations, create narratives of resistance and redemption but also deploy language of globalization, that proliferates the area they live and work within, to craft out better living and working conditions for themselves. While their experiences sketch out harsh existences profoundly strained under the new boundaries and regulations, which their adopted communities impose, their narratives unfold encouraging stories on how they build solidarity and collective identities.

Following Madison’s (2010) work in Africa, I also focus on the wider context of women’s position in contemporary India. Instead of singular focus on patriarchal traditions creating structures impeding the rights of women, I also factor in the political economy because their lives are imbricated in multiple ways with the larger story of the nation’s economic development (or the lack of it) and the social, familial and cultural realities of the Indian woman and her struggle for survival. Just as Madison (2010) finds a grey area in the women’s participation in the Trokosi system, I focus on the grey area of these women reinforcing the same
indigenous traditions and rural customs from their home state imbued with patriarchal practices. While focusing on their hegemonic revival of traditions and customs from their home communities in order to produce their vernacular identities as women, I also try to see how they promote their selfhood as workers within a global culture, while also asserting their belongingness within the diaspora.

**Literature Review: Globalization and the poor**

According to Appadurai (1990, 2000), conditions of disjuncture created through globalization and consequently “a world without borders” have generated certain anxieties in the minds not only of policy-makers and academics but more importantly, among the poor and their advocates. Their concern is that while policies being enacted across the world on trade, environment, science, technology and varied other areas affect the life-and-death decisions for ordinary people around the world, the discourses of expertise and epistemology that set the final rules for global transactions have generally left the ordinary people like farmers and slum-dwellers, street-vendors and merchants, urban poor and refugee populations outside and behind. Figures 5.1 to 5.9 show photographs of some such ordinary people I took in the Gurgaon area during my fieldwork. But these photographs have amazing similarities with paintings drawn from the Map of Marginalized series by Indian artist Gayatri, who has spent time among untouchable groups and laborers in and outside his home state of Kerala, worked among homeless and downtrodden across India and whose deep concern for social justice is recorded in his artwork. The concern about social exclusion, about voicing the vernacular discourses on how to sustain cultural autonomy and economic survival within the same framework, and the awareness that the poor find themselves far removed from the intricacies of the global debates

59 Untouchable or Dalit is the nomenclature applied to certain castes who rank lowest in India’s Hindu caste system
and policy discussions, all combine to create a potent ground for new studies on how the poor urban populations in the newly instituted “global spaces” are responding to emerging issues of food security, citizenship and economic/social exclusion. Added to the already disturbing scenario about the exclusion of the poor from national and global development are processes of internal migration and displacement that have not merely contested and redrawn effectual boundaries of states but have led to increasingly complex ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996) thereby generating anxieties about the presence of strangers, and attendant cultural differences, especially in communities with entrenched norms of traditional behavior.

In examining such anxieties, scholars have distinguished between a Eurocentric conception of an authentic, local grassroots civil society organically formed of modern liberal citizenry in the immense pressures of globalizing from “above” on one hand (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008) and on the other, the multitudes of masses who have increasingly become aware of their positions as citizens of the state and have engaged with political demonstrations and agitations on their civil and political rights. In India, the former, arising out of educated urban middle-classes, have occupied a very specific place in modern, postcolonial India to form a bureaucratized version of civil society within which they regularly engage in political discourse as right-bearing citizens of the state. Scholars like Partha Chatterjee (2004) have contended that there is need to distinguish between them and the constituents of a “political society” – comprised of the poorest of poor who have often been left behind in the postcolonial nation’s progressive measures and whose claims are not always within the purview of a legitimate legal domain. This political society could be composed of the poor ranging anywhere from landless agricultural laborers to informal migrant workers to residents of urban slums squatting on public land. “Political society encompasses social movements that are often at odds with the narrow
development agendas found in civil society in more recognizably modern institutional forms of associational life, including trade unions, NGOs, and civic politics” (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008, p287).

In India, the dynamics between the state, organized labor, civil society and the vast majority of labor classes in the informal sector creates highly differentiated relationships between the modern postcolonial state and its various stakeholders. The rapid globalization of the last two decades with increased mobility, precariousness of work, transnational influences crisscrossing the economic scenario, as well as environmental crises and political instability has exacerbated the gap between these two groups – a small technologically-educated coterie in the modern formal urban workforce and the vast number of working poor who largely feel left behind in this economic progress. This vast group of marginalized publics constituted of non-formal workers, urban unemployed, the underemployed, the landless agrarian workers, referred to as “subaltern publics,” (Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008; Chatterjee, 2004; Spivak, 1988, 1999, 2005) have often been mobilized within political society in voicing their claims for access to some basic fruits of a modern state – education, healthcare, housing, land or jobs. The members of this subaltern class, which is the most deprived of all the categories, have the least cultural and social capital and frequently come from the lower castes or indigenous groups in India and their relationship with the postcolonial nation-state has been defined by their daily struggles to wrangle out minimum benefits for themselves and thus been defined by power relations antagonistic at worst and ambivalent at best.

In post-developmental states, where the goal has been to produce a middle-class society of competitive workers and consumers, so as to attract global capital, deprived and displaced citizens have often, frustrated by the corrupted electoral systems and traditional hierarchies in
party politics, frequently turned to NGOs as a way of participating in political life without engaging with the state. Indian civil society has thus had the dual responsibility and privilege of being constituted of erudite members of its urban elite but also frequently representing the marginalized emerging from subaltern publics of rural and indigenous communities. However, though this elite civil society has frequently concerned itself with empowerment, education and political engagement of dispossessed and displaced classes and their presence and engagement within the NGOs has contributed to an increasingly heterogeneous civil society in India, the marginalized in India have often found their own solutions to pressing problems of livelihood and sustenance. Chatterjee (2004) used “political society” to review how the democratic processes in India have managed to influence the lives of the subaltern classes as they engage in contestations on matters of livelihood or habitation. He examined the agency of the subaltern as they engaged in the political sphere, lending new insights into the concept of subalternity and agency: “they were political in a way different from that of the elite” (39). By examining the “political society” formations in the Gurgaon area, my chapter aims to add to the existing literature on issues of marginalization of the poor in a globalized society.

Case study on Domestic Workers in Indian NCR: The urban paradox

This case study emerges from ethnographic work in the city of Gurgaon, situated in north-east Haryana, and Saket in south Delhi. Both these contiguous areas together form the south-western part of the Indian NCR that has grown around the capital city, New Delhi. Often, the term “Delhi” is loosely applied to cover the NCR region in this essay, as it is in everyday usage, official dialogues and media reports. Urban Gurgaon is now far removed in spirit and structure from other parts of interior Haryana, like Manesar, Hissar, Rohtak or Kurukshetra and shares very little with adjoining areas of Badshahpur, Sohna, Mewat or Nuh. Frequently referred
to as the Millennium City, Gurgaon epitomizes India’s new political-economic reality with a very high concentration of service-sector networks that handle back-office operations for most of the Fortune 500 conglomerates. This chapter is oriented towards critically analyzing and understanding the nature of the NCR’s and Gurgaon’s stratified population and its embedded customs. It is based on the oral histories of events and recent developments – examined and expressed through radical, interpretive inquiry.

*Migration, stratified citizenship and demographic anxiety*

The stories of migrant workers in the area are foregrounded against a backdrop of various traditional structures of caste, religion and ethnicity which continue to co-exist with newly instated differential citizenship rising from neoliberal governance. It is a study in oppressive social and political practices and economic imbalances that emerge in a capitalistic space under the immense pressures of a globalization-fuelled urbanization. Global cities, at least in this postcolonial country, are populated not only by corporate executives and accountants, but also by huge masses of marginalized people who live in excruciating poverty - that vast section which builds and repairs, cleans and sweeps, cooks and mows: the laborers and migrant construction workers, domestic helpers and factory employees, the rickshaw pullers and the peons, the vendors, drivers, plumbers and electricians. According to the Delhi Human Development Report 2013, Delhi’s lowest earning 60 per cent residents are mostly migrants into the area, and are employed as domestic workers, cleaners, washermen, caretakers and gardeners as well construction workers, masons, plumbers, painters and welders. Though this report presenting figures on Delhi shows that most of the 75,000 annual migrants into Delhi usually migrate from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, a fact also reflected in previous research (Das, 2011), my study in the

---

60 The 2012-13 Economic Survey by the Delhi-based Institute for Human Development.
wider NCR found a big population of domestic workers from West Bengal, Bangladesh, Assam and Jharkhand – many of them employed as cleaners, cooks, doormen, canteen boys, housekeepers, housemaids, nannies and chauffeurs. In trying to show the connection between domestic labor and migration Moya (2007) drew from data in India showing that domestic labor in Indian cities frequently came from hinterlands of corresponding states. So domestic labor in Kurukshetra came from the Haryana countryside as well as nearby slums and helpers in Calcutta (Kolkata) came from interior parts of rural West Bengal. Whether initiated by higher need and therefore higher pay structures in the global NCR or by deepening food and livelihood crisis in the country’s hinterlands, my work showed a high percentage of Bengali, Jharkhandi and Assamese workers in the Delhi and Gurgaon.

The most noticeable characteristic of the demographic pattern within Gurgaon is the migration of several categories of population. This includes western expatriates, transnational corporation (TNC) officials, call center employees, local business executives, business owners, as well as thousands of inland people - “floating populations” (Ong, 2006) – like those displaced by environmental disasters, declining agriculture, political strife and impoverished localities dwindling under developmental failures or recent economic trends.

In global circuits educated and self-propulsive individuals claim citizenship-like entitlements and benefits, even at the expense of territorialized citizens. Expatriate talents constitute a form of moveable entitlement without formal citizenship. Low-skill citizens and migrants become exceptions to neo-liberal mechanisms and are constructed as excludable populations in transit, shuttled in and out of zones of growth. (Ong, 2006, 16).

It may be useful to distinguish between the affluent global citizen and the dispossessed migrant laborer both of who have moved into this urban space following India’s recent incorporation into the global market. The widest and most significant distinction found between these two specific groups is the degree of control that they have over their lives. The affluent,
premier group of professionals – the knowledge workers, expatriates or TNC executives enjoy all the benefits of flexible citizenship (Ong, 2006), moving freely across nations, international borders, at home everywhere with the privileged lifestyle of first-world citizens. On the other hand, the masses of poor, rural, marginalized, menial workers who are often bussed into these volatile spaces to serve the needs of burgeoning construction, real estate and service sectors have little or no control over their own movements and enjoy very few privileges of their legal citizenship in the “democratic” republic of India. Neither is this disparity addressed in government policies or administrative agendas nor do public policy messages address the needs of this doubly-marginalized section.

As a critical scholar, my orientation is towards responding to the current climate of crises of democracy through the engagement in the “practical, progressive politics of a performance cultural studies” with a commitment to “radical social change, economic justice, to a cultural politics that extends critical race theory” (Denzin, 2003, 3). In the interests of social justice my objective here is to focus on the second group of migrants caught in the interstices of the uneven touchdown of globalization and the state’s intermittent adoption of neoliberal strategies to aid liberalization on one hand and playing catch up with social welfare on the other. Here, in this chapter, in trying to “decipher” and convey what the subaltern says, when they do speak (Spivak, 1999, 308-310), I focus on the people from the domestic and household service sector – and try to include their voices in capturing their lives in the globalized space of India’s new urban.

In reflecting on the struggles and triumphs of these domestic workers, I also throw light on the multiple practices of exploitation that they resist, show how they seek to get their voices heard, how they mobilize and indicate possibilities of an emancipatory discourse equipped to counter oppressive formations. My aim is to contribute towards a performance text that may help
in building “response-ability” against emerging issues of inequality under “neoliberal forms of democracy and capitalism” (Madison, 2010): the emphasis here is on a “felt, sensing account of history as well as its particular materiality” (169). In telling the told, in capturing the stories formed here, I aim at a “matrix of materiality, memory, subjectivity, performance, imagination, and experience that events culminate in oral history performance, a culmination of layers that are all mutually formed by each other.” I argue that the story that breaks through, while one of double marginalization of an already disadvantaged, silenced people, also shows emancipatory possibilities - with subaltern people breaking the barriers of silence which have historically muted their stories from being recorded in the postcolonial nation’s narrative.

**Borders for Others**

A closer look at Gurgaon brings home the stark truth that it is far from just the shiny new office towers and luxurious gated communities. It is also home to working class people from all over the country who work anywhere from factories, to hotels, shops, homes and construction sites. “The new city is being built and maintained by migrant labor and yet migration is also at the heart of an urban paradox” (Srivastava, 2013). The space inhabited by these migrant workers has no resemblance to a global city and I call it the “back-room,” given its invisibility from the projected globalized space of multistoried office building, malls and gated residences. It is a subaltern space of an alternate society with vast disparities between its conditions and the standards of the transnational urban space. With its civic amenities, utility companies, transportation and communication facilities connected to a privatized grid serviced by this community of marginalized, dispossessed workers, the global city thrives because it feasts on the labor of this back-room. On the other hand, the workers spend their nights after their 12-18 hour work days in their slum quarters - shanty towns which have been hastily constructed on
government land, bereft of regular water or electricity or basic amenities. As the state boundaries fade into neo-liberal space, other metaphorical borders are instated between different groups of population. The massive scale, speed and scope of migratory movements which have become the order of the day in the era of globalization in the recent years (Alexander, Kaur & St. Louis, 2012) have led to profoundly complex community lives where newer strategies of control and technologies of regulation have often been created markedly for disciplining of the marginalized and have eventually led to new barriers, literal or symbolic, to be inscribed, legislated and policed, seeking to control these “others” at home and in the journeys of their everyday lives.

Such unprecedented bordering practices stand alongside, and are entangled with, older and resistant forms of inclusion and exclusion, mobility and restriction, security and displacement. Attributions of belonging and not-being remain too often coded through appeals to race and, increasingly, to culture or ethnicity, with each marking the borders of citizenship and the contours of persistent inequality and injustice. (Alexander et al., 2012, 2).

Often these boundaries are determined by pre-existing caste-creed classifications or colonial enclosures, at other times by more recent neoliberal circuits, but almost always, they are stricter borders under which citizenship becomes stratified and this second group is further disenfranchised and marginalized. The rights of the subaltern population are as nonexistent as their silence is pervasive. Very often originating from India’s lowest castes, these people own nothing, possess very little, have no education and very scant purchasing power, have no voice, and may truly be called subaltern. They are certainly not consumers in the worldwide consumer network which globalization thrives on, but they are the invisible producers and it is their surplus labor which fuels the capitalist market. As the emerging post-developmental state bends backwards to facilitate corporate agendas, the neo-liberal space within global city Gurgaon becomes a fertile ground for oppressive formations.
Madison (2010) has rightly argued that most of the crises in human rights activism and social justice issues in this day and age stem from the rampant neoliberal agendas adopted by the big players in the transnational capitalist economy: “one of the root causes troubling local human rights and social justice activism are the *machinations of neoconservatism and a corporate, global political economy*” (Madison, 2010, 19). Whereas I completely agree with this viewpoint, I also argue that in complex postcolonial societies like India, the heterogeneous historical realities that co-exist with contemporary maneuverings of global capitalistic forces contribute towards more intricate ground conditions where issues of subalternity and marginalization are complexly imbricated with narratives of agency and empowerment.

**Domestic labor in a global marketplace**

As I asked myself the question frequently visited by my community of qualitative researchers – how do we make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, justice in academic endeavor, the answer seemed to be in pursuing a model of academic writing imbibe with ethics and advocacy which enjoins me to locate myself deeply and self-consciously within the research process and try to create the most authentic, vivid, articulate, moving and compassionate story of the migrant population that I work among. The story I tell here about the people of Gurgaon begins with mystory (Denzin, 2003), because I locate myself within a field of relations qualified by various intersections in which my role as a researcher was located. This intersectionality is created between my ethnicity (that I shared with most of the Bengali participants), my place in their lives as a western researcher from United States, my hierarchical position as an employer in the area, and my being a woman, (which called forth certain ethnic bonding practices and rituals with the women participants). The complexity that built up was, at times, intimidating, but at many others provided a richness to my work which I am grateful for. Their position as research
subjects also combined with their situation as employees of people similar to me – relationships which were not only inscribed with authority and domination of the latter but which, along with their relations with the local landlords, was often the most visible, localized version of state and market authority: in their reality, it was an overarching “them,” - the localized power becoming symbolic of other vectors of state and market power. This was brought constantly into the dialogues since most of the participants spoke in terms of social relations between “them,” the “bada lok,” versus “us,” the “chhota lok” or “goreeb manush” literally meaning “big people” and “small people”.

Ray (2000) has traced this division between the employers and menial domestic workers in her study of domestic workers in Calcutta (Kolkata) in West Bengal. She explored how the gendered ideology of “bhadralok” culture of the middle class Bengali employers created a master narrative of the “civilized” class who were endowed with intellectual and cultural capital. Constructed within this was a realm of hegemonic masculinity and feminine respectability, an ideological position that foreclosed all claims of the menial underclass to independently position themselves within this sphere. While it preemptively ruled out all questions of the bhadralok themselves ever having to engage in menial labor, this was a condition that automatically presupposes the placing of the worker in servitude within the domestic sphere, according to normative standards of masculinity and femininity and a complex backdrop of class deprivation. Whereas according to Ray, the ways in which the workers carved their existence within this bhadralok sphere, were visited by both acceptance and resistance, my work found this binary construction of badalok/ bhadralok versus “chhotalok” also to have been internalized by some of the workers while others resisted it. However, my experience deviated from Ray’s (2000) study

---

61 Poor people
62 Bhadralok literally means a “civilized person.”
where she found that the domestic workers as live-ins in Calcutta minimized their identities as workers and instead build their identities as women and men, mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, daughters and sons.

In the NCR, most of the workers strongly expressed their identity as workers who were in the area to make money and contribute to their family’s economic progress. Whereas familial bonds with employers were minimized, the same were hyped up in case of connections they carried from their villages, thereby people originating from the same area formed a family-like network. Very often, tensions on my anchoring in the bhadralok class were superseded, by my belonging to Bengali culture and language, resulting, again, in a familial bond with me, that was reinforced by them with constant references to how I, as a “Didi,” (Sister), or “Ma” or (Mother/Daughter), would understand their misery so much better that the hostile world they inhabited: “Didi, tumi to bujhtey parchho amader obosthya” or “Bodo koshto hoy Ma... aar parina... sokal chaartey uthhi aar shara din shudu kaaj, kaaj, aar kaaj63”. At other times there was awkwardness arising from an upending of the power relationship between us where they held slightly greater power since theirs is the authoritative voice in the narrative. However, this is in no way to discount their eagerness and commitment to tell their story or effect a warm, almost family-like bond with me, welcoming me as an insider to their group. The fullness of meaning in this story is definitely derived from their stories in their own words as “speaking subjects,” partly shaped by “scenes from the field” (Madison, 2010, 19) to enrich and enliven the performance text by capturing the field experience in all its original energy and vitality.

The aim is not for the researcher to disappear from the performance or the report, but to be accountable and responsible for her own choices. The presentation of oneself in the report and/or the performance is not gratuitous self-presentation, but it is to be critically

63 Ma, I suffer so much, breaking under the strain of so much work...loads and loads of work all day. (Bengali)
self-reflexive, accountable for one’s biases, vulnerabilities, and blind spots. (Madison, 2010, p13)

Stories and themes

I conducted my fieldwork from my temporary home in one of the residential complexes in Sohna Road area of Gurgaon. Though I was fully acquiescent with the idea of “intimate habitation” (Spivak, cited in Madison, 2010, 24) based in the belief that a community cannot be an object that can be studied from the outside, but it has to be inhabited and experienced, in order to find expression, I was not able to insert myself completely into the workers’ colony. This was due, not merely to the colony’s lack of the basic amenities that I needed to operate in India, but also because of concerns for social norms which I would be transgressing as a woman living alone considering the strict hierarchical structures of the environment. However, I managed to visit them in their colony, share meals with them, attend their religious festivities and get a close view of their daily working lives. By privileging the voices of the community members in describing their experiences, where they become “speaking subjects” (Madison, 2010, 24), I envision the new India for the masses coming alive in the direct quotes, descriptions, verbatim interviews and oral histories of the men and women of Gurgaon and Saket. I try to capture the energy and vitality of the field with all that is at my disposal: images, expressions, scenes and performances so as to craft a moving reality, always conscious of never representing anyone or anything in a way I would rather not be represented: “an act of seeing the self see the self through and as the other” (Madison, 2010, 13).

The stories emerging from these migrant domestic workers were stories of exploitation and domination from the multiple systems of oppression but also stories of courage and empowerment. They were visited by a striking consistency that attends their migration and subsequent life in the NCR: no matter which part of India they hailed from, it was a devastating
story of a subaltern population which had been repeatedly marginalized but could still not be foreclosed from India’s destiny. In narrating this story, mostly in their own words, but often also in media and organizational literature, I focus on a few events that stand out in their telling, so as to highlight their day-to-day struggles with subsistence, moments of empowerment, their despair which attends every effort to get their needs heard and finally the intricately woven tales of survival and sustenance through their own folk culture and social network. The hope is to capture a certain texture of their lives, lived everyday at the edge of an insecurity that is a constant part of their urban existence.

Among the highlights is a resistance movement that workers of Sohna Road organized among themselves in December 2012, in order to ensure a fair wage structure. While I was not present at the site of this agitation, the oral history narratives of the “worker strike” or work stoppage, help to enliven this event. The second is a close look at their annual religious event, Manasa Mangal⁶⁴, which is celebrated in the workers’ colony and which I attended on August 17, 2013. In holding onto such indigenous religious and cultural rituals, these women try to reinforce the strength of their traditional identities and values even as they construct their new identities in a hyper-materialistic, globalized community. Beyond these, the major themes that emerge from focus group conversations relate to their explanation of the logic of the rural to urban move; their vulnerability as landless, uneducated laborers in an urban space which is

⁶⁴ Manasa is an ancient non-Aryan deity worshipped in Bengal and adjoining areas including the states of Assam and Orissa. The Manasa Mangal Kavya narrates the epic conflict between Manasa, the snake-goddess and Chand Sadagar who was a worshipper of Hindu god Shiva. The battle which ends in Manasa’s victory epitomizes the Aryan and non-Aryan conflict but also focuses on various other social issues rising from discrimination of indigenous communities. The role of the female protagonist, Behula, epitomizes the best in Indian womanhood, especially a Bengali woman’s devotion to her husband. Manasa Mangal is widely followed among indigenous forest communities in the Sunderbans area among Hindus. Also known as Bisahari, Janguli or Padmavati, she is also worshipped as a fertility goddess and the guardian angel of foresters who saves them from snakes bites and infectious diseases.
defined as much by its unauthorized resource exploitation, incessant *jugaad*\(^{65}\) and exploitative labor practices, as it is by recent demands for standardized paperwork and global aspirations.

Demand for paperwork often results in their repeated marginalization within a site marked by recent transformations in India’s developmental orientation, especially in the use of technology for dispensation of welfare programs. The third theme discussed here is the thinly-veiled hostility that the migrant workers encounter from the local people or “*Gaonwala*\(^{66}\)” (as they are called by the migrant Bengali workers) and also their resentment at some of the intolerable behavior meted out to them by householders within the spheres of their employment. This helps to highlight the changing relations between the burgeoning middle classes and the urban poor, in which the latter’s slightly empowered status and the culture of political society mobilization is instrumental in triggering confrontation and occasional demonstration of agency from members of the worker groups. Through all this is woven the overriding tale of how modern technologies of governance and population regulation consistently leads to the marginalization of these migrant urban poor and how they constantly negotiate for better conditions as agents of their own economic progress while resisting the myriad exploitative practices by the private sector and the repeated neglect by the post-developmental state. In the following sections, the various performance texts revive these conditions and the protagonists’ responses to them, thus exploring each of the themes discussed above.

---

\(^{65}\) Improvisation

\(^{66}\) Hindi term meaning “villagers.” This reference to villagers has a dual meaning. It refers to the local landlords who were from among Haryanvi villagers whose land had been bought by real estate firms and developed as a global space. The other meaning is derived from the local people’s constant reference to their local roots and reminders to the outsiders of their foreign origin. This is to emphasize that they had ownership over the villages that became a city.
Rural to urban move.

I begin with the common thread in all their tales and then move on to the narratives on the December Resistance and Manasa Mangal. The extreme poverty in the rural home communities usually combines with a final political strife or environmental disaster to push them to leave their home state and look for subsistence in the urban areas. A large part of the women domestic workers of Sohna Road were environmental refugees from the wetlands of Sunderbans, in West Bengal, eastern India. But whether from West Bengal or Jharkhand or Assam, (Figures 5.10, 5.11, 5.12) the excruciating poverty and deprivation that qualifies the rural experience in India also acted as the underlying reason for dislodging this population from their anchoring in their villages. Natural calamities and receding shorelines of the Bay of Bengal deprived many of them of their land, livelihood and homes. The geographical region of Bengal is a plush tropical wetland and sits on the largest river delta in the world – the Ganges delta. Nestled in the shores of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and West Bengal’s wetlands are rich in forest reserves and also the potential of verdant agricultural grounds with their low-lying areas being renewed every year with the mineral-rich silt from the Ganges and Brahmaputra flowing through. However,

67 The workers in the Saket area that I worked with had moved from Jharkhand and Assam and they were Adivasi or members of the Scheduled Tribes listed among the historically disadvantaged population groups recognized in the Constitution of India. The law stipulates that they are to be protected through reservation and details are included in the Schedule of Castes and Tribes. However, such considerations are again dependent on their being able to prove their Scheduled Tribe status which becomes the site of another struggle.

68 Bengal has a checkered history but its contemporary position is one attended by intense contradictions - political, ethnic, religious and ecological. Since the original capital of the British Empire, Calcutta, was situated in Bengal, the region saw great prosperity and development under colonial rule but it also underwent violent communal strife when Indian Independence in 1947 was accompanied by Partition of Bengal into a largely Hindu West Bengal and mainly Muslim East Pakistan. This meant that the politics of nationhood divided a united Bengal with religion being used as the yardstick – driven into the heart of a huge community otherwise united linguistically, ethnically, culturally and philosophically. The latter later emerged as an independent nation, Bangladesh whereas the former remained in India as West Bengal.
environmental changes in recent years have seen these areas devastated with violent cyclones and floods, destroying the rural communities here and washing away their traditional livelihoods of agriculture and pisciculture. The most recent one was Hurricane Aila.

**Scene 1: Seasonal Farming, Hurricane Aila, and the Slow Erosion of Rural Communities**

*Lalmohan and Pari: In Hurricane Aila, the river banks in Sunderbans were breached and the fury of the water rushed into our villages breaking the barrage down. As the water came in, our farms, husbandry, poultry were all washed away. Many of our neighbors were washed away. Homes were destroyed. At that time, some government agencies and other community organizations came in to help us. We were in despair because our livelihood was jeopardized. Specifically, the fish and the paan
d banks were destroyed. Government gave us some money – about Rs. 500
to Rs. 1000 to drain the salt water out of our farms and ponds but the neighborhoods had been destroyed and the stench made it uninhabitable. Block offices and charitable organizations like Ramkrishna Mission started pitching tents for us to live in and people moved into these relief camps with their meager belongings. Charitable agencies started soup kitchens and people would go in and get their meals twice daily. This went on for a few months. Then people started figuring out ways to sustain themselves again. But hard as it was before, now it was even harder to find work. People were leaving for distant places – Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi. So as it took shape, we realized we had to leave. The decision to leave came under the burden of the debts building up. The family was split up as our sons argued over the debts and we decided we would come here to make some money with which we could secure our children and grandchildren’s future. So we left in the darkness of the night and headed for Gurgaon. Our son caught up with us on the way and cried his heart out. It breaks my heart even now when I think of that day. (Lalmohan Das, Canteen Server and Pari Das, Maid, Gurgaon, 2013. Both are migrants to Gurgaon from Sunderbans)*

*Phillipa: In the villages there are no facilities at all. Here at least we make do, but in the villages it is even more difficult. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).*

*Vanity: We do have food in the villages but there is no hope of progress or facility to educate children. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).*

*Phillipa: Schools are very far and young children cannot make it there. One school for 2-3 villages – they are never within our reach. ... We are not educated. ... Even now, where there are Christian schools, they charge Rs. 700-800 fees per month because they say these are English medium schools. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).*

*Chorus: We have nowhere to go. There are more hardships back home, that is why we are here.*

---

69 Sunderbans with its warm tropical climate with high humidity is ideal for cultivation of betel leaves. Betel leaves combined with chewing tobacco is a common addiction among several communities across India.

70 $1 = Rs. 63
Vanity: If we live in the village, all money will go in food. Like us, our children will also turn out to be uneducated, unpud gawaad\(^7\). (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).

Phillipa: In Delhi, we come with the hope of at least giving our children a good education. At least somehow scratch up little resources for the progress of the kids. We wouldn’t be able to get that back in the village at all. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).

Vanity: If we stay in the village we would work for 6 months during monsoon and be idle for 6 of winter. Whatever comes from farming is what we sell and try to pull through. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).

Ginger: Whatever we sell from our farming, we manage to buy essentials. The paddy crop which has been sown now, will first have to be harvested, and then after that they will buy clothes or other essentials. That is how it is in all villages, Didi! (Live-in housekeeper in Saket from Jharkhand).

Sita: We have to work very hard in the fields back in the villages, right? It is a hard life. So people come here to avoid the hardships of village life. They come here to earn money, with which they can buy land back at home and then return home in old age and enjoy a good life there farming that land. ... Some can’t make it even when they work. ... Sometimes all 3-4 members in the family work hard, make money, and go back home. Many keep their children at home, because it is even more expensive to bring up and educate children here. (Migrant domestic labor in Gurgaon from Sunderbans, West Bengal).

Sabitri and Mahadev: There are fewer people from Kolkata. Those who have nothing back home in the villages, come more. Migrants from Kakdwip, Malda, Raigung, Mednipore,- why do they come? They have lowlands there – when farming becomes problematic, they look at someone they know in Delhi, who works and earns money. So they move in here, work and make money. They earn maybe Rs.10,000, and somehow manage to get a little piece of land back home. Neighbors see them and feel it is possible to make progress when you work in the city. So more people come in. (Migrant domestic labor in Gurgaon from Kolkata, West Bengal).

Search for paperwork.

The Gurgaon workers’ colony I visited was inhabited not only by those displaced by environmental disasters from Sunderbans but it also had a large number from other parts of West Bengal like Kakdwip, Malda, Raigung, Mednipore and also across the border from Bangladesh. This last group remained very silent about their place of origin as it entailed inconvenient questions on legal immigration documents. This search for legal documents becomes a persistent site of struggle for migrant people across the board and is repeatedly visited by my group. Though none of my focus group participants were refugees from Bangladesh, and were born in

\(^7\) Uneducated village buffoons
India, most of them cited difficulties in accessing government aid programs to alleviate their excruciating poverty and lack of clear paths to progress and security in their urban life despite their movement from their home state. Most of them, irrespective of their citizenship affiliations, also complained about the difficulty of acquiring legal residency in the NCR and the profound fallback from lack of proper identification documents.

The latest controversy arrived out of India’s AADHAAR card or the biometrics-based Unique Identification system initiated by Indian government, in which government agencies were locked in a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) with a NGOs dealing with labor issues and the dispensation of AADHAAR card-based benefits. Whereas government officials and politicians claimed that the scheme was a voluntary one and more than half the population had registered for the unique identification number and Aadhaar card, the PIL questioned the various state governments’ move to make Aadhaar mandatory for registration of marriages or sale deeds, getting ration cards, employee provident fund benefits or subsidized LPG cylinders, admission of students to schools and colleges, and even scholarships from the University Grants Commission, (Mahapatra, 2013). Caught in this controversy were the urban poor who could not avail of any government programs without these ID papers. The domestics who worked in Saket and had been working in the NCR area for more than a decade were the most vocal about this, whereas the Bengali workers had a more subdued attitude.

Every inch of the road to obtain government services and facilities is a deeply contested terrain with citizenship paperwork surely and swiftly taking a rigid place in India’s otherwise malleable environment. Obviously, for them migration is not attended by flexible citizenship – once displaced and on the move, they even lose the fragile connection that they have with the state’s developmental agenda as residents of a particular area. Even their access to their
workplace is through limited access gates manned by security guards and is strictly policed. They can only enter the residence parks with an identity card issued after a long process of vetting which also involves application to the local police station. They are not only under surveillance for the entire time they are within the gated complexes but body searches are common and their personal items like ladies’ purses subjected to constant scrutiny. As Madison (2010) mentions, “neoliberal policies have affected both basic human rights and humanitarian justice in varying degrees.” The conversation below highlights this condition where migrant people are frequently strained beyond forbearance in search of the very basic human rights: health care, food security, education. At every turn, their urban experience drives home the truth that they are not only outsiders in the city but do not even figure anywhere in the nation’s developmental grid without the papers. It then turns into a nightmarish search for papers.

**Scene 2: Legal residency, government welfare services and ADHAAR Card**

Narrator: Aadhaar is a 12 digit individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on behalf of the Government of India. This number will serve as a proof of identity and address, anywhere in India. Any individual, irrespective of age and gender, who is a resident in India and satisfies the verification process laid down by the UIDAI can enroll for Aadhaar. Each individual needs to enroll only once which is free of cost. Each Aadhaar number will be unique to an individual and will remain valid for life. Aadhaar number will help you provide access to services like banking, mobile phone connections and other Govt. and Non-Govt. services in due course. [http://uidai.gov.in/aapka-aadhaar.html](http://uidai.gov.in/aapka-aadhaar.html)

Phillipa: We tried a lot for the ration card but nothing came of it. Just now we got our AADHAAR cards – we ran around and got it made with a lot of difficulty. We paid bribes of Rs.500 for our AADHAAR Card. We also paid Rs.500 for our PAN\textsuperscript{72} Card.

Vanity: We paid Rs.300 for our AADHAAR card. Rs.300 for PAN card. The people who make the cards also act as brokers.

Chorus: The officials are the brokers.

Ginger: They say if you give us money we will do it but not if you don’t pay, we will just not help you. But it is free - we just made it free – Bhaiya-Bhabi\textsuperscript{73} helped.

\textsuperscript{72} Personal Account Number generated for the purpose of filing Income tax

\textsuperscript{73} Ginger addresses her employers as Bhaiya, Bhabi or Brother and Sister-in-law. It is a common practice for live-in housekeepers to create a familial address system with the employer family.
Vanity: But we don’t get help. We ask for electricity bills from our employers but they don’t give us. We don’t have electricity bills in our name because we live in rentals which do not provide electric meters in our name, so we cannot apply in straightforward ways and we have to pay bribes.

Phillipa: Didi, jitna dikhaatey hain na, utna kuchh nahi hain. All what they show about progress is not really true. In the newspapers, television, the famous ministers give speeches about progress, it is not all true. (Migrant domestic labor in Saket from Assam).

Ginger: Jitna tarakki dikhaatey hain, utna kuchh nahi. (Housekeeper in Saket, from Jharkhand).

Sheila Dikshit: We have achieved almost 100 per cent enrolment for Aadhaar card. As against the population of 1.67 crore as per 2011 census, the total Aadhaar enrolment in Delhi has now crossed 1.71 crore. Availing benefit of Government welfare schemes through Aadhaar has been ensuring accuracy, transparency apart from containing corruption and fraud. The introduction of Aadhaar Card has also eliminated the role of "middlemen". The city government had established an elaborate mechanism and put in considerable efforts to enable its citizens to get enrolled under Aadhaar. (Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi, 1998-2013. In The Economic Times, September 26, 2013).

Nandan Nilekani: The Aadhaar number can be attached to the health records and used as a route to maintain healthcare data. Healthcare data providers should cooperate with other agencies to put in place a health record system using Aadhaar. If this proposal is implemented, it would empower individuals as they will be able to access their health records even when they are on the move. (Nandan Nilekani, Chairman, UIDAI. In The Hindu, 2013, February 17).

P. Chidambaram: Government remains fully committed to Aadhaar under which 57 crore unique numbers have been issued so far and to opening bank accounts for all Aadhaar holders in order to promote financial inclusion. Under the Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme money is being transferred to beneficiaries under 27 identified schemes, including the National Social assistance Programme (NSAP). A total of 54,20,114 transactions have been put through until January 31 and Rs. 628 crore has been transferred. It is those who are at the bottom of the pyramid, the poor, the migrant workers, the homeless, and the oppressed need Aadhaar and we will ensure that they get Aadhaar. Aadhaar is a tool of empowerment. (P. Chidambaram, Union Finance Minister, UPA Government. in The Hindu, 2013, February 18).

Raghuram Rajan: I particularly want to emphasize the use of the unique ID, Aadhaar, in building individual credit histories. This will be a foundation of a revolution in retail credit. (Raghuram Rajan, Governor, The Reserve Bank of India. In The Times of India, 2013, September 12).

Vanity: When we went to open bank accounts, they asked for AADHAAR cards, PAN Cards, they say bring your PAN card and Ration Card. Everywhere we go, they want these documents.

Phillipa – Now when our children go for school admission, they want the Jaati Praman Patra. We had to run around everywhere to get various signatures and submit it. Every caste,
religion and ethnicity and status has to be proved by a certificate. It is a government
document for which we had to run around and go to the police station. This document is
so that we can say – I am Assamese Christian etc. They could fill up the certificate but
even for that, they ask for bribes. Bribes are everywhere otherwise no one listens to poor
people. Will they think that these are poor people, let’s help them? No, never. Actually
they ask for more money from poor people. We still don’t have the Jaati Praman Patra
(JPP). If we have it, then our children will be accepted as Christian children.

Vanity: If you go for Birth Certificates for our children, they ask for bribes.
Phillipa: But this is something they should give us per law - because this is the medical rule.
Vanity: We asked them for the Ladli²⁴ Card and they said – get the Minister’s signature, show us
your Ration Card, AADHAAR Card. But we don't have many of these papers!
Phillipa: Isn’t it the doctors’ responsibility to provide us with the paperwork after our delivery?
We went to them at pregnancy, registered for delivery, got the vaccination and did
everything according to the rules – so after delivery they really should give us the Birth
Certificate. But they don’t. Especially in Government Hospitals we should get these
things free, shouldn’t we?
Vanity: Before the baby is delivered, the husband, the child’s father has to donate blood,
irrespective of whether the mother needs blood transfusion or not. There is no accounting
of what happens to that blood. During my delivery, my husband was told that your wife
will need blood, so you have to give blood. My husband donated blood but I was never
given blood at all. It was used somewhere else.

Chorus: Scheduled Castes and Tribes? Yes, we are all Adivasis. But we get nothing – no facility.
Yes, we have heard that Adivasis are supposed to get help, but it has never come to be. ...
That is why we need the JPP. Only then we can avail of the facilities. We paid Rs.3000
for my husband’s JPP.
Chorus: Nobody listens to us. They want bribes. Bribes. And more bribes.

Aiwa Ong: Economic globalization is associated with staggering numbers of the globally
excluded. Despite legal citizenship in some country, millions of migrant workers,
refugees, and trafficked peoples who have the most minimal hold on survival have
become even more imperiled and elusive. It is clear that legal citizenship is merely one
form of human protection. Marginalized people are excluded from an environment of
rights because they are often hidden from view, or they live in ‘failed states,’ or as
displaced peoples they are effectively stripped of rights once on the move. (Ong, 2006,
24).

Hostile social relations within a contested terrain.

Within the Bengali domestics, pre-existing power structures are carried over from their
rural communities. Often such connections act as safety nets but most of the time they were
added to the local mechanisms of domination and control. The “Haryanvis,” or the locals of

²⁴ Loving daughter – government program for first-born daughter
Haryana, who are intermittently called “Jats\textsuperscript{75}” or “gaonwala\textsuperscript{76}” by the migrant worker have gained in affluence and power due to the real estate boom in the area. They adopt dominant roles in these nascent communities, and deploy exploitative and disciplinary tactics based on concepts like bhumiputr or son of the soil. The Haryanvi Jats’ resentment toward migrant workers from other states often spills over into rough treatment and vehement opposition of all newcomer efforts to secure permanent station and livelihood as well as employment and economic resources in these highly competitive environments. Their exploitative behavior is frequently the most conspicuous part of their relationship with the newcomers.

Along with age-old class-caste-religion-ethnicity-based customs, other criteria like language, regional affiliations, conditions of illiteracy, landlessness, poverty and alien origins become grounds for discriminatory practices. The Jats are feared as much for their rough demeanor as their stronghold on local resources, geared to carving out variegated citizenship rights (Ong, 2006) in which they demand and establish higher degree of authority, privilege, as well as political and economic rights for themselves. Distinction is made between Hindi and non-Hindi speakers, especially Bengalis, with the latter often relegated to a lower economic and social status due to their lack of proficiency in Hindi and harsh punishments meted out for anything deemed as insubordination. Whereas it is possible to decipher a certain demographic anxiety (Moodie, 2010) about all Bengalis being illegal immigrant from Bangladesh, the treatment meted out also to the Indian Bengali families from Sunderbans showed that this

\textsuperscript{75} A sub-caste among the farmers of Haryana. Historically they are the non-elite, non-servile cultivation farmers with a background of pastoralism in North India. In this context, the Haryanvi Hindu Jats are to be differentiated from Sikh Punjabi Jatts – mainly landowners, who distinguished themselves in British colonial army during 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{76} Villagers
treatment was meted out to all Bengalis irrespective of their citizenship and brings in the need in future studies to critically analyze such anxiety.

Power relations are also defined by unique housing and zoning practices where most residential areas are comprised of limited access or gated communities for expatriates, foreign nationals, corporate executives or similar publics with hardly any provision for the living quarters of those who service these huge enclaves. While the former live in luxury comparable to any developed country, the service workers’ living conditions are appalling: rudimentary structures often without proper sanitation, electricity and water. The high-maintenance urban spaces, created in order to secure the lifestyles of the rich - remarkable in the splendor of its architecture, the wealth of its malls and the oozing comfort of its recreational spaces - reinforce the idea of a glamorous internationalist society, and a first-world, global, corporate business zone, opening its manicured lawns to global capital. However, much is lacking in zoning standards and corresponding regulations in building codes, water treatment and traffic controls. Underneath the glamor, the city is plagued by all the deficiencies of a Third World country.

One of the first things that strike me about this population is their vulnerability in the face of forces incomprehensible to them. They neither understand fully the concept of government accountability nor all the intricacies of the failures of a post-developmental state, and even less its machinations to succeed in the global economy. While they are quite perceptive of the injustice meted out to them, more often than not, they are unaware of their citizenship rights and therefore have nothing with which to resist their disenfranchisement. By bringing them into a practice of public performance, my work aspires to create possibilities of an engaged public who can envision a world of equal rights and full representation. In raising their consciousness so that
they can resist containment strategies inscribed in everyday practices, performance ethnography wishes to empower them and animate them toward collaborative action.

**Scene 3: Caught Between Gaonwalas, Badaloks & “Company”**

*Tek Ram Kandela:* We have planned to fix a deadline of February 15 for the Centre to issue notification for giving quota to jats in central government jobs and admission in educational institutions. We have also planned to block all roads leading to the national capital if jats were not given reservation by February 15. (Tek Ram Kandela, Convener of Rastriya Sarv Jat Khap Panchayat in Haryana. In The Times of India, 2014, February 6).

*Sabitri:* They want to dominate us. To them, we are outsiders who have come into their area and they have to prevent us from getting an upper hand. We should not prosper, that is why the villagers always want to oppress us.

*Sita:* If we would get together and make a colony among us we could have a better life, but the villagers would never allow it to happen.

*Sabitri:* For instance, take our landlord, here we are these Bengali families - we work so hard and make our living by cleaning, sweeping and working as domestics in people’s homes. Should he charge us so much? Should he not be lenient towards us? He not only charges a high rent but keeps threatening us with eviction if we step slightly out of line.

*Sita:* All the land belongs to the gaonwala – they have no deeds to the land. This is all government land. They encroach upon it, build rough structures and rent out. It’s all illegally occupied land.

*Mahadev:* We have nothing. There is no lease, no receipt of rent or any system to show our rental. They do not want to show their income.

*Sita:* If they give papers, we can show it as legitimate documents for residence address proof, but they don’t.

*Mahadev:* Where we live, our landlord has 60 rooms and he charges Rs.2500 as rent for each room and Rs.50 for garbage disposal. In this way he earns 2 lakhs per month... There are no cleaning services. We have to clean the premises ourselves.

*Sabitri:* Grocery stores are run by the landlords and they supply ration to us. This is really hard on us because if we buy Rs.100 they enter Rs.150 in our account. Most of us can’t even read so we never know what is being written down. They tamper with our accounts and charge us much more than what we owe them.

*Sita:* It happened to us! We have repeatedly had to pay so much more that we owed.

*Mahadev:* New tenants come in and are told that there is a ration store right here in the building. So initially they provide ration on credit for the first month and it is a big help to newcomers. But later they are charged far more than their dues. Not only are we charged more but you cannot buy from anywhere else and if you do, or are late in payment – you face abuse and eviction threats.

*Chorus:* They are the ones who own everything.

*Phillipa:* They prefer strong-arm tactics over words. They don’t care to communicate civilly with us.

*Vanity:* Most of the rentals are owned by them and they are our landlords. We don’t own anything.
Vanity, Phillipa & Ginger: They are very rough and violent people who don’t much care for courteous communication.

Vanity – Here the employers are harsh. Even if we have worked in a household for 10 years and we into some difficulty and cannot for a while, even then they will stop paying us. Its not that they will do anything to help. Even when we go back home once in 2 years – even then they will deduct our salaries for the absence. We get no leave.

Sita: They don’t even give us a cup of tea. That Madam I work for on the 14th floor – never gives me a cup of tea. I told you about how I had brought my niece to work here. She is only 12 years old and has been working as a live-in handmaid on the 14th floor. They did not give her to eat – for the 4 days that she was working there. They are doctors but they cannot spare some food for her. Once I complain about her not getting enough food and if I try to get her to leave employment, they will not give her wages.

Vanity – If we ask for a little help in filling up forms for our children’s school admission or some paperwork, they turn us away. Its not that we are asking for money, just a little help to improve our children’s lot, but we are often turned down. Very few people help. Maybe seniors in the area are a little kinder.

Phillipa & Vanity: The times have gotten harsher now. There was less money earlier, Rs. 600-700 but more kindness. Now people have lots and lots of money but they show no kindness or generosity at all.

Phillipa: We get nothing from them.

Vanity: We get out at 6 a.m. for work, but nowhere do we get any offer of food, not even a drink of water in the heat of summer. No body cares if we have eaten at home, whether we are hungry, instead they give us extra work.

Phillipa: Yes, they will give us much more than agreed but never think that they are working so hard, let’s give them a cup of tea.

Vanity – We have cleaning jobs so we are supposed to do only sweeping, mopping and dishwashing. But they will ask us to chop vegetables, make bread dough, peel the garlic, do some dusting, etc. etc. They load us with much more work than what we are supposed to do. If we ever protest, they are branded as garrulous, and it spoils our reputation.

Sita: They frame us for theft. There are many things we face. Debu’s wife worked in that apartment in Tower 4 but wanted to quit the job. She completed one month and wanted her wages. The lady refused, saying you just stole my gold chain, you are not getting any salary.

Mahadev and Sabitri: There have been a lot of changes, but not for the poor. Nobody cares for the poor, its all for the rich. Those who have money have everything, those who don’t, nothing.
December Resistance.

This following performance text looks at a gendered sphere of mobilized domestic labor in a workspace qualified by globalized imagination. By deploying the means of a performance-based ethnography, I aimed to engage the people of the NCR community in a discourse about their prospects within the national theme of progress and advancement. What emerged along with the wider cycles of injustice that engulfs them in their everyday lives, were everyday acts of resistance and their agency in creating an organic worker’s resistance movement through a certain creative insubordination within the ground of their workplace. These men and women are citizens of the democratic republic of India and yet, for most of them, the meaning of citizenship or democracy is obscure and the concept of equal fundamental rights unattainable in real terms. For them, a sense of “desh,” literally meaning home country in the vernacular, was not the larger nation but was inscribed in their memory as scenes from their villages. Many of their folk practices and customs were therefore geared to keep their rural, religion and cultural traditions alive. Most of their working days are spent in amassing money for the day when they would return to the village with dignity and independence. It was only when this goal of securing their nest egg for the future through higher income in the present was jeopardized with employers refusing to abide by the standard wage structure and arbitrarily reducing their salaries, did the workers organize their own public demonstration and initiated a hartaal or strike. Their roots in West Bengal, where the culture of political society, as discussed by Chatterjee (2004, 39-41), was a vibrant reality, was perhaps instrumental in their deploying some form of “subaltern politics” (40). In politically mobilizing their demands for a stabilized wage structure, they undertook collective public action much in the pattern of Civil Disobedience which has a long history in postcolonial India.
Act II Scene 1: Where is the shame in asking for wages?

KMG: In December 2012 there was a workers’ strike here in this Gurgaon neighborhood... did it just flare up suddenly or did you guys organize it? Can you say something about it?

Mira: We talked about it for a month. In the first week of December, we all got together to protest. Before that, they had posted a Rate Chart for the Employee wages at the entrance gate of each apartment tower with new low rates: protiti kaajer lok77, every domestic worker was covered. This was all they would be paid. Whosoever wanted to work would have to work at this rate. So, for instance, the rate for car washing was Rs.500. You were getting Rs.500 for washing their car for a WHOLE MONTH.... They were NOT GIVING YOU Rs.500 FOR ONE CAR WASH, right? So the rate was like this: Monthly rate for cleaning, sweeping, mopping and washing dishes was Rs. 2000, for cleaning the toilets or washing clothes or dusting would be Rs 600 per chore. This was the money we would get if we worked the whole month – 30 days. This was our rate and they just reduced it just like that! They said we would have to do the cleaning job for Rs.1200 instead of Rs. 2000. If we worked as cooks, then the monthly rate for cooking two meals per day for a family would be Rs.2500 instead of Rs.4000. (Mira is a private part-time cook who works for 7 families. She is a migrant from Sunderbans, W. Bengal).

KMG: How were the rates decided?

Mira: Say we used to earn only Rs.1500 for this cooking job but we talked among ourselves and decided that things were so expensive now and we are such poor people with few resources, that we needed to ask for more. We decided that if ALL of us COOPERATED to go by that new rate, they would have to agree to pay us at least monthly Rs.3,500 or Rs. 4,000 for 2 meals. So the rate came to be Rs.4000. Now when they put up the notice pulling down the wage, we said, everything has become even more expensive – the rent has increased from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,000 for us. On top of that, water, bathroom use and electricity had to be bought extra for Rs.500. How would we buy food? We cannot get the subsidized government rate for LPG cooking gas but we buy it at Rs.170 per kg in the black market. When everything is getting so expensive why would we poor people work for so less? We do need to save something for our future too, don’t we? We are working so hard, if we don’t save even a small amount of Rs.2,000 -3,000 in the month, how will we survive when bad times hit?... So we decided, let us work for one month, and at the end, if they pay us what has already been agreed at the higher rate, then there would be no need to agitate. If we see they were paying us less, then we would go forward with a HARTAAL78.

Sita and Sabitri: There were many people at the December event. Many workers. ... We would not let anyone pass through the entrances of the gated residence complexes to work. We didn’t want anyone to work at the lower rate. If they wanted us to work, they would have to pay us the rate structure which had been posted per earlier agreement.

KMG: Who put up the Rate Chart notice at the entrance? Was it by the office?

77 Kaajer lok – domestic workers
78 Work strike
Mira: Yes. The Madams and Sahebs\textsuperscript{79} got together, discussed the rate and initiated the notice. They had a meeting – the Madams and the Sahebs and said, there are so many workers, we can pick any one. If we pull down the wages they will be forced to work for less. \textbf{They are the poor, if they don’t work how will they eat? SO they will be forced to work for less.} All of us domestics, decided to get together and spread the news of a demonstration by word of mouth. We just told EVERYONE WE KNEW, and told them to tell others. We communicated through our own network and decided to organize hartaal on a specific day of the month. We waited for the salary week to be over – usually it takes time for most people to get paid, some collect their wages on the 10\textsuperscript{th} day of the month. So we decided on the strike after the 10\textsuperscript{th}. Our idea was, if they paid the right wages, then there would be no need to do the hartaal. The salary period brought various outcomes – some employers who were good, paid the actual wages and many others paid less. \textbf{We decided we would not go into any confrontation but organize ourselves for a hartaal, a work strike in a peaceful public demonstration.}

Sabitri: Actually they had a meeting, just like how we are sitting here. Several people got together and discussed the wages we were getting: that some of us were earning Rs. 10,000 per month how it was not acceptable to them. They got the information of our incomes from their maids, and thought: “How can they make so much just by working as domestics? We are paying them too much! We are getting exploited!” They just turned around and decided to pull the wages down. That is when the domestic workers decided to go on strike on the demand that they be given the standardized wages.

Mira: On the day, some of our leaders came and occupied space at the different gates in these two apartment complexes very early morning so even the earliest workers could not go to work. Many men and women were there. … We sat and blocked the gates so none could join work even if they were intimidated by their employers. As the Madams called on the cellphones we would tell them about the demonstration and how we were on a strike and standing in solidarity with those who had not been paid fully....

Sita: They were trying to pay us only Rs.1200 and not what the rate had been decided. They were not heeding by the rules but just trying to force us to accept the lower wages. The rates were posted at all the entrance notice boards. Different rates for different work – Rs. 2000, Rs. 3000, Rs. 5000. But they wouldn’t pay us, actually they would destroy the papers if we showed them the rate charts.

Sabitri: If you can find work for a certain amount, say Rs.2000, why would you work for half of that? But if you objected, they would threaten us – that they would bar us from entering the gates of the complex.

Sita: \textit{I can just name the people who do not want to follow the proper wage structure.... If you work for 20 days and wanted to leave their employment, they would never pay us our due. Just like my niece – they are starving her, but when I asked them to release her, the gentleman of the house, a doctor, said unless she worked for one whole year as agreed, he wouldn’t give us her wages. They will never give her her wages. They will not....}

\textsuperscript{79} “Saheb” was a term given to the British masters by native employees during colonial times. The term has stuck and is usually used by employees to refer to their boss.
Mira: So the first day passed – no one went to work. The day after, we went again. That was when one Bengali Madam and two Bengali Sahebs came to us: “Don’t you guys feel ashamed? You have come from Kolkata for work here in Delhi. What is the salary in Kolkata? Don’t we know? Compared to Kolkata, wages are so much more here, what else do you want? Don’t you feel ashamed, asking for more?

Mira: We said: We work and we get wages, where is the shame in asking for our wages? We didn’t ask for free money! If we have to feel ashamed that we have left Kolkata and come here to make money, then what about you? You could have gotten jobs in Kolkata, couldn’t you? You have come here to Delhi to work for a little more money, haven’t you? You could have made Rs.25,000 in Kolkata but came here so you could make Rs.20,000 more, right? Why can’t we do the SAME? We have to think of shame but you don’t. Why? Because you are badalok, rich people, who have money, and we are poor, so we should have these inhibitions? How can you say there is shame in asking for what is our right?...

Mira: Suddenly one of the Sahebs hit one guy in our group…. We quickly removed him from the scene and decided we women would talk. They wouldn’t hit the women, right? If they touched the women, there would be no end to it. There were a huge group of domestics from the area gathered there in our group.

KMG: How many people were there?

KMG: How many of you were women?
Mira: There were mostly women – about 500. EVERYONE was there. ... When we heard that cops were coming we told the men who were there to leave the demonstration, go sit at a distance and decided only the women would handle the situation. We felt that it wouldn’t be proper if all of us tried to talk to the cops, so a few of us decided to become “heads” – those who were good in communication. We would be calm, composed, and logically explain to the police what was happening. There should be no commotion, whatever we, the leaders said, the rest would agree. Having the men face the police could create problems, they would be beaten up even before talks could proceed. The cops wouldn’t be violent on us, the women... Even if they arrested us, we decided we would all go to jail together. They would be forced to release us – how could they keep 500-600 people in the jail? There were 4-5 of us who led. ...

KMG: Are they all Bengalis?
Mira: All of us are Bengalis, from Sunderbans.

Mira: They called the police. The cops came and asked us why so many people had gathered. So we explained it to them. They said that is fine. Things are getting expensive. You guys are poor working people. How will you manage? Carry on the hartal and till the time some resolution is reached, you don’t have to go to work inside. You can go home and just

---

80 Kolkata is the capital of West Bengal, the state from where the workers are from. In everyday parlance Kolkata is often the synecdoche for the entire state of West Bengal. The Bengali employers might also be referring to the fact that Kolkata was the metropolis which drew rural people from all over the state in search of employment and higher income. Though a metropolis, wages as well as living expenses were lower in Kolkata than in Delhi or Gurgaon.
carry on with your own things and take rest. They will themselves call you back to work. Let them figure out a solution and decide on the rate.

Sabitri: Of course, there were some who were being paid proper wages and worked in liberal households. They wanted to continue work, and this created problems within the workers. Like me, for instance, my Madam pays me Rs.9000 for a fairly easy job as a nanny. So how could I stop work, tell me?

Mira: But we wouldn’t stay back at home. After 3-4 days, it was coming to the point when there were those among us who were worried about their jobs (everyone is not the same) and we would see to it that they did not resume work till the issue was resolved.

Mira: On the fifth day, several Madams and Sahebs approached us. They said, “Go ahead and join your work at the respective households. After this, none of you need to work for lower wages. Just maintain the rates which have been established this far.” So we said, “Sure we will resume work, but please withdraw the notices which have been posted showing lower wages.” What would be the problem with the notices, they asked, now that the issue is resolved? Well, we explained, what about the new residents who moved into these apartment complexes? They would look at those notices and refuse to pay us the higher wages. Best would be to remove the notices so these wages could be stabilized for the next one year at least. So, they withdrew the notices. And we resumed work everywhere.

D. Soyini Madison: Sitting down is a striking performative. There is a poignant history across the world of sitting down as a means of civil disobedience. From the non-violence independence movement of Mahatma Gandhi to the sit-ins of the Civil Rights and American Indian Movements in the United States, the act of sitting down as a form of public protest is both intuitive and formidable. … because the combination of sitting where you don’t belong and the factor of duration – staying put, to rest, to perch, to be still – becomes an act of activism that is all at once a peaceful, public, and a counter-hegemonic occupation of space.

In the volatile atmosphere of Sohna Road’s gated complexes, the domestic workers constructed an oral history narrative of how they mobilized and successfully carried on public demonstrations in the area to secure higher wages. In this, they coopted the vocabulary of the globalization discourse which proliferates in real life and media messages to claim their place within the global city of Gurgaon. Though they maintain that the new India is no country for poor people, they also recount how they and fellow villagers left for distant places like Gurgaon, Bangalore, Bhutan, Mumbai, Chennai because there were abundant opportunities now to make money in these urban places, especially taking pride in tracing their own economic progress through salary raises.
Mira: We have even worked for Rs. 1000 in the cleaning jobs, when we first came 7-8 years back. Then of course our wages have increased – first Rs.1200, then to Rs.1500 and now to Rs.2000 per job per month. Now we are satisfied and can pull through for the next 2 years. After that, when the expenses go up again, we will ask for raises again. Otherwise how will we manage?

Sabitri: We had first moved from Kolkata to Delhi. We had neighbors who had got new employment in Gurgaon. When they told us that there were many job opportunities for my husband in companies in Gurgaon, we moved here. In New Delhi, at that time, there were very few opportunities for people like us. We had hardly any good choices – maybe pulling a rickshaw or escorting children from school or rag-picking. There are no call centers in Delhi. Here in Gurgaon, there are plenty of jobs. My husband is a pantry boy in the DLF office. ... When I first started working as a nanny with this family 8 years back, the baby was was a newborn. They paid me Rs.1,500. Then they raised my salary to Rs.2,000, then to Rs.2,500. ... But then we were having difficulty making the ends meet. We paid such high interests to borrow money from loan sharks. So then I started taking additional jobs as a cook. But it was problematic because my ward was attached to me. So I negotiated with my employer for more money so I did not have to work extra. Now I get paid Rs.9,000 as a nanny.

Sita: I brought back 5 people with me. ... If they work in five homes, they will earn Rs.10,000. What will they do back in the village?... Even if they did go to Kolkata, if they work in 5 homes they would get only Rs.2000, but if they worked here in Gurgaon, they will get paid Rs.10,000. So more people come here from Sunderbans.

According Sen, (1992, p.139), the role of outside earning seems to have a strong effect in creating a difference in the status of women within and outside the family. When seen within this socio-economic analyses, women’s participation in “‘productive’ activities” and in earning from outside become important signifiers of their status as contributors to the affluence of the family, thus reversing their position within the socio-economic system where women have been traditionally considered to be liabilities. Such reversals are especially conducive to consolidating the woman’s position as an “agent” (Sen, 1999) rather than as a “victim” or “patient.” Scholars have emphasized the significance of political or economic agency of women in alleviating their conditions. Recent research has shown that gaining control over their own productive actions and outcomes leads to greater empowerment even among the poorest of poor women in the western state of Maharashtra in India (Datta, 2003). Political agency has the value of lending voices to the women where they can encounter and resist pervasive biases in society which perpetuate
cycles of neglect of their claims and needs. In addition, economic agency enhances the visibility of their contribution to “social living” and elevates their position within and outside the household (Sen, 1992).

The devastating hardships of the poor and dispossessed combine with hegemonic formations at the intersections of religion, tradition and colonial conventions to create a dangerously slippery research space where any conclusion about trends or themes are immediately challenged by newer conditions that resist any generalized presentation. The local Gurgaon environment, in addition, is witness to new sets of power relations and practices of exploitation created everyday in newer interactions between land, labor, capital and entrepreneurship or skill. Each of the groups I participated in dealt with the ambivalence in their own way. Whereas the Saket group which had been in the area for over a decade, showed a certain resignation despite their specific sense of entitlement, the new Bengali migrants to Gurgaon created their own narratives of empowerment by focusing on how they were in the area for financial reasons only and could always return to the villages once they had made close enough to their goal of amassing finances for securing status in their village. In this instance, greater economic agency also contributed to greater political agency among the women who were then able to take leadership roles in negotiations during the workers’ strike.

Folk culture and Indigenous worship in a global space.

Act III: Performing Manasa Mangal: A Goddess of the Subaltern
[This Act is performed by a group of five women who take turns in reciting the Manasa Mangal text. In the background there is a slide show of this festival being celebrated by migrant workers in the Sohna Road workers’ colony in Gurgaon.]

This scene is based on my participation in a live event – the Manasa Mangal festival in Sohna Road on August 17, 2014 – and no verbal text could be recorded due to the background noise and nature of the activity. I draw from visual and other experiential material to present an
embodied impression of the unique performance of a rural religious tradition from interior Bengal being observed in the global city of Gurgaon. Manasa Mangal follows the story of one-eyed non-Aryan goddess, Manasa, soliciting worship from the staunchly Shaivite Vedic-oriented upper classes. “Manasa is the goddess of the Dalits and the subalterns. Her legend represents the rebellion of the weaker classes against the power-holders,” (Mukhopadhyay, cited in Ghose, 2013). Originating in the 15th century, this is a goddess-based folk tradition usually practiced among rural women from Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand and other eastern Indian states. Her worship is seen to arise from their daily struggles against natural adversities and the need to safeguard themselves and their families from the many troubles that plague rural life – poverty, disease, snake-bites, wild animals, domestic problems, and weather calamities. The verses the women usually chant extoll Manasa’s powers and also refer to how Manasa Mangal observance brings bliss, wealth and good luck to all listeners and neglect brings misfortune. Manasa is a particularly demanding goddess and her festivals and rituals are followed by rural women during the monsoon month of Shravana (July-August), through the chanting of mythological narrative rhymes or panchalis81 (quoted below) and vrata katha82 which celebrate her glory.

Speaker 1: Puja83 na koriya jeba kore upahas
Padmar kopete hoi swabangsha naash
Bhakati koriya jeba korye pujan
Manobhishtha siddha tat hoy tattkhan

(Whoever does not worship her or treats her with disrespect will be destroyed along with

81 These are Bengali poetry of rhyming couplets or quartets narrating the legend of the goddess. They are usually read by Hindu women in observance of rituals dedicated to various female deities within the domestic sphere for family well-being, marital bliss and good health.
82 Vratas are ritualistic observances, seen as solution to various problems in human lives, usually dedicated to female deities. The Vrata Katha or recitation texts compiled out of religious or mythological texts or folklores are typically addressed to resolution of immediate problems of mainly rural populations.
83 Worship
his family by the anger of Padma/Manasa. Whoever worships her with faith, his/her aspirations will be instantly fulfilled).

Speaker 2: Angaheen devatar puja aache mana
(Our religion forbids the worship of non-iconic gods).

Speaker 3: Padmar bibade she harailo shakal
Putraheen loker nakhir paralok
(He lost all through his conflict with Padma, for a man without a son has no chance of salvation after death).

Speaker 4: Sansarer Naath hoiya pade pade ghati
(Siva, Being the lord of the Universe you stumble to temptation at every step).

Speaker 5: Padmar kope more muni kaal bisher jhale
Kothai jap, kothai tap, kothai borai
(The sage was felled by Padma's anger and her deadly venom. Where then was his japa-tapa, his hermit's powers of prayer and meditation, his Brahmanical arrogance?)

Speaker 2: Shashur shashuri aar baap bhai rakhe
Swatantar hoile taar nana dosh theke
Sati pativrata houk dharma te tatpar
(A woman should be in safekeeping and maintain the wellbeing of her in-laws, her father and brothers. Independence brings about the fear of lost chastity and other vices. A woman should be chaste, religious and subordinate to her husband.)

The text above, excerpts from the Manasa Panchali that rural Bengali women recite during observance of Manasa puja occasion, shows the code of conduct that many rural Bengali women are expected to live by. The story of Manasa Mangal is about how the “non-Aryan snake goddess” had needed the patronage of a rich merchant like Chand Sadagar to make her presence felt in Bengal. But Chand, a devotee of Shiva84 refused to worship her even after the death of his seven sons. Finally Behula, the newly-wed wife of his youngest son Lakhindar (who dies of snakebite on his wedding day), travels to the gods with her dead husband’s body in a raft, wins Manasa’s forgiveness and manages to bring Chand’s seven dead sons back to life. In return, Chand becomes a devotee of Manasa, although he always prays to her with his left hand, the

84 Also known as Maheswar, he is one among the principal triumvirate of male Hindu gods, Brahma-Vishnu-Maheswar, mentioned in the Vedas.
right being reserved for Lord Shiva. Though most of the large repertoire of Manasa worship in rituals, chanting and narration are meant for the domestic sphere, where women come together in groups and dedicate themselves through regular fasts and other observances, it has, over the centuries, taken the form of a public cultural festival in rural communities with music, performances, big feasts and artistic clay modeling of scenes from the Manasa Mangal.

I was invited by Mira and her husband to attend the Manasa Puja celebrations in the workers’ community. An open space at the entrance of the colony had been designated for the mandap and the surrounding area decorated with colorful ribbons, festoons and banners (Figures 5.13, 5.14, 5.15). Film music from Bengali and Hindi cinema blared through the loudspeakers and a big crowd of people, many of them Bengali women attired traditionally – heads demurely covered with the aanchal of their cotton saris, adorned with red sindoor, sankhas, bangles – all milled around the mandap. Though the majority of the attendees were Bengali migrants, there was a sizeable attendance from their Haryanvi neighbors as well. Separate tents and awnings had been pitched for dining facilities and festive lights strung around the entrances. This little neighborhood square was not asphalt, in fact, there was hardly any paved road leading to the colony and the ground was mucky from a heavy shower earlier that evening. But nobody seemed to notice. It could have been a scene from any community in rural Bengal except for the people who sat around at a reception desk, who collected the donation for the festival: they were all local Haryanvi landlords or neighborhood business owners.

85 A tent which housed the deity sitting on a dais surrounded by the paraphernalia of ritualistic gear and offerings.
86 Sari is a traditional Indian dress of a 6-yard long scarf. Aanchals are the ends of these scarves which Bengali women drape like around their shoulders and when in formal company, also cover their heads in purdah style.
87 Red vermillion dust that married Indian women wear on their foreheads.
88 Conch shell bangles worn by women as markers of wedded status.
Inside the *mandap*, the altar was beautifully decorated in red and gold silk with the ground covered in plush rugs. Flowers, incense, ribbons and lights were strung around the deity. The clay idol, showing Manasa surrounded by her serpents and other followers, had arrived from Bengal, as had the priests who performed this very indigenous ritual. Right outside, the participants of the Manasa Puja had built a small model of the central protagonist, Behula (Figure 5.16), in close imitation of clay figures of gods and goddesses which are ubiquitously seen in Bengal during religious ceremonies. Except, this was not the figure of a goddess but their representation of the ideal woman who brought back her husband from the land of the dead. She was seen holding her dead husband in her lap, sailing in a small boat to meet Manasa.

While issues of misfortune, death and disease were woven into this indigenous story of Manasa, the central message was nevertheless one of renewal and courage in the face of adversity. It was obvious that the migrant women drew a lot of energy and strength from this. Obviously these Sunderbans women still retained this as their major religious event and celebrated it to their best ability. Mira had prepared a huge spread which she wanted me to share with her family on this occasion. In their tiny 8’x10’ room, they had arranged a Bengali meal with many desserts, drinks and snacks. As they welcomed me to their little home, adorned with a Sony television and their children’s photographs, the family’s best cutlery was brought out, bottles of Coca Cola and drinking water offered, fruits heaped on plates (Figure 5.17), I began to get an insight into the significance of this puja in their lives. They were holding on to these customs and traditions, and the tangible material presence of the idol requisitioned from their distant village, brought their home close to them, to some degree helped to keep their hold on the *desh* that they pined for and hoped to return to one day.
The strong oral tradition of Manasa Mangal also keep alive rural Bengal’s ritualistic culture among lower middle-class Bengalis living in various other parts of India. While the main puja was being performed here by the male priest, female participation in chanting the various Manasa texts during domestic rituals was still the predominant practice. The oral verses, crystallized into the compilation of the Manasa Mangal Kavya by Bengali poets, have often been critically analyzed as the predominant goddess among lower classes. Scholars have pointed to the origins of her worship among the lower-caste Hindu groups and indigenous people (McDaniel, 2004; Chakravarty, 2012; Mukhopadhyay, 2013 cited in Ghose) leading to speculations about her as the “goddess of the subaltern” whose worship itself was an act of resistance against the dominant elite.

Manasa is widely worshipped, in both Adivasi (tribal) and Hindu low-caste groups; she is accepted as a goddess among the Oraons of Chotanagput, the Kurmi of Hazaribagh district, the Santals of the Santal Parganas, and the Ho of Singhbhum. She is also worshipped by low-caste Hindu groups such as Bauris, Bagdis, and Doms. (McDaniel, 2004, 148).

Her worship is seen as reflecting a caste conflict in the Manasa Mangal Kavya as it narrates how the orthodox Brahman and Shiva devotee Chand Sadagar was forced to worship her to revive his son’s life. Scholars have read the story of Manasa Mangal Kavya as a parable on the lower caste resistance to Brahmanical dominance especially with Brahmanism depriving the lower castes of the right to access Vedic texts, participate in Vedic worship or perform Hindu rituals. The poems on the life and adventures comprising the Manasa Mangal Kavyas, have also been viewed as setting up of Sakti89 against Shiva worship but it is distinguished by its complete absence from the Vedic texts and thus the possibility of its affiliation within the Sakta tradition is doubtful.

89 Divine feminine
Apart from reading the Manasa Mangal as a complex political text, it may also be pointed out that the Bengali women’s focus on Behula, the epitome of the loving and loyal wife, is to draw attention to the role of the woman in Bengali familial culture. Whereas Manasa’s story is capable of being interpreted on various counts as a narrative of alterity, Behula’s story may also be read differently within an alternate framework of the agency of a powerful woman who refuses to accept her destiny: to take Manasa’s machinations in killing her husband docilely, or to succumb to the dictates of the patriarchal society and accepting death as a sati⁹⁰ on her husband’s funeral pyre. Behula, already a learned woman with feminine wisdom and formidable knowledge of herbal medications, shows great courage, presence of mind and agency when she resists sati, steps out of the domestic sphere and embarks on a long journey to the Land of Death resolved to revive her husband. That the figure of Behula finds a special place in the altar of these Bengali women may perhaps be read within a feminist perspective of women who have found encouragement and agency in becoming financially independent in their urban lives. Whereas a detailed feminist analysis might be outside the scope of this study, it will not be amiss to see them as drawing inspiration from traditional archetypes of the ideal womanhood, but also crafting their existences by drawing from tales of empowerment and agency like Behula’s.

Discussion: The Voice of the Subaltern

According to Madison (2010, 10), advocacy and ethics require that we clearly define and clarify the “I” within my personal responsibility to fieldwork so as to address what is a fundamental question for me – “what do I do now” and “what should I do with what I have witnessed.” The answer for me is that in creating these emancipatory texts lie the possibilities of giving “voice to the subaltern” (Denzin, 2003, 18). In joining local stories to my story and the

⁹⁰ An ancient Hindu practice where the newly-widowed woman embraces death by accompanying her husband on the funeral pyre, thus being cremated with his dead body.
story of today about postcolonial urbanization and transnational capitalist transformation of the
Indian state, I have aspired to create a radical space of qualified by mobility, agency, civil action
and activism. The motive is to “generate spectacles of resistance that challenge the local power
structures” (Denzin, 2003, 22) and the method is to deploy performance as a subversive tactic.
According to Madison (2010) this would mean “creating a means and a space from whatever
elements of resources are available in order to resist or subvert the strategies of more powerful
institutions, ideologies, or processes” (p2).

In taking help from “speaking subjects” the performance ethnographer enlivens the
commentary and weaves a moving story in their words. The performance creates an opportunity
to bring forth “as intimately and directly as possible” (24) the actual words of the people and
their vivid worlds. I am enabled, through a deployment of a politics of possibilities, to guide my
audience to look beneath the surface appearances, probe for underlying power relations and
mechanisms of control, understand the obscure machinations of power and above all find the
subjects’ own voices to make commentaries:

the critical ethnographer… disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and
taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of
power and control….She will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to
make accessible – to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of –
the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of
reach. (Madison, 2005, p5).

My role as an advocate-scholar is defined by the call for morally informed, performance-based
work, a collaborative project taking shape in the dialogic interaction between the researcher and
the researched. My auto-ethnographic work has evolved out of my experience as a researcher
and resident of the Gurgaon Sohna Road community and their experiences add value to a
political drama of resistance and social critique of new India within the bigger drama of
globalization in India’s showcased spaces.
What is at stake here for a critical analysis is the extent of engagement with the domestic workers’ subalternity. What is at stake is also the ambition, theirs and mine own, to make their voices heard. On one side, the domestic and household labor sector and their condition as migrant workers within a global special economic zone is conspicuously absent from all policy discourses, most of their complaints muted in the eulogizing accounts of contemporary neoliberal performances. Even recent programs on Food Security and universal identification systems like AADHAAR\(^{91}\) largely target registered voter banks, therefore, more situated communities than migrant ones. On the other side, my fieldwork showed them as mobilizing and taking strong positions as agents with their own short-term goals of ascertaining proper wage structures and working conditions. The argument that this is a subaltern population, then, is predicated on the track record of the domestic and informal sector being absent from all policy discourses and legislative efforts in India. Their voices, even when raised in wage bargaining or work reforms have been silenced, and domestic work neither recognized as economically productive activity nor ever included in legislative agendas. I try to follow Spivak’s logic that conditions of subalternity is perpetuated not merely by the subaltern’s “muting by heterogeneous circumstances” (1999, 308) but is also equally contingent upon the failure to be heard and deciphered. If one can be encouraged by Spivak’s argument on sublaternity, especially where she insists that even registering for vote could be seen as mobilizing of subalternity (1999, 309), these domestic workers’ narratives, while capturing the profound ambivalence of their situations, also indicate towards utopian possibilities. “When a line of communication is established between a member of subalteran groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. … this is absolutely to be desired”

\(^{91}\) A unique identity card with a 12-digit number issued to all Indian residents by Unique Identification Authority of India, Planning Commission, Government of India.
The subaltern can speak if someone is able to read her text even if it is outside the normative standards of textual composition: “Bhabaneswari attempted to ‘speak’ by turning her body into a text of woman/writing. … I am able to read Bhabaneswari’s case, and therefore, she has spoken in some way. (Spivak, 1999, 309). In trying to enliven their stories, told in their own voices, by framing these stories within the matrix of materiality, memory, subjectivity, performance, imagination and experience (Madison, 169) and by layering them with the flow of media activity which surrounds our times but is often outside their reach since they are cocooned in the silence of their illiteracy, I tried to reach at an embodied reportage of the time and space in which the fieldwork was conducted.

Conclusion

There is always tension between the ethnographer’s intention for doing this work and her ability to recognize and understand the Other’s world fully (Denzin, 2003, 54). It is something which is exacerbated by the double-bind where the critical ethnographer is asked to locate herself within the research site, “ethics and advocacy demand that the self is located” (Madison, 2010, 12), but artistic and intellectual standpoints demand that an aesthetic distance be maintained between the author/performer and the work being performed. In this, my endeavor and intention is forever to be mindful of respecting the differences that exist between me and the Other, differences that define the other’s world. Also, I am fully cognizant of the need to create a study that is deeply inscribed in the local while presenting the story of today within a global perspective. Critical performance ethnography asks the researcher to be engaged in advocacy and not be an “objective” scholar or a “participant observer.” To be an “observer” of all the injustice and human rights violations and not be engaged as an advocate would have been a hard task for me. The call to be an actor and a “co-performative witness” of the moment (Madison,
makes my engagement in this paradigm of research doubly meaningful. This creates the opportunity to capture the active, risky and intimate quality of the experience in the field first-hand and gains from a coevalness and co-temporality (Madison, 2010) – actively sharing the same time with the Others. While I am responsible for engaging in all the issues in an ethically reflexive way, I am also responsible for enabling others so that they gain ability to respond too.

I bear witness and in bearing witness I do not have the singular response-ability for what I witness but the responsibility of invoking a response-ability in others to what was seen, heard, learned, felt, and done in the field and through performance. (Madison, 2010, 10-11)

Because performance ethnography devotes careful attention to the politics of representing, it also underscores the importance of the politics of positionality – which is central to representing the fieldwork encounter in an ethically and morally responsive way: “Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects” (Madison, 2005, 7). The dialogic text that performance ethnography creates brings forth imaginative and constitutive possibilities because it is reflexive about one’s position, and is created in a dialogue between the past, the present, the audience, the performer and the author (Denzin, 2003). Performance as a strategy of inquiry enjoins the researcher to place “the site of inquiry within larger sets of ongoing historical, political, intellectual, and aesthetic conversations” (Hamera, 2011, 319) so that meaning is co-created in a larger context. Whereas the ethnographer is not a native of the fieldwork site, her position in initiating and participating in the performance gives her a “threshold status,” a liminality, which helps one understand that “Identity is not immutable but fluid, social, and contextual” (Hamera, 2011, 321). This is both empowering and liberating.

There have been a lot of changes, but not for the poor. Nobody cares for the poor, its all for the rich. Those who have money have everything, those who don’t, nothing.  
(Mahadev and Sabitri, Canteen Boy and Nanny in Gurgaon)
The times have gotten harsher now. There was less money earlier, but more kindness. Now people have lots and lots of money but they show no kindness or generosity at all. Didi, why don’t you open an office here? (Phillipa, maid in Saket, New Delhi)
References


http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue30/chakravarty.htm


Use Aadhaar to create health record system: Nilekani. (2014, February 17) *The Hindu*.


With no laws to protect them, India’s maids are ‘invisible,’ exploited and abused, ILO says. (2014, February 20). *The Times of India*. 
Chapter 6: Conclusion

In his recent book *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the global condition* (2013), Arjun Appadurai raises various issues emerging in debates about the future of the nation-state, especially in the context of globalization. In this study of the journey of globalization, a work Appadurai places as a sequel to his 1996 book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, he explores various facets of globalization, especially seeking to learn whether it has changed shape, force or form in any significant way over the twenty years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a period he calls the “age of high globalization” (3). In moving through the new world of open borders, free markets and new democracies during the phase of triumphant globalization of the 1990s, Appadurai had, in the earlier book, pointed to “imagination as a social practice” - a critical form emerging in global cultural processes. He reviewed how the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by various media technologies and the ways in which they framed and energized older media, were exponentially changing the role of the imagination in social life: “More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms,” (Appadurai, 1996, 54).

Capacity to Aspire

While Appadurai draws our attention to the need for ethnographic research into the “ways in which humans construct their cultural futures” (Appadurai, 2013, 5), Sassen (2000) has pointed to the need for studying the complex interlacing between the national and the global. The concept of “capacity to aspire” which Appadurai (2013, 1) noted from his work among Mumbai’s housing activists materialized as a signifier in my work as I looked at the dynamic spaces qualified by the internal differentiations between the national and the global, adding to the
nuances which qualify also the local forms and practices within this emblematic segment of a
globalized urban – Gurgaon and NCR as the face of New India. These new spaces, which emerge
in the mutual imbrication, in the overlap and interaction between national and global, has led to a
disputing of the spatiotemporal unity of the nation state. A closer scrutiny of the new
spatiotemporal order of the national as well as the global thus formed, has been of particular
interest for this paper and has yielded new insights for future studies.

Motivated by the element of “aspiration” inherent in the role of expanded imagination in
social life that Appadurai talked about, (1996), as well as cautioned by his exploration of social
uncertainty and ethnicist violence materializing out of the blurred boundaries and new
formations of globalization (Appadurai, 2013), I looked at new grounds which might be opened
up in the predicted trajectory of these “new spatialities.” I hope to conclude my thesis on a note
of anticipation of progress, though not completely devoid of anxiety. My dissertation, which has
explored the concept of New India, not merely in terms of the nation’s identity, its development,
and redefinition, but also in the coloring of the dreams and visions of its people – the elite,
middle class and ordinary folks alike – aspires to relate their stories to the unforeseen
multiplicities of conjunctures and disjunctures which continue to merge in a postcolonial but
globalized space. This last part might make connections which will make the actors of today a
part of the new story emerging in these global spaces, enabling more of them to partake in a
globalized imagination system. Or it might raise new issues on how some might be left behind.

I draw inspiration from Appadurai’s “ethnography of aspiration” (2013, 1), which he
conducted in the “harsh global mega-city” of Mumbai and attempt to look at my own
ethnographic work in New Delhi-Gurgaon NCR as furthering academic inquiry in that direction
while also suggesting possible additional areas of critical research in this concluding section. In
doing so, I try to underscore the emancipatory potentials inherent in human imagination itself as
the various actors etch out their lives across the vast and complex canvas of the global city of
Delhi and Millennium City Gurgaon. While addressing my initial question on what this New
India is, through the chapters, I found myself being drawn to a few themes which could help in
summing up my argument, anticipate future developments, as well as highlight both the
celebratory as well as troubling aspects which emerge to qualify and comment on this New India.
The crucial insights which I looked for to fully understand the country’s transformations started
from a re-reading of the nationalist historiography on the founding of the nation which
reproduced colonial historiography in fundamental ways. By focusing on the elite, a different
elite from the colonial, (Guha, 1997, as cited in Dwyer & Pinney, 2001), but nonetheless the
elite, rather than the masses, nationalist histories turned a blind eye to the histories of the masses.
By consistently eliding their consciousness, their myriad predicaments, the postcolonial elite as
well as the bourgeoisie failed to integrate mass consciousness into their hegemonic, ideological
representations and in turn, failed to speak for them or fully represent their interests.

That the nation was founded by elites with subaltern support, was mostly glossed over in
postcolonial narratives and the division this created never was fully erased. Even though the
newly independent postcolonial elite initiated socialist measures, these were soon overshadowed
by a traditional society’s natural propensity for a multi-tiered non-egalitarian, caste-determined
social system. As mentioned by Subaltern Studies scholarship, the subaltern masses, though
marginalized, also continued to exercise their political rights as citizens of a thriving democracy,
but their politics and its domain was different. However, their political society demonstrations
and mobilizations made sure that the state did not completely foreclose them from the nation’s
destiny. While New India is definitely a story of the ambitious global ventures of the nation’s
tech-savvy entrepreneurs and rising aspirations of a rapidly burgeoning middle class, it is not only that. The New India is new because it records a movement from the stagnant sector of marginalized populations. Maybe these movements are not always directly upward, but still there are movements, which may be juxtaposed against previous downward vicious cycles of economic deprivation.

Since the liberalization of the 1990s, while SEZs and SUZs have pulled in knowledge workers from all directions, they have also given a new hope to the masses. Frequently dispossessed of their lands, displaced from their home communities, millions have migrated to these global spaces that opened up new opportunities for the common people. They have staked their claim on the global, alongside the graduates of the elite IITs and IIMs. Thus, the New India with all its incongruities and inconsistencies, is a logical outcome in the progression of the democratic state’s evolution as it emerged from colonial administration through Nehruvian modernist state into a globalized, neoliberal architecture. This New India and the accompanying future of a globalized India might be not so much about shining towers and malls but far more about the social relations which have been building up at the frontier zones of India’s global spaces. It is about how the subaltern subject finds her voice as Mira talks back to her employer in Gurgaon, something she would never have been able to do in Sunderbans or even in Kolkata:

*We work and we get wages, where is the shame in asking for our wages? We didn’t ask for free money! If we have to feel ashamed that we have left Kolkata and come here to make money, then what about you? You could have gotten jobs in Kolkata, couldn’t you? You have come here to Delhi to work for a little more money, haven’t you? You could have made Rs.25,000 in Kolkata but came here so you could make Rs.20,000 more, right? Why can’t we do the SAME?*

---

92 Indian Institute of Management – A public-private educational enterprise and elite management academy which has campuses across the country.
In discussing the themes, I organize the following part of this chapter into two major sections: the first with the theme that involves the transactional relationship between the “imaginary institution of India,” its “national community” and their negotiations in the time of globalization; the second, the effects and affects of the rapid urbanization and how it further reconstitutes the idea of national culture in India. Woven into these section are the stories of the global citizen as the new face of India’s elite and also the story of the marginalized - highlighting the “different” politics of the subaltern. The last two themes are, in fact, not separate but have historically been framed within a conflictual, though not incommensurate structure - representations of the two diverse publics who act within India’s public domain with their conflicting agendas, irreconcilable differences and irrevocable positions.

In this, the caveat is that the operative structure is still the imagination system within which the human actors perform their destinies and following Appadurai, I suggest that the link between this imagination and social life is not merely global but also deterritorialized. Thus, I am guided by the advice that “ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories” (Appadurai, 1996, 55). Therefore, in analyzing the themes which I hope epitomizes this New India and tentatively proposes a vision for its next iteration, I concern myself more with ways in which the actors craft their social and material existences according to their expanded imagination, especially in the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2013, 1) that I trace among the Bengali women in Gurgaon.

Imagination and the nation

According to Appadurai, the entity of the nation-state is a relatively modern formation, emerging in the course of the seventeenth century as the most general form of the “sacred social
collectivity” (2013, 85) and he cites Foucault’s works as instrumental in tracing the emergence of “the idea of a people” in a modern sense. Foucault’s works during the 1970s were configured around issues of power arising from the study of strategies and techniques through which the sovereign, the state and the various assemblages of governance carried on the function of controlling, ordering and organizing the individual as well as populations within the modern state. As Foucault traced the paths taken by the modern state, and the various techniques of space deployed by it, especially in works like Society Must be Defended (1975-76), Security, Territory, Population (1977-78), he examined the state’s focus on the idea of borders and territories, seen as essential to the emergence of a people within the state. Defined and qualified by their co-presence within its territory, and their countability, their accountability to the apparatus of the territorial state – all contributing to the interests of maintaining the nation-state’s integrity as a cohesive social unit - this sense of a nation’s “people” came to be stabilized as its “national community,” along with several other concepts in due course of time, like national geography, national sovereignty, national economy and various other refinements within a new articulation of the power of the bureaucratic state.

Some idea or other about ethnic singularity or purity is always present when national peoplehood is discussed and defined, thus producing an enduring tension between the idea of citizenship as a formal political fact and peoplehood as a substantive somatic fact, the latter always being rooted in some pre-contractual sense of affinity. Blood and race are invariably involved in this underlying ideology, and preoccupations with national identity and authenticity are invariably tied up with ideas of national purity. (Appadurai, 2013, 86).

This sense of sacredness of the nation or the motherland, frequently referred to as Mother India or “Bharat Mata” and the idea of ethnic purity emerging from affiliation to the nation, girdles the community and brings it into the fold of the nation. It is one of the dominating ideas which circulated in the nationalist discourses in colonial India. The relevance of this to the current
discussion is best understood in examining the initial constitution of an imagined national
community and then its review within the complex conjuncture created at the intersection of the
postcolonial, the national and the global. Though the nation still remains the “regnant principle
of political affiliation,” its stability as a valid code for bringing cultural or ethnic cohesion has
been complicated by the development of new forms of loyalty and mobility produced through

But then again, as Subaltern Studies has argued for decades, the Indian nation itself was a
questionable unity. That nation which Nehru greeted as the “star of freedom in the East” at the
dawn of Independence was, in fact, “a thing without a past… radically modern” (Kaviraj, 1992),
constructed by the elite intellectuals in the anti-colonial struggles. Nehru’s efforts to establish a
political existence and ethnic cohesion of India, and construct a coherent national community
through repeated reference to “we” its people, and mention of “the soul of a nation, long
suppressed,” were props for the founding myth of the Indian nation. The attempt was to draw a
canvas of past grandeur in the picture of an ancient India at the dawn of history embellished by
her triumphs and travails: “At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and
trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures.”
In fact, “this India was new, but it required the delusion of an eternal existence” (Kaviraj, 1992,
14) just as Indian-ness was also a historical and social construct (Chatterjee, 1992, 66-67) – the
outcome of the hegemonic nationalist project eagerly looking for a stable identity for a
subcontinent of many diverse ethnic groups historically divided against each other.

India, the objective reality of today’s history, whose objectivity is tangible enough for
people to try to preserve, to destroy, to uphold, to construct and dismember, the
reality taken for granted in all attempts in favour and against, is not an object of
discovery but of invention. It was historically instituted by the nationalist imagination
of the nineteenth century. (Kaviraj, 1992, 1)
In effect, Nehru was being far more literal than rhetorical with his references to nation-building: “We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.” The Indian “nation” which the postcolonial rulers had inherited was far from an integrated political entity – or a cohesive nation state. The territory was divided into two parts - an assemblage of some 500 princely states controlled by their hereditary rulers, and the rest comprising of areas under the British Empire and some enclaves of French and Portuguese dominion. The political integration of all these into the Indian Union, a hard-won objective of the Indian National Congress, came much after the Independence - and India, in its rudimentary form was established, as a stable entity of 14 states and 6 Union Territories, only after the State Reorganization Act of 1956.

This constituted nation, currently consisting of 29 states and 7 Union territories as well as a mega-metropolis of a National Capital Region, has developed as home to innumerable ethnic, regional and racial groups, further divided into sub-categories of caste, tribe, religion, language, community. Consequently, the Indian nation has witnessed the clamor of the multitudes in the most formidable of separatist movements over the past several decades with battle lines being constantly drawn and redrawn along the unhealed wounds of the past and new fissures of the present. The imagined national community, the collective subject, which was never spelt out in great detail by the nineteenth century nationalist writers, was left hazy, somewhat of an immediate, imminent nature which could be interpellated at will to perform at any juncture, and which, during the last stages of the nationalist struggle was suitably deployed in the nationalist interests of the elite leaders. It has finally played out its role and now its multiple stakeholders returned to their respective political-economic claims, rejecting the pretensions of national integration – “unity in diversity”. The nation which itself took shape in the imagination of the

---

93 Times of India, August 3, 2013, p. 19.
94 A rough count showed about 142 such groups.
anti-colonial nationalist movement continues to be riven by conflicted interests, restructured repeatedly and its territories redistributed according to the demands of various alienated groups – the most recent one being the creation, in February 2014, of two states of Telengana and Seemandhra out of Andhra Pradesh.

Between the elite and the subaltern masses is India’s celebrated middle class – a burgeoning segment which is hard to describe and define considering the fact that it is changing continuously – including more and more categories with every passing day. Dominating the profound paradox of the new urban is this exploding class and in reviewing some of my interactions during my fieldwork in Delhi, my inclination is to tilt towards previous scholars who proposed that the middle classes are too intoxicated in their global lifestyles to be engaged in any way with the local realities “global lifestyles frequently involve the refusal to engage with the lives of those at the local coalface.” (Srivastava, 2013). It is said that India’s middle classes have little political clout since “people power” is with the hundreds of millions of rural peasants who struggle to make a living at less than a few dollars a month and yet they hold sway over the ballot box. However, this does not seem to bother many of my Gurgaon participants who identify themselves as middle-class, and on whose testimonies I base my deductions on India’s middle class – though with no intention to generalize on an infinitely diverse group. They seem to have found their place in Gurgaon and despite the complaints about the traffic congestions or civic amenities, their lives are bounded within the boundaries of their guarded gated complexes to air-conditioned cars to their plush offices inside Gurgaon’s many business complexes. Many of their average incomes rank among the highest in the country. As property values here have jumped, so have their financial aspirations with newer meaning being attached to “risks” that they take in their investments. Investments are no longer related to traditional areas like real estate and stock
markets but on newer and riskier financial instruments – pointing to a deep trend of “risk-taking and risk-bearing” that the MNC executives claimed has become a regular feature of their lives.

While the city might not have a functioning drainage or sewer system, reliable electricity or water supply, efficient public transportation or public parks, there are innumerable shopping malls, seven golf courses, luxury shops selling Armani, Chanel and Louis Vuitton, and showrooms selling Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs. And the city’s upwardly mobile middle class executives should not mind the civic deficiencies because their apartment towers are fitted with massive diesel generators, private water wells, guarded with armies of private security personnel. With the usual count of two to three cars in each family’s garage, neither do they have to worry about their commute to their prestigious offices, often housed in futuristic office hubs in downtown Gurgaon.

While one India celebrates its global successes, the “other” India is driven to extremes of violence, battling over dwindling natural resources. Aihwa Ong (2006) talked about how the neoliberal logic of the late twentieth century, has brought in new dimensions to state power in developing economies and societies in Southeast Asia. Acting out their destinies in the order of globalization, states align themselves with major corporations and global regulatory agencies. In this, neoliberal agendas of a capitalist market system influence governments, reconfiguring economic and political action of several developmental states of southeast Asia. In what Ong calls “postdevelopmentalism,” in order to effect high rates of economic growth and infrastructural changes, these states frequently adopt the tenets of a market-driven logic to introduce political strategies which enhance corporate interests. Without initiating nationwide policies of development, states favor “fragmentation of the national space into various noncontiguous zones, and promote the differential regulation of populations who can be
connected to or disconnected from global circuits of capital” (Ong, 77). India has witnessed the same market-driven logic, its territory broken up into diversities of SEZs, SUZs, free trade zones, export processing zones, urban enterprise zones etc. and the state has moved from its developmental orientation to a neoliberal one by regulating population through differential and un-equitable policies.

Though recent populist legislations like the National Food Security Bill and the Land Acquisition Bill are being held up as “historic,” aimed at reducing inequitable distribution of resources, in the case of the latter, which was created for rehabilitation and resettlement of communities after land acquisition, local media reports point to specific projects in which the state has yielded to market interests at the expense of tribal rights and forest law. One among many such is where the state approved the diversion of dense forest land to promote the Mahan coal block project in Madhya Pradesh, maneuvering out current norms and regulations to promote interests of major corporations and nationalized banks. This Land Acquisition Act, publicized by the UPA government as a landmark, quietly circumvents the issue of exemptions to government acquisition of land in mineral-rich states (Yadav, 2013). Here, most of the acquisitions by the central government and public sector companies are under older laws that bypass the new Act as in cases of the following: Coal Bearing Areas Acquisition and Development Act (1957), Land Acquisition (Mines) Act (1885) Damodar Valley Corporation Act (1948). Even though projects like Koel Karo Dam and the Indian army’s field firing range in Netarhat was confronted by massive public resistance, and created precedence of civil society and political society mobilization under which the state had to withdraw, multiple conflicts over land emanate regularly. These encounters have become regular features of the contemporary national, drawing battle lines not merely among tribal factions but between the state and
indigenous communities in areas like Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and several northeastern states, often further aggravated by political incursions by radical Maoist Naxalite groups in the former group of states or Bodo, Karbi or Mizo insurgencies in the latter.

In orienting towards the conflictual relations materializing across the country in the process of resource ownership, development and urbanization, critical research helps us understand the challenges to the national order evolving in global spaces qualified by the social uncertainty. As Appadurai summed it up, globalization has deeply shaken up the underlying fixity of things: “The idea of a sovereign and stable territory, the idea of a containable and countable population, the idea of a reliable census, and the idea of stable and transparent categories – have come largely unglued in the era of globalization” (2013, 90). What is more important is that globalization as a particular way in which markets, states, and ideas about trade and governance have come to be organized, despite its potential for progress, also “exacerbates the conditions of large-scale violence because it produces a potential collision course between the logics of uncertainty and of incompleteness…” (Appadurai, 2013, 92).

The conflict over land has been legendary in India. Recent data presented by a central government’s Ministry of Agriculture report (Mohan, 2013), showed that as many as 20 of the 29 Indian states reported decrease in cultivable land to the extent of 790,000 hectares in four years from 2007-08 to 2010-11. This was mainly attributed to diversion of cultivable land for non-agricultural purposes like construction, industries or other “development activities.” Here, it is significant that Haryana, the state in which Gurgaon is located, was cited in this report as having one of the highest records in dwindling cultivable land and so was West Bengal, the state form which most of the Bengali domestic workers have migrated into Gurgaon. While the government looks at such acquisition as inevitable in initiating SEZs, SUZs and a plethora of
public-private partnership projects in mineral and resource-rich areas, the devastation it creates among rural communities is evident in the count of farmer suicides presented in 2011. Suicide rates among Indian farmers have been reported by the 2011 Census\textsuperscript{95} to be 47 per cent higher than the rest of the population and escalating at a far higher rate than other segments. And this trend is most pronounced in major farming zones including Punjab and Haryana. While official figures of actual number of suicides are already under scrutiny, academic research has also showed up the intensity of the despair and destruction within the agricultural sector.

It is disappointing then that under the pressures of globalization, the state itself becomes variously responsible for the displacement and dispossession of millions. Many of the families displaced from rural areas of Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam and Orissa loop back into the globalized system in urban zones like Gurgaon, where the demand for labor absorbs hundreds of thousands of migrant workers regularly. The displaced masses, forced to substitute their native livelihoods and crafts with menial, unskilled jobs in the city, become willingly or unwillingly part of the new spatialities and temporalities in frontier zones of SEZs like Gurgaon. As the city becomes the zone for interfaces between global and national temporal orders, the discrepant temporalities generated by the superfast circulation of financial capital in the former triggers new temporalities among those connected to the global system. As the rhythms of their rural lives are overcome by the new temporalities of the global space, many of them work for 12 to 18-hour shifts, night times and 7-day schedules. Faced with devastating poverty in their rural lives, and on the other hand distressed by routine tensions rising from the communal and religio-ethnic structures of their villages, more people get motivated to migrate to the city by the promise of globalization. Their expanded imagination envisions the latter, often represented most clearly in

\textsuperscript{95} 2011 Census data presented in The Hindu: “Farmers’ suicide rates soar above the rest.”
tourist images of the shining City, as the provider of opportunities unimaginable within rural India’s dwindling economy.

*Urban Promise*

As cities become the centers for new sources of economic growth and hierarchies of profitability, the border zones between the national and global most often seen in global cities develop as areas of great analytic interest. The higher demand for labor in rapidly urbanizing areas like Gurgaon, has absorbed hundreds of thousands and continues to draw in more in its upward virtuous cycle - generating jobs, careers, livelihoods every day. The McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report cited earlier in Chapter 4 contains an optimistic forecast of per-capita growth in India’s gross domestic product (GDP), particularly in its cities. By 2030, it predicts, Mumbai will have a population of thirty-three million and a per capita GDP of $8,000, in 2008 prices. Delhi will have a population of twenty-six million and a per capita GDP of $11,400⁹⁶ – both featuring among the five largest cities in the world. Besides the metropolitan cities, MGI projects a count of 66 other cities with population over 1 million, with 70 per cent of the net new jobs created till 2030 generated by cities, while also accounting for 70 per cent of the Indian GDP. With a projected 590 million urban population by 2030, cities are not only central to India’s future but Indian social scientists have already identified urban India as the future, with urban wave fast eroding away rural economies, social ties and culture. So, India’s identity is no longer debated within a Bharat versus India binary but it is time now to think only in terms of this New India:

The distance between town and country is narrowing, and narrowing fast. There was a time when rural India was almost entirely agricultural, but today more than half the

---

households in villages work in non-farm occupations. …old village ties have snapped and the new age villager thinks much like urban people do” (Gupta, 2013, 24).

Globalization and its concomitant urbanization have increased people’s choices not merely among affluent Indians but also for the poor but economic theories like Amartya Sen’s on social development have reiterated the limited societal impact of India’s economic growth (Drèze & Sen, 2013) fuelled by globalization. Sen’s theories, guided by his deep preoccupation with social justice and inequalities between men and women, has become central to civil society efforts in India as seen in an earlier ethnographic project on Indian NGOs. Jean Drèze’s formulations provided the theoretical basis for some of the major items on the UPA government’s recent social agenda. The response arriving from a celebratory media is not always intellectually geared to evaluate all the dimensions of such theories, but they nevertheless point to certain central features of the New India which I find useful for the next part of this discussion: “India is here to stay as a stable marketplace with vanishing boundaries and as the most enduring democracy in South Asia. It is not that the party is entirely out of place” (Prasannarajan, 2013).

While these narratives point to the accelerated economic growth despite India’s late awakening, as well as an aspirational middle class and an ambitious entrepreneurial class adding fuel for further growth, I prefer to conclude that the New India is not merely about the aspirations of the upwardly mobile “middle class,” a huge population segment consisting of many sub-strata and constantly in revision. More importantly, it has created in the working poor and marginalized sections of society a “capacity to aspire.” By connecting the rural populations to the urban, many of the rural strictures and societal restrictions have been left behind. While this has both positive and negative connotations and it is true that many of the migrant worker families carried their cultural and religious practices into their Gurgaon communities, this urban move has also created cycles of empowerment for many of them. While social scientists point to
how the earth has “literally moved from under the feet of the village” in India (Gupta, 2013), that movement has loosened several entrenched customs and provided a momentum among severely marginalized sections like rural women.

One such cycle of empowerment is noticed among the Bengali women of Sunderbans who have moved to Gurgaon: Sita, Mira, Pari. Back home, they were informal workers in the agricultural sector of the rural economy in addition to being homemakers and many of their stories narrate the grueling life that they left behind. Whereas detailed study of women’s actual contribution in rural household income in India might be outside the scope of this study, scholarship on rural livelihoods (Coppard, 2001) has shown that women face far more barriers to securing rural non-farm livelihoods than men. On the other hand, most of their contributions to their family land and farming, to family meals and healthcare, considered to be a normal part of their daily routine in addition to their child-bearing and child-rearing duties, are basically unpaid work, never recorded formally as economically lucrative labor. Their transition to the urban sphere has not relieved them completely from household duties but as they are connected to domestic-labor niches, which tap into their native skills as cooks and cleaners, caregivers and companions, they flourish as professional cooks, nannies and housekeepers, often bringing in more money than male members of their families. These new professions raise the capabilities of these women and empower them within and outside their families. As the focus group discussions showed, there was a quantum rise in some of their incomes following their move to Gurgaon. Sita went home to her village for two months and built a home there with her newly-found economic strength. She agreed that there is new hope in their altered situation and that more people were arriving from the rural to the urban world because of potential of a quantum rise in their income in Gurgaon, even when compared to Kolkata:
If they work in five homes, they will earn Rs.10,000. What will they do back in “desh,” the village? Even if they did go to Kolkata, if they work in 5 homes they would get only Rs.2000, but if they worked here in Gurgaon, they will get paid Rs.10,000.

Whereas not all the domestic workers’ stories were same, many of them had similar themes of greater capacity to aspire, better economic status and ability to perform within their limited skill sets to achieve their desired economic and social goals. The Human Development and Capability Approach, inspired by Amartya Sen’s pioneering theories (Sen, 1992, 1999), which emphasized on welfare and development economics based on social choice, has emerged in India’s intellectual and civil society discussions as providing the necessary philosophical basis for much of the progressive initiatives on development. This approach “puts people first”, and focuses on expanding what people are able to do and be, by augmenting the “real freedoms” of people. Part of Sen’s work was based upon some case studies of Indian populations, and he has actually called for the engagement of a “plurality of institutions” including the participation of NGOs in promoting this new kind of development based on interconnected freedoms (1999, p. 53). In India, though the key to recent urban development was economic growth and the currency was the economy, the changes initiated by globalization have, if not enhanced, but at least triggered the ability in common people even from rural areas to see paths to improvement of real living conditions.

The capabilities approach often emphasizes the concepts of “effective freedoms” or actual possibilities, which empowered people have. Central to the capabilities approach are concepts like functionings, capabilities and agency. These determine people’s ability to do activities that they value or have reason to value and a person’s ability to pursue goals that one values (Sen, 1993 as cited in Deneulin & Shahani, 2009, Chapter 2). The creation of the agent or “someone who acts and brings about change” and her engagement in promoting any kind of life
she wants to live has been stressed upon repeatedly by Sen in describing the “freedom-centered perspective on the ends and means of development” (Sen, 1999, 53). It is difficult to locate the exact source of the momentum which has nudged Sita or Mira forward on their journey to greater empowerment in this New India, and even harder to judge whether their economic mobility was improved by the social agendas of the UPA government over the past eight years or could possibly be attributed to the neoliberal tendencies of the time. This is because the story of the great Indian rejuvenation is a biased text and we cannot miss “glimpses of Darfur in the dusk lands that lie beyond the much advertised shrines of globalized India: There is a Bastar for every Bangalore,” (Prasannarajan, 2013). However, I conclude that while there might be a Godhra imbricated into the Gurgaon, there are possibilities of Gurgaon overcoming Godhra in the future.

Godhra is the name of a town in the western state of Gujarat, which was the site of an incident that triggered one of the biggest communal riots in India’s recent history. In 2002, the Sabarmati Express loaded with Hindu pilgrims and activists was allegedly burned down by Muslim mobs – killing 59 people. The pilgrims were returning from Ayodhya after a religious ceremony at the disputed Babri Masjid site. This became the flash-point for a 3-day carnage across Gujarat where 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed and thousands injured in communal riots which lasted for several weeks. While the actual number of casualties remain disputed, the incident had implicated the Gujarat Bharatiya Janata Party government and its Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who is now the BJP’s nominee for India’s Prime Ministerial office in the upcoming Parliament elections. The name “Godhra” has come to symbolize the communal tensions and ethnic violence that qualify Hindu-Muslim relationships in contemporary India. However, we can also propose that though there is a Godhra which is mixed up in the
Gurgaon we see today, that same Gurgaon, in the imagination of the Sunderbans’ rural multitudes has become the symbol for economic freedom and empowerment.

This, of course, does not indicate to an alleviation in women’s rights or decrease in gender violence, or is a comment on gender relations, all of which have remained outside the area of this study but which continue to be of emergent interest for me especially in view of the new imaginations of gender and family which have been introduced through cultural globalization. However, the information which always gathers in the interstices of ethnographic research and personal experiences during the time I spent in the field in India, indicate disturbing continuities in the oppressive gender culture of India. While this is accentuated by the inclusion of global media, also emerging are new patterns of male privilege arriving from the same narrowing of the rural-urban gap that has led to greater empowerment in some. Perplexing though such trends may be in the face of the rapid progress and incorporation of global standards in everything from fashion to corporate culture, recent incidents of violence on women, like the Nirbhaya rape in December 2012, brings one face-to-face with the many contradictory and harsh realities of the New India which is emerging. What is chillingly relevant here is that all the six men were migrants to Delhi NCR, their backgrounds not much different from tens of millions of migrant young men moving in under the lure of globalization, prompting many to respond that “it is the change itself that is generating the violence” (Burke, 2013).

Conclusion

There are several aspects of a New India which I might not have been able to visit or dwell upon in detail through this study. As the villages are taken over by the cities, the social and cultural flows affect the ground when new meanings and practices are laid on top of existing

---

97 There were 25,000 incidents of rape in India in 2012 according to the National Crime Records Bureau. (Wikipedia)
structures. This mutual imbrication not only of rural and urban but also of the national and global, the global and local all interact and interlace to form the foundation for a new kind of spatiotemporal order or disorder. These areas are attended by multiple flows of a mixed national and transnational culture which might be explored in subsequent studies. As early as 1996, Appadurai had mentioned the urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of deterritorialization - “the loosening of holds between people, wealth, and territories” – not merely in the functioning of transnational corporations or money markets but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements and political formations. My work notices this same dynamics affecting the culture, lifestyles and preferences of many of the people I came into contact with in India, and calls forth further studies into the multiplicities of cultural flows developing in these frontier zones.

The other inherent attribute of the postcolonial urban that begs mention here is the ubiquity of media products, their piracy, fluidity and proliferation. This accompanies the technological irregularity, constant breakdown that qualifies the irregular rhythms of life in the city, and the concept of “jugaad” or improvised solutions, which is frequently resorted to by sections of urban migrant populations in order to deal with or circumvent the inequity that is inherent in power relations and often perpetuated in the imposition of formal infrastructures. In addition, globalization has accelerated a hyper-fluidity in an already mobile situation - fluidity of work, people, real estate tenures, media technologies and products. In the incessant Indianization of the global and the accompanying “mimicry” which is characteristic of the postcolonial – mimicry of fashion, western media productions, art, architecture – constant imitation of themes and trends from western as well as other international cultures dominate the world that the global
subject moves in and out of in the intensely dynamic and complex environment of 21st century India.

Finally, last but not the least, India’s hyper-prolific cinema industry is one subject which has not entered into this discussion of New India despite its centrality in the discourse of a contemporary India and will perhaps figure as a pivotal area in taking this current study forward. Recent avant-garde productions have shown great promise in exploring newer themes and issues pertinent to a time and space which closely addresses India’s current position. Encouraged by a bevy of films over the last few years, like “Dhobi Ghat,” “Peepli Live,” “The Ship of Theseus” and “The Lunchbox” or even “The Good Road” and “Highway,” film critics have heralded the arrival of a “new” New Wave in Indian cinema. While the debate continues over whether there is truly a New Wave in Indian cinema marking a cumulative shift in the ideology, aesthetics, modes of finance, direction, production, distribution of films as well as audience appreciation, recent scholarship has pointed to new directions which are emerging in directorial handling of time-relevant themes and issues. In the past, when India’s story was largely colored by the ongoing narratives of nation-building, cinematic excursions were handled by the then avant-garde filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen or Ritwik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal, Mani Ratnam or Aparna Sen within socio-political dimensions where plots and characters served only as commentary on worldly matters concerning the Indian nation (Chowdhury, 2013). A different dynamics is seen to emerge which could be in fact Indian cinema’s comment on the New India:

Today, India is a nation that has made its mark on the global landscape and is now debating its identity. It is a relatively more affluent and secure state, and consequently the concerns of people have moved away from the world outside to the world inside – or perhaps it is a reflection of the egocentric times we live in, that matters concerning personal wellbeing of the individual have take precedence over well being of the state as overarching entity. It is the characters and their unique psychological issues that take the forefront in contemporary New Wave Indian films (Chowdhary, 2013).
While a detailed study of Indian cinema within the New India context remained outside the scope of my limited study of the subject, this preoccupation with individual well-being remains a prominent feature of the various actors with whom my project path intersected. It is as if, by hitching their wagon to the rapidly “rising star” of India’s economy, they have literally embarked on a journey to a new spatiotemporal order in which the New India exists.
GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY


Mohan, V. (2013, August 16). Cultivable land continues to shrink. *Times of India*.


APPENDIX A:

PHOTOS OF NEW INDIA
Figure 1.1
Academic Interest in “New India”
Figure 1.2

New India on YouTube

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgWeOdUjpU

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GKsHWt5B5U
Indian National Capital Region

Figure 1.3
NCR
Figure 1.4
**Figure 1.5**

http://www.pibi.nic.in/archieve/upareport/ppa/empowering.pdf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law/Act</th>
<th>Benefit group</th>
<th>All women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
<td>All rural households willing to do unskilled manual work. 3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Information Act</td>
<td>Some people employed at present of which 48% are women 30% &amp; 53% in 20-30-90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganised Workers Social Security Act</td>
<td>All citizens now empowered to claim the right to information on actions by government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Education Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act</td>
<td>All students belonging to Other Backward Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act)</td>
<td>All Scheduled Tribes in historical possession of land prior to 1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Nyayalya Act</td>
<td>All people rural areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act**

The Act gives more effective protection to women who are victims of violence occurring within the family and provides them a civil remedy to deal with such violence.

**Bill for Amendment in Land Acquisition Act and Bill for Rehabilitation and Resettlement**

These Bills stand introduced in Parliament to provide adequate compensation and protection to people whose lands are acquired by government and also extend the scope of such acquisition to public purpose.

**Bill on Right to Education**

A Bill making it the duty of States to provide elementary education of quality introduced in Parliament.

**Reservation for Women in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures**

Introduced in Parliament. Provides for 30% reservation to women in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures.

**The Communal Violence (Prevention, Control, and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2005**

Introduced in Parliament. This Bill seeks to prevent and control communal violence, protect witnesses ensure expeditious disposal and provide relief rehabilitation and compensation to victims of communal violence.
### Figure 1.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landmark Legislations Passed In India By United Progressive Alliance-led Government</th>
<th>Year 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Food Security</td>
<td>August 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Information Act</td>
<td>December 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Education Act</td>
<td>August 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act</td>
<td>December 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Farm suicide annual averages in select States 1995-2002 & 2003-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Farm suicides annual average</th>
<th>Difference (2nd Avg - 1st Avg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995-2002</td>
<td>2003-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>2301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>2259</td>
<td>2123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>1071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP + Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>2304</td>
<td>2829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>2508</td>
<td>3802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table only includes States whose annual averages have risen or fallen by over 100 farm suicides between the two periods. It also treats Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as one unit for data purposes.

Source: NCRB Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India reports 1995-2010.
Figure 3.1
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Figure 3.2
National Museum, New Delhi
Figure 3.3
Nehru Living Room
Figure 3.4
Nehru Living Room
Figure 3.5
Nehru Office
Figure 3.6
Nehru Parlor
Figure 3.7
Nehru Artwork
Figures 3.8 & 3.9
Silver Buddha Sculpture (Burma) & Cloisonné enameled plate from Italy
"They call me the Prime Minister of India, but it would be more appropriate if I were called the first servant of India."
Figure 3.11
The Appointed Day Exhibit – Excerpt from Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” Speech

THE APPOINTED DAY

THE APPOINTED DAY has come—oh day appointed by destiny—and India wade forth again, after long
brutality and bondage, noble, vital, free and independant. The past things are as we still in some
memory still, but here is the much before we redeem the pledges we have so often taken. Yet the turning
point is past, and history begins now for us, the history which we shall live and act and others will write about.

It is a solemn moment for us in India, for all Asia and
for the world. A new sun rises, the sun of freedom
in the East, a new hope comes into being, a vision long
cherished by millions. May the star never set and that
hope never be betrayed.

We regard with that freedom, even though clouds surround
us, and many of our people are terror-stricken and
despondent, not despair, but freedom brings
responsibilities and hardship, and we must face them
in the spirit of a few and disciplined people.

On this day our forefathers toiled and sacrificed for this
freedom, the Father of our Nation, who, embodying
the soul of India, held aloft the torch of freedom
and lifted up the darkness that surrounded us.
We have often been unworthy following in his footsteps
and have strayed from his message, but not only do we
but succeeding generations will remember the message
and bear the imprint in their hearts of this great son
of India, magnificent in his faith and strength and

courage and humility. We shall never allow that torch
of freedom to be blotted, burned, broken.
(Figure 3.13)
(Figure 3.14)
(Figure 3.15)
(Figure 3.16)
(Figure 3.18)
(Figure 3.19 & 3.20)
(Figure 3.21)
Commonwealth Crown Replica
(Figure 3.22 & 3.23)
(Figure 3.24)
Miniature Paintings
Figures 3.25a & 3.25b
National Museum exhibit: “Tribal Lifestyle of North-East India”
Figure 3.26a & 3.26b
Figure 3.27 & 3.28
Figures 3.29a & 3.29b
Figure 3.30 & 3.31
Figures 3.32a & 3.32b
Figure 4.1
India Gate

The New Delhi that the British had mapped out with the help of Edward Lutyens served several purposes:

• display of colonial sovereignty
• mobilization of ceremonial power of Empire over the colonized (with subtle incorporation of local influences)
• primacy of the spectacular
• elevational display of the Viceroy’s house and Kingsway (now Rajpath, shown here)
Figure 4.2
Rashtrapati Bhavan (Presidential Palace)

Delhi’s, spectacular architectural monuments served as loci for generating the national imaginary. Perpetuating the founding myth of a “new India” awakening, the city became a site for showcasing the nation.
Figure 4.3: City as Display Window

- Articulation of Delhi as a national-federal space for reconciliation of the divergent logics:
  - democracy
  - Development versus ancient heritage
  - Regional, ethnic and religious interests
Figure 4.4

Re-construction of New Delhi as:

- a site for staging of nationally inclined cultural events
  - focal point of socio-political campaigns
  - a space for showcasing the national imaginary

Regional cultural performances at the Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts.
Figure 4.5
Regional Performance Art: Unity in Diversity
Figure 4.6: Performances highlighting a homogeneous national culture

Santoor recital by Shiv Kumar Sharma with Zakir Hussain on tabla
Figure 4.7
Uncontrollable City
Figure 4.8 a (cont.)

Figure 4.8 a
Gurgaon: A Face of “New India”
Figure 4.8 b (cont. from previous page)
A Premature Metropolis
Figure 4.9a & 4.9b

Gurgaon skyline

Mewat, Haryana, 30 km from Gurgaon
Figure 4.10 a & 4.10b

DLF Gateway Tower

Gurgaon Skyline & traffic congestion – view from NH-8
Figure 4.12
Figure 4.13
Figure 4.14
Malls in NCR
Figure 4.17

Figure 4.17 – Non-stop Construction of Residences, Malls, Retail Spaces
Figure 4.20

Who labors?
Figure 4.21
Who sells? Who buys?
Figure 4.22
Gated Communities
(Figure 4.23) **NH-8 GURGAON TOLL BRIDGE**
Figure 4.24
New Delhi Metro
Figure 4.25
Manual Rickshaws
Figure 4.26

Figure 4.26: “Autos”
(Figure 4.27)

Tractors loaded with Construction Laborers
Figure 4.28
“Tempos”
Figure 5.1
Gurgaon Roadside Pottery Shops
5.2
Gayatri: Map of the Marginalized 2009
Figure 5.3
Gayatri: Map of the Marginalized
Figure 5.4
Women construction laborers, working at a building site in Gurgaon, 2011
Figure 5.5
Gayatri: Map of the Marginalized 17
Figure 5.6
Gayatri: Map of the Marginalized
Figure 5.7
Meo-Muslim Anganwadi worker
Community: Nuh, District: Mewat
Figure 5.8
Women of the Meo-Muslim Community: Nuh, District: Mewat
Figure 5.9
Gayatri: After a Siege
Figure 5.10
Domestic workers in Gurgaon
Figure 5.11
Domestic workers in Gurgaon
Figure 5.12
Domestic workers in Saket
Figure 5.13
Manasa Puja (festival) in Gurgaon
Figure 5.14
Manasa Puja in Bengali workers’ colony, Gurgaon, August 2013
Figure 5.15
Bengali women celebrate, Manasa Puja in Gurgaon
Figure 5.16
Clay Model of Behula, crafted during Manasa Puja in Gurgaon
Figure 5.17
Meal served in Mira’s home during Manasa festival
APPENDIX B

USEFUL LINKS TO ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

COLONIAL DOCUMENT:

Macaulay’s Minute on Education. (1835). Retrieved on December 9, 2012, from

OTHER SOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS:


file:///Users/koeligoel/Downloads/MGI_Indias_urban_awakening_full_report.pdf