Contentious Connections

Contentious Connections:
Social Imagination in Globalizing South Asia

Edited by

Sirpa Tenhunen and Klaus Karttunen

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

SIRPA TENHUNEN AND KLAUS KARTTUNEN

India has been increasingly integrated into global flows since the 1990s when it started to liberate its economy. During the same period, satellite television arrived in India, and subsequent decades have witnessed great improvements in its electronic and digital communication systems. Bustling trade relations across borders are, however, not a new phenomenon on the Indian subcontinent; in the country's long-term history of relatively open markets and global interaction, the periods of state-controlled economy from the 1950s to the 1980s were exceptional decades, as Balachandran and Subrahmanya (2005) argue.

Combining history, cultural studies, sociology, international politics and anthropology, this multidisciplinary volume analyzes transnational connections in South Asia and India. The articles[1] explore how politics, gender, religious discourses, regional concepts, and public culture are being re-imagined amidst translocal connections. In theoretical terms, the volume contributes to understandings of the relationship between culture, globalization and social imagination by posing following questions: What is the nature of relationships between local worlds and global flows historically and in contemporary South Asia? What role does the state play amidst global flows? How do power issues and local hierarchies contribute to social imaginaries? And how do translocal flows influence opportunities for individual agency? The volume introduces articles dealing with various aspects and arenas of globalizing in South Asia: economy and media landscape in India (Derné) cinema (Kumar), global brands (Majumder), religious music and South Asian Islam (Viitamäki), foreign politics (Grekova-Stefanova), politics and gender (Roy), political uses of mobile telephony

---

[1] The articles in the volume were originally presented in a conference titled "Globalizing South Asia" in Helsinki in 2010. The conference was funded by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, Nordic Institute of Asian studies, Finnish Cultural Foundation and Kone foundation.

(Tenhunen), Indian diaspora (Svensson), migration in colonial India (Adapa) and the position of history in classical India (Karttunen).

The Role of Social Imagination for Globalization

Appadurai (1996) argued for the growing importance of social imagination in a rapidly globalizing world connected by transnational flows, where people are able to envisage realms beyond the givens of their culture. Appadurai (ibid.) called attention for examining imagination and imaginaries as a social practice. He argued that, thanks to global flows, far flung images increasingly contribute to social imagination and enable agency. His pamphlet-like essay has provided a fruitful ground and starting point for making sense of global connections, which Appadurai classified as ethnoscapes (moving groups and individuals), mediascapes (electronic media), technoscapes (distribution of technologies), financescapes (movement of global capital) and ideoscapes (movement of ideas). The writers contributing to this volume have engaged in a debate with his notions, basing their responses on empirical research in globalizing South Asia. The articles reveal social imagination as a selective process growing out of contested positions in local hierarchies. As a result, social imagination offers different groups various possibilities to imagine new realms of action.

Derné found that non-metropolitan, non-élite Indian men in Dehra Dun were selective in their acceptance of new meanings introduced by cultural globalization. He argues that the non-élite middle class in India, for whom globalization has brought little change in their economic position and opportunities, has resisted changes to existing ideas about family, marriage, and gender relations. According to Derné, people of this class accept only such innovations which are compatible with existing understandings that support obdurate social structures, thereby reiterating existing social stereotypes. In accordance with this, the newly available Arnold Schwarzenegger films intensify the association of violence with masculinity. Similarly, foreign pornography incites new means of expressing male dominance. Derné argues that comparisons between the non-élite and the transnational middle class in India suggest that with globalization, class identities must be defined more by transnational contexts than by those within bounded nations; they must be based on shared patterns of consumption rather than shared positions in the economy, and must also be increasingly defined by gender relations.

Kumar's article focuses on the Indian cinema, arguing that the globalization of the Indian economy and society is the main factor behind the changing portrayal of women in Indian cinema. Bollywood now understands and caters to the upper class female viewers' demands. Due to the

availability of easy financing, a discerning multiplex audience, and the availability of huge global market, Bollywood makes films that are different from the cinema of earlier decades. He provides a discursive analysis of the new representations in Bollywood films and contends that these new images are resources which offer the space for more egalitarian gender relations in India. In order to support the argument that the portrayal of women in Indian cinema has gone through a sea change, he challenges the view that it is the male gaze that governs the cinematic landscape: that he is the bearer of the "look" while the female bears the quality of "to-be-looked-at-ness". He concludes that, due to economic and societal globalization in India, a distinct female gaze has emerged which, if not dominant, at least cohabits the space with the male gaze.

Appadurai (1996) saw global advertising as tacitly duping people into thinking that they are actors, although in reality, he argues, advertising guides consumers to be mere choosers. Majumder's article demonstrates that global brands can be turned into platforms for local agency. Majumder analyzes a Coca-Cola advertisement campaign in India, *Thanda Matlab Coca-Cola*, exploring connections between the campaign and local resistance movements against the Coca-Cola Company. Drawing from Ghosh (2010), he argues that icons like Coca-Cola can become contentious objects. Majumder illustrates how Coca-Cola's attempts at localization are, and can be, destabilized, precisely because of its uniform, homogenous identity as a global icon. He concludes that flattening out the heterogeneity of local differences to produce an undifferentiated homogenization through transnational corporate practices, ensures greater visibility and potential consolidation of pockets of localized resistance This, he argues, is the paradox that turns Coca-Cola's project in India on its head, enabling an utilization of corporate representations (*Thanda* campaign) and corporate electronic space (Coca-Cola as global media icon) to represent opposition. Such opposition also reshapes corporate policy, which seeks to make room for dissent within its own discourse.

Local and Global as Mutually Constitutive

Grekova-Stefanova's and Viitamäki's articles beg the question of how local and global are mutually constitutive. Viitamäki explores South Asian Muslims' *qawwali* music as a form of cultural and religious expression which is both Islamic and South Asian: a musical genre that was originally developed as a meditative and ecstatic technique of Sufis in the thirteenth century. Its audience was limited to an elite circle of adepts until the early twentieth century, when a popular variant of the genre emerged and reached a much broader public through concerts and recordings. Currently, popular *qawwali* has acquired traits of commercial entertainment while

preserving its distinctively religious character and becoming an important way of disseminating religious ideas. In the discourse on Islam in South Asia, the line is frequently drawn between indigenous and orthodox expressions of religion. The former, often called India-oriented, are centered on the veneration of shrines and saints, while the latter, characterized as Mecca or Arab-oriented and given global prevalence, focus on literal interpretation of religious sources and emphasize the correct performance of Islamic rituals, such as daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca. Globalization is commonly assumed to contribute to the dominance of the latter while marginalizing the more local forms of Islam. By discussing the significance attributed to the shrines in the lyrics, Viitamäki adds nuances to the commonly accepted dichotomy between India-oriented and Arab-oriented Islam in India, arguing that popular *qawwali* lyrics share notions concerning religious perfection and ideal Muslim life with reformists but acknowledge the help of the saints in the process of attaining them. The lyrics thus recognize the goal of religious perfection shared by Muslims globally but do not ignore the local shrines in doing so.

Grekova-Stefanova explores the ways in which India's foreign policy initiatives in relation to East Asian regionalism contribute to changes in the regional notion of South Asia. She argues that India's participation in the East Asian Summit has reintroduced India as part of East Asia in the broadest sense: not only as a geographic entity but as a political and economic actor. She discusses the terminology and theories connected with regional integration in Asia, the historical development of regionalism in South and East Asia, and concludes by assessing the challenges for India's participation in the larger East Asian regional agenda. Grekova-Stefanova's work supports Appadurai's (1996) argument that regions are not permanent geographical facts but, rather, should be regarded as problematic heuristic devices for the study of global geographic and cultural processes. However, whereas Appadurai (ibid.) argued for the diminishing role of the state amidst the imaginary that enables global flows, Grekova-Stefanova demonstrates that the state is a key actor in the co-construction of regional entities.

Political Dimension of Globalization

Roy analyzes the extent of the devolution of power to women in rural India and the impact of political institutions on the empowerment of women and gendered power relationships, based on her ethnographic fieldwork in rural West Bengal. Due to the decentralization initiatives in the modern system of governance, women—particularly rural women as a result of the reservation of *panchayat* seats for women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI)—enjoy a greater opportunity to fill agentive roles and exercise pow-

er. In theoretical terms, Roy seeks to understand the current debate on the question of gender in the context of globalization. By critically examining the everyday participation of rural women in micro-level politics in the context of macro-level changes in global political and economic processes, Roy's article reveals that, while the current age of globalization is opening political space for the women of the Global South, they are finding few opportunities to utilize it to further their own interests due to inherent cultural constraints in the social system. Roy concludes that while new opportunities for female mobilization are emerging that may challenge gender inequalities in post-colonial countries, processes of global capitalism pose a persistent threat to women, particularly those in rural and marginal areas, in terms of coping with their lives and livelihoods.

Tenhunen's article [2] reveals that digital media, particularly mobile phones, provide new political spaces, which the older electronic media could not offer. Tenhunen seeks to understand the relationship between politics and mobile technology by examining how political activists in rural West Bengal use mobile phones for their daily political work. She shows that, in contrast to the hierarchical flows of information and decision making of the CPI (M) party, Trinamul Congress party is using phones to change how political hierarchies are imagined and practiced by encouraging translocal communication across the hierarchical units. She illustrates how riots and protests correlate with the increase in translocal communication enabled by mobile phones. Phone use builds on earlier political patterns and meanings, but has made politics faster, more heterogeneous, and translocal. Not only can activists connect more promptly with their supporters and voters, but they can also communicate more efficiently with different organizations, both horizontally (e.g., other activists, and organizations such as the police and communal elected bodies) and vertically (with their leaders and subordinates). Instead of bringing outside forces and ideas to bear on the local, parties gain rural supporters by drawing on local concepts of politics. Tenhunen's research therefore exemplifies how understanding flows of ideas and connections enabled by ICTs requires examining how they are tied to local meanings. Recent studies on the relationship between culture and globalization in India (Donner 2008; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) have emphasized that instead of leading to major disruptions and changes, globalization has entailed the continuity and reproduction of local meanings. Tenhunen's research pinpoints how cultures harbor conflicts and alternative discourses: local con-

---

[2] This article is a republication of Sirpa Tenhunen (2011): Culture, Conflict, and Translocal Communication: Mobile Technology and Politics in Rural West Bengal, India, Ethnos, 76:3, 398-420.

cepts of politics create a base for critical discourses which translocal communication helps amplify.

Svensson's article examines how Indian-Malaysians may transcend their marginalized position in Malaysia through their studies at public universities in Malaysia. The Indian community in Malaysia is subject to a high level of discrimination in education, economy, housing and distribution of land. Indian students who aim to transcend this position through university achievement perceive their future chances to be based on their academic life style and imagined possibilities in the age of globalization as part of a transnational global community; this is in contrast to Malays who identify with their ethnicity and nationality. Through an analysis of the connection between the social backgrounds of the students and societal inclusion and exclusion, Svensson demonstrates how, as Appadurai argues, globalization has produced major changes in relations between the economy and class structures, stressing that the emergence of cosmopolitan elites can challenge existing conceptions of the role of the nation-state, cultural mechanisms and hierarchies. He further contributes to the debate by demonstrating how social imagination evolves from Indian students' contested social position as a minority group in Malaysia.

Long History of Globalization

If globalization is understood as the movement and supply of goods, services and knowledge across borders, India had one of the first globalized economies in the world. As early as 3000 BC it could boast a remarkable range of handicrafts, with Indian merchants already trading across political borders. However, as Ray and Alpers (2007) have elaborated, the nature of these early maritime connections was culturally distinct and differed in crucial ways from contemporary global networks.

The roots of long-distance trade lie far back in the prehistoric period. The flint stone arrow heads made in the Neolithic factories of Rajasthan have been found thousands of kilometers away. In the third millennium BCE a regular network of trade linked the Indus civilization with the marts of Eastern Iran, Oman, Bahrain and Mesopotamia, and India has been participating in international trade ever since. The volume grew considerably in the early centuries CE, when Roman ships from Egypt visited Indian harbors and Indians sailed to South Arabia, the Gulf and South-East Asia, where they also encountered Chinese merchants. Inland trade frequently used caravan routes connecting North India with Iran, Central Asia and China. Beside merchandise, cultural ideas were also carried between different countries in this early phase of globalization. Greek astrology and astronomy, for instance, came to India, while Indian Buddhism

spread to Central, East and South-East Asia, and Kerala received its Christian, Jewish, and then Muslim minorities.

We can, therefore, date the commencement of India's global role to probably the third millennium BCE and certainly to the beginning of the CE. As an example of the long-distance trade network, cowrie shells originating in the Maldive Islands have been found in great numbers in graves that are dated c. 500 CE in northern Norway and Latvia. Arabs were studying Indian sciences from the eighth century (especially mathematics, astronomy and medicine), developing them further and transmitting them to Europe, where the very number system, the shape of the digits, and the use of zero derives from India. From the twelfth century India was also part of the larger community of the Islamic world. Visitors came from as far afield as Morocco, while Indian Muslims often visited Mecca and the major cities of the Near East. At the end of the fifteenth century Europeans arrived, attracted by such Indian commodities as spices, textiles and jewels. For more than 200 years before the beginning of colonial occupation this trade flourished, benefiting the economy of coastal areas, especially Gujarat, Kerala and Bengal. Even in the colonial period, however, globalizing trends were not synonymous with imperialism and exploitation. While the colonizing powers were certainly responsible for the large scale movement of labor—resulting in considerable Indian minorities in many countries in South-East Asia, the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean—Indian traders and entrepreneurs were also agentive in many parts of Asia and East Africa with Pañjabi merchants even operating in Russia. Later, the Indian independence movement would become the model followed by many colonies striving to break free of the colonial yoke. Karttunen's and Adapa's articles offer analyses of, and insights onto, some of the early connections and imaginaries.

Adapa's article underscores the Asian dimensions of globalization in world history by exploring the movement of people across the Bay of Bengal region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Adapa argues that South Asian patterns of integration into the world capitalist market since the middle of the nineteenth century were shaped by intra-Asian trade, migration and remittances as much as by direct incorporation into Western economies. The opening of the Indian economy to long-distance foreign trade under colonial conditions was not simply an opening to the metropolitan West; it was also simultaneously an opening to Asia on a substantial scale. Adapa's study of intra-Asian labor migrations, along with movements of capital which crossed territorial and colonial borders, informs and illustrates the nature and dynamics of colonialism and imperialism. His article focuses on the evolution of intra-Asian migratory patterns and highlights aspects of overseas emigration of lower castes/communities that impacted on socio-economic change and the caste system. His examina-

tion of the socio-cultural and religious life experiences of the immigrant laborers suggests that the lower downtrodden castes utilized emigration and its resources to overcome their multiple disabilities and were also able to challenge the hegemony of higher castes.

Karttunen's departure point is the Orientalist cliché that India had no tradition of historical literature. After a summary of different historic-literary genres, he considers the position of history and of historians in Classical India, offering a comparative perspective by discussing parallels with other major classical traditions of history writing: the Graeco-Latin, Arabic, and Chinese. An important function of historiography in these schools was its use in teaching politics and political wisdom whereas in India the science of politics developed early as a distict field containing important theoretical perspectives onto history.

Contentious Connections

While Karttunen's and Adapa's articles demonstrate that social imaginaries deriving from translocal interaction and contexts already shaped classical and colonial India, as a whole, the articles in the volume shed light on the nature of global flows, refining the theoretical understanding of social imagination's role in globalization and transnational flows. The articles exemplify that flows are not homogenizing; instead, they help amplify different social groups' aspirations in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. As Tsing (2004) has argued, global flows do not dominate localities by creating local effects. Local social structures channel flows more crucially than Appadurai (1996) envisaged. Class positions, along with other local hierarchies such as gender, kinship, and caste vitally influence people's ability to see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives that the media offer. A detailed examination of translocal interaction reveals that, at times, global connections help ascertain pre-existing power structures, but also that they also provide chances for individual agency, power contests, and conflicts, thus affirming Appadurai's notion of imaginations as a space of contestations.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Balachandran G. and Subrahmanya, Sanjay. 2005. On the History of Globalization in India: Concepts Measures and Debates. In: J. Assayag and C. J. Fuller (eds.) *Globalizing India. Perspectives from Below*. London: Anthem Press.

Donner, Henrika. 2008. *Domestic Goddesses, Maternity, Globalization and Middle-class Identity in Contemporary India*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ghosh, Bishnupriya. 2010. Looking Through Coca-Cola: Global Icons and the Popular. *Public Culture*. 22 (2): 333-368.

Fuller, Chris. and Narasimhan, Haripriya. 2007. Information technology professionals and the new-rich middle class in Chennai (Madras). *Modern Asian Studies*. 41 (1): 121-150.

Ray, Himanshu Prabha Ray and Alpers, Edward. 2007. *Cross Currents and Community Networks: the History of the Indian Ocean World*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Tsing, Anna. 2004. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSFORMATIONS OF CULTURE, CLASS,
AND GENDER IN INDIA SINCE ECONOMIC
LIBERALIZATION[1]

STEVE DERNÉ

Ardent advocates of globalization refer to the middle of 1991 as a "golden summer" when the Indian economy finally opened. Partly due to the oil price rise fueled by the first gulf war, India found itself with just two weeks of foreign-exchange reserves left and accepted a structural adjustment loan from the IMF, the terms of which demanded the devaluation of the rupee and the lifting of most restrictions on foreign investment. Within five years, imports doubled, exports tripled, and foreign capital investment quintupled. New media flooded in to provide consumers to global advertisers.

In 1986-1987 and again in the golden summer of 1991, I lived in India, doing research with Indian men. Although I mostly interviewed educated men with good jobs, none had access to television beyond the one state-run channel and few had seen even one Hollywood film. The men whom I interviewed prior to 1991 focused on Indianness as the cornerstone of their identity—and they often associated Indianness with what they saw as distinctive family systems that included arranged marriages and limitations on women's movements outside the home.

To understand how cultural globalization (the movement of media) and economic globalization (India's integration into the global economy) affected lives of ordinary Indians like these young men, I returned in 2001 to replicate the study I had conducted a decade earlier. The economic liberalization of that "golden summer" had radically transformed the media land-

---

[1] This article preserves the informal style of my Helsinki address. This article doesn't cover new ground, but draws together material from my 2008 book *Globalization on the Ground: Media and the Transformation of Culture, Class, and Gender in India* (New Delhi, Sage).

scape. With the end of foreign-exchange restrictions, Hollywood films flooded Indian theatres. With the end of regulations and the desire of advertisers to reach the newly opened market, the expansion of cable was exponential. In 1991, it reached 300,000 homes; in 1994 it reached 12 million homes; in 1999, it reached 24 million homes. While in 1991, none of the men whom I interviewed had seen cable television or Hollywood films, by 2001 about two thirds of the men sought out global media.

How has cultural globalization and new global economic worlds shaped identity? The orientation of Indians with education, good English-language skills, and transnational connections was becoming global. On a fast air-conditioned train from Delhi to Dehra Dun in 2001, I saw two college women flirt with a young college man. All three wore jeans and Western-style shirts and spoke exclusively in English. They passed copies of *Cosmopolitan* and *Time* magazines back and forth. They joked about an orientation to the USA, saying they had abandoned the use of "Zed," instead using "Zee," to refer to the last letter of the English alphabet. After asking the young man about his education and family, one young woman asked the man if he was flirting with her. "Are you pulling my leg?," the young man replied. "What do you want me to pull?," countered the woman provocatively. Later, she asked the man, "Do you have a car? Will you take me for a ride?" The orientation is cosmopolitan. The notions of gender arrangements and culture come from global sources.

But the orientation of Indians lacking opportunities in the global economy continued to be oriented to local realities and culture—even as they enjoy foreign media. Unlike the young people on the train, they reject challenges to Indian gender arrangements and temper their enthusiasm for consumerism. Amit, a 22-year-old whom I interviewed in 2001, left his village to study at an urban university. While he fancies himself a connoisseur of western fashions and enjoys cable's Arnold Schwarzenegger films and National Basketball Association games, Amit remains attached to distinctively Indian family arrangements and is uneasy about foreign influences. "I want an arranged marriage," Amit says, "but I fear that Fashion Television, MTV, and [music] channel V are distorting the desires of the younger generation." Amit, like most people I interviewed in 2001, saw himself as a member of a local middle class—positioned on a local level between the Indian poor and the transnational Indians like those whom I met on the train. Men like Amit were attracted to Western fashions, but often defined themselves by focusing on their adherence to distinctively Indian gender arrangements that contrasted with the cosmopolitan gender arrangements of the people whom I met on the train.

This article considers how economic globalization—the transnational movement of goods and production—and cultural globalization—the transnational movement of media—is creating a *transnational middle*

class, consisting of people like those I encountered on the train, but also a *local middle class* defining itself more by its position within a local economic structure and attachment to local gender values. I believe this development suggests the need to fundamentally rethink class analysis.

Rethinking Class in a Global World

Only recently has class analysis begun to address how a globalizing economy is fundamentally altering the class system. Most notably, Leslie Sklair (2001) analyzed the emergence of a transnational capitalist class who work to advance the interests of transnational corporations. Sklair (2001, 6) is right to focus attention on how this class also has a strong interest in promoting the "culture ideology of consumerism" which is central to the reproduction of the global capitalist system. "Global capitalism thrives," he argues, "by persuading us that the meaning and value of our lives are to be found principally in what we possess" (Sklair 2001,6). The transnational capitalist class of course wants to create more than the desire to consume; rather it wants to create the desire of everyone around the world to consume *the same* products. Getting at the crucial role of media in this process, a CEO of Heinz commented that "once television is there, people of whatever shade, culture or origin want roughly the same things."

While Sklair emphasized the creation of a transnational *capitalist* class, there has so far been insufficient attention to how globalization is shaping other classes. But in inciting consumption, the transnational capitalist class ends up creating a transnational middle class who constitute the primary consumers fueling the capitalist system. The transnational capitalist class, in short, creates a *transnational middle class* oriented toward *cosmopolitan consumption*. I believe that this is the process that is currently taking place in India.

Most theories of class followed Marx in focusing on a person's position in a productive system. But my study, along with other recent ethnographic studies of class in poor countries exposed to global markets, suggests the importance of the Weberian focus on how middle classes are made by defining themselves in opposition to class others largely through cultural practices associated with consumption.

This article compares India's *transnational middle class* that aspires to lifestyles of consuming classes in the rich countries with a *locally-oriented Indian* middle class, still limited by local markets, that defines itself as distinctively Indian. The transnational middle-class is made up of affluent Indians—the top 5% of Indians who have the global connections, good educations and English-language skills that allow them to hitch their dreams to the global economy. The locally-oriented middle-class is made

up of the 15% of Indians who can afford decent housing and consumer goods like televisions and scooters from their jobs as clerks, police officers, teachers, and so on—but who lack the income to buy very many global goods and who lack the skills to take off with the global economy. (80% of Indians are mostly poor and/or rural)

I focus on several features that define class in globalizing India. First, class is defined on a global field. Second, class is increasingly rooted in consumption. Third, class is rooted in gender arrangements.

First, middle-class efforts to define itself in opposition to class others now takes place on a global field. Affluent Indians whose opportunities for consumption and employment are now shaped by global markets increasingly constitute a *transnational* middle class that holds the space between the poor in India and the consuming classes in North America and Europe. Thus, affluent Indians are oriented to the living standards of the consuming classes in Europe and North America and define themselves in opposition to the Indian poor. Since the class identifies with cosmopolitan consumers around the world, it is a *transnational* class for whom national identity is relatively unimportant. Mass media of course play a role in celebrating cosmopolitan consumption and, indeed, transnational movement. One magazine advertisement describes how computer training could mean that "two years from now 19 year old Vijay will be driving his own car...on the other side of the globe" The reader may see the advertisement's depiction of jeans-wearing "Vijay" sitting on his motorcycle in front of his obviously Indian house as existing between the status of the Indian poor and the automobile-driving life that is on offer in "Silicon Valley, California," the place the advertisement trumpets as Vijay's destination.

Affluent Indians' perception of themselves as a transnational middle class located between the Indian poor and consumers in rich countries is generated by both structural and cultural factors. These today *are* more located on a global field. Their jobs are high paying precisely because they produce for a global market. Their lifestyles can aspire to those of consuming classes in rich countries precisely because global goods *are* more available. At a macro-economic level cheap labor is India's comparative advantage. Gupta (2000, 9) points out, moreover, that at a personal level affluent Indians' "rich lifestyle" depends on the support of millions of poor people. A full-time live-in servant costs less per month than a single pizza (Shurmer-Smith 2000, 32). In rich countries, convenience foods, including packaged flour, ground spices and frozen dinners help provide a "middle-class" lifestyle, but in India low-paid servants save the wealthy from the drudgery associated with food preparation (Shurmer-Smith 2000, 50). At the cultural level, privileged classes' perception of themselves as middle class is fueled by cable and print advertising which normalizes elite life-

styles and hit Indian films which increasingly focus on consuming elites (Uberoi 1998).

By contrast, a *locally-oriented* Indian middle class is limited by local markets for consumption and employment, and, so, focuses on a local field, defining itself in opposition to poor Indians who live on day-to-day earnings and the great people who jetset and appear excessively influenced by foreign culture. Despite discourses which describe consuming elites as India's middle class, people who can afford reasonable housing, but can barely imagine jetsetting or email *also* see themselves as India's middle class. Research in Madurai (Dickey 2002, 218) and Hyderabad (Saavala 2001, 302-3) shows ordinary middle class people using vernacular Tamil and Telugu to call themselves "middle class"—below the "great people" who drive automobiles, but well above those who live in slums, cycle miles to work, and survive day-to-day pulling rickshaws or slogging in sweatshops. The locally-oriented middle-class's identity is shaped by *their* structural realities. Lacking English-language skills or global connections, the locally-oriented Indian middle class is *in fact* limited by local markets for employment. Lacking money to buy global goods, they are *in fact* limited by local markets for consumption. While the transnational middle class is oriented to new cosmopolitan worlds of opportunity, national identity remains salient for the locally-oriented middle class, who cannot, after all, aspire to consuming lifestyles in rich countries.

Class: Beyond Employment

Second, middle-class identity is rooted more in shared consumption than in a shared relationship to the productive system. Transnational middle class Indians use cosmopolitan consumption to advertise taste and discernment. The *transnational* middle-class in India embraces cosmopolitan fashion to identify itself with consuming elites in rich countries.

By consuming Pepsi rather than the local Thums Up! or Domino's Pizza rather than a roadside samosa (at a cost that might be 35 times higher)[2] one presents oneself as a cosmopolitan, transnational mover who is oriented globally rather than locally. By wearing jeans, rather than local clothing, one presents oneself as oriented toward the transnational world. Often, the discernment being advertised focuses on particular ways of being male and female. So, the transnational man shows his maleness and his cosmopolitanism through his attachment to products (like a Pulsar motorcycle) which are associated with male strength. The transnational woman shows

---

[2] Because Coca-Cola now owns Thums Up, the Coca-Cola only costs about 3 times as much as the cost of the Thums Up.

her femaleness and her cosmopolitanism through attachment to transnational standards of beauty, like a thin body and up-to-date fashion.

New global advertising and cable television celebrate—and make acceptable—their consumer lifestyles. The affluent urbanites speak of new choices of goods as the biggest benefit of economic liberalization. Some say that they had previously felt "guilty" about displays of wealth in a country like India, but that today "consumerism has become an Indian value." Young women often say that they watch cable music channels just to see "the hairstyle, the shoes, [and] the clothes." Susan Parulekar's (n.d.) 1997-2001 fieldwork shows that affluent women increasingly pursue taut bodies that appear in transnational media by dieting, working out, and patronizing slimming centers which have proliferated throughout India. Boutique shop owners report that clients have developed "fashion literacy" to refer to styles they see on TV. Advertising in English-language magazines aims to incite men's desire for "Italian look" trousers, "Rich look" shirts, and "cargo pants" with "multiple pockets" to accommodate "sun glasses," a "cell phone" or mints. Transnational middle-class Indians come to see themselves as having more in common with cosmopolitan consumers around the world than with ordinary Indians.

The *locally-oriented* Indian middle class *also* define their class standing through consumption. They embrace consumer goods like televisions to distinguish themselves from the Indian poor, while they use sober avoidance of wasteful spending to define themselves in opposition to the vulgar and excessive consumerism that they associate with the affluent whom they see as corrupted by foreign cultures.

Gender and Class Identity

Third, class identity is rooted in gender arrangements. The transnational-middle-class identity of affluent Indians is rooted in cosmopolitan gender arrangements which give women freedom—especially as consumers. One way that the most affluent Indians advertise their cosmopolitan status is by easing attachment to distinctively Indian gender arrangements. Most Indian women in the transnational middle class move more freely outside the home—especially to shop. Indian VJ's report that women in colleges now snatch the microphones from the presenters, eager to be on stage. These gender arrangements embrace greater freedom of movement for women, emulating gender arrangements of consuming classes in Europe and North America and distance themselves from the local arrangements of poorer Indians. The transnational middle class often defines itself in terms of women's attachment to shopping and pursuit of cosmopolitan standards of beauty. As Mark Liechty (2003, 253-4) argues, "consumption is the cultural labor of the middle class," and it is important than women

are the primary consumers. Theorists like Maria Mies (1986) are correct to see "housewifization" as a fundamental basis of capitalist profit, and, indeed, the focus on women who do what Mies calls "consumption work" is partly produced by the transnational capitalist class's efforts to encourage women to become active consumers.

Global media celebrate love as a basis of marriage and some accounts by social scientists and English-language media suggest a move away from arranged marriages. Articles in the mainstream press describe dating as becoming common for teens (Sengupta 2001). One advertising campaign manager describes Valentine's Day marketing as increasing young people's focus on romantic love (Sengupta 2001). A Delhi sociologist argues that Valentine's Day celebrations are making "the idea of romance" more legitimate (Sengupta 2001). Sociologist Jyoti Puri (1997, 438) surveyed 101 elite Mumbai college-going readers of English-language romance novels. Of these, 98 "believed that a girl should marry out of choice" (see also Shurmer-Smith 2000, 39-41). While we lack systematic data, these reports show increasing acceptance of love matches among the most affluent. The *transnational* middle class shows its cosmopolitanism by adopting nonlocal gender arrangements.

Of course, social structures that provide greater discretionary income and transnational media from television serials to advertising each play a role in producing new gender arrangements for the transnational middle class.

Rejecting these cosmopolitan gender arrangements, locally-oriented middle-class Indians *also* root class identity in particular gender arrangements. While the transnational middle class embraces *cosmopolitan* gender arrangements, the non-elite middle class continues to focus on its *Indian* identity as rooted in adherence to distinctively *Indian* gender arrangements. By continuing to limit women's movements outside the home, the nonelite middle class defines itself in opposition to the "great" people whom they see as excessively influenced by foreign lifestyles.

Despite the increased media celebration of love as a basis for marriage, the men whom I interviewed in 2001 remain as committed to arranged marriages as they were before the media onslaught. Virendra, a 22-year-old postgraduate engineering student likes Hindi-film love stories but remains committed to arranged marriages: "In actual life, a love marriage is not possible. I'll marry with my parents' wishes." Another 19-year-old student living in a joint-family headed by a father with a professional job likes "love stories" even though they are not "possible in real life." His favorite film features a school teacher encouraging students to pursue love, but the 19-year-old remains certain that "any girl I could find for myself would not be as good as the girl my parents will find for me." Despite a decade of cultural globalization celebrating love and choice, similar per-

centages of young men say they want an arranged marriage (66% in 1991; 68% in 2001).

While transnational media have intensified favorable images of independent women who work in the paid economy, locally-oriented middle-class men remain attracted to gender arrangements which limit women's public activities and freedom. In North India men still enjoy cinema halls as a largely male arena in which they can joke, play and roughhouse, and emphasize how this contrasts with women's home-based lives (Derné 2000, 2008, 215). Tahsin, a married 25-year-old, describes his compelling attraction to Hindi film as so strong that he used to see at least one movie a day. When I asked him why he didn't bring his wife of seven years to the movies, he proudly relates that she is so "home loving" that "she even objects to seeing movies with her own husband."

Often local middle-class men target foreign media. A postgraduate engineering student who likes to dress smartly but wants an arranged marriage avoids foreign media, complaining that "satellite TV is making the younger people too mature." A civil draftsmen whose marriage has just been arranged is disturbed by programming that teaches "the message that . . . a brother should allow his sister to go with her boyfriend to watch a movie."

For many years, protesters have targeted Valentine's Day, attacked couples in restaurants, burned Valentine's Day cards, and thrown stones at shops selling cards. Other protesters pressure colleges to ban women from wearing jeans and skirts and target media that show women in revealing clothes. Although organized by political elites, these protests resonate strongly with locally-oriented middle-class men who are attached to male privilege.

So, locally oriented Indian middle class men remain focused on distinctively Indian gender arrangements that include especially arranged marriages and limitations on women's movements outside the home.

Indeed, the aspects of foreign media locally-oriented middle class men tend to accept are those that reinforce and exaggerate male dominance. While locally-oriented middle class men often resist transnational media that threaten existing gender arrangements, they often eagerly embrace new imaginations introduced by cultural globalization when they can be used to bolster these arrangements. One way is through media celebrations of violence. Another is through foreign pornography.

The cultural association of maleness with violent aggression has been an important cornerstone of male dominance. Local fighting-and-killing films continue to celebrate such male violence. Members of the male audience continue to clap and shout when heroes beat up their opponents.

Intensifying Violent Masculinities in a Global World

But today cable television and foreign movies may be *intensifying* the attraction to violent masculinities. Nearly 60% (11/19) of the men I interviewed who watch foreign films regularly say that they do so because of the excellent action sequences in these films. Men talk of Jackie Chan or Arnold Schwarzenegger as favorite heroes because of their fighting ability. They say they like American films, like *Gladiator* or *Godzilla,* because the action appears more realistic than in Hindi films. As I sat watching the previews before one screening of a Schwarzenegger film, one of the men I interviewed smiled broadly on seeing Jackie Chan. "Jackie's a good fighter," he said with a grin. Ramu, a twenty-year-old Brahman medical student, says that he likes watching Hollywood action movies because the Hollywood industry has the backbone to make the action more exciting and realistic.

Anand Patwardhan's (1995) documentary film *Father, Son, Holy War* shows boys, teenagers, and young men in Mumbai who are attracted to Arnold Schwarzenegger's body building. Boys smile, make faces, roughhouse, and imitate the headlocks they see on television. "That's Hit Man, the World Wrestling Federation wrestler," one says. "He hits hard. He's good." One boy who had another boy in a headlock says that "only boys" wrestle "because boys are heroes." Pressed by the interviewer, the adolescent says he doesn't play with girls "because girls wear *sari*s, because girls are a calamity, because girls make too much fuss, because girls are girls and boys are boys." In another scene, boys react enthusiastically to WWF wrestler Macho Man Randy Savage, who makes a local appearance to promote WWF on local cable. Boys chant "We want Macho; we want Macho" in anticipation of the hero's arrival. "Macho, Macho, Macho," they chant as he comes into the promotional tent.

The increased *realism* men find in foreign media's presentation of male violence may increase their attachment to male strength and violence as an actual possibility. The violence in Hindi films has long been presented as a fantasy, clearly separating it from the day to day world. The special effects are both wildly unbelievable (like heroes jumping incredible heights to the tops of buildings) and crude (accomplishing the jump upward by reversing the film). "By exaggerating the violence out of all proportions," Ashis Nandy (1989, 48-49) argues, Hindi films create the "overall impression" of a "fairy tale" or "comic strip." By contrast, many cable television events from violent American sports to WWF wrestling appear to be an actual social reality. Some men may believe that the violence they see is common in foreign societies with which they have no real experience. Several men commented that they liked foreign films precisely because the world they present appear authentic due to their realistic special effects. The cable

television and movie preferences of Sanjay, a prosperous unmarried thirty-year-old, suggest a strong attraction to media that emphasize male violence and villainy. For Sanjay, American films are especially pleasing because, he says, they "show things the way they actually are [*actual hota hain*]."

Cultural globalization has brought more foreign pornography to India. In 1991, two cheap theatres showed Indian-made pornographic films, carrying an A [Adult-Only] rating. In 2001, these theatres continued to operate, but one of the two most prestigious theatres in town also now routinely showed dubbed foreign films which were marketed with the A-rating usually marketed as pornography. Low budget and dubbed into Hindi, these foreign films aimed at soft-core titillation as Indian censors bar all nudity. The foreign pedigree and prestigious venue attracted good audiences that included ordinary middle-class men and male adolescents (as age restrictions were not enforced.)

More hard-core foreign pornography has also become available on video. Boys now watch these films in video halls with their peers (e.g., Abraham 2001, 139). Mainstream film magazines increasingly carry advertising for phone sex. Abraham's (2001, 144) 1996-1998 study of English-speaking college students in Mumbai revealed, for instance, that more than half of the male students had seen pornographic films.

Hindi films have long played a role constructing female sexuality as existing for men's pleasure. The theme especially comes through in dance scenes. The sensitive hero of the pre-globalization superhit *Maine Pyar Kiya* (*I Fell in Love*, 1989) guided his beloved in dancing for his pleasure in a number of sexy rooftop dances. The skimpy dress the heroine wore prompted the hero to gaze spellbound, causing a look of pain on the heroine's face. Prior to globalization, ubiquitous fantasy dance sequences made usually-modest heroines wear jeans or shorts to please their beloveds. In fighting-and-killing films, villains try to victimize women for their own pleasure—often to the delight of males in the audience—while in social films, heroines often focus on pleasing the hero.

The availability of foreign pornographic films has reinforced the emphasis on women's "to-be-looked-at-ness" and the construction of women as existing for men's pleasure. Thus, at screenings of A-films in Dehra Dun the wholly male audience whistled their enthusiasm at any scene suggesting sex. "Oh, oh, oh," men would shout as a female character in a dubbed film took off a sweater (revealing a shirt underneath).

Mark Liechty's (2001) path breaking study of the effects of newly available foreign pornography reveals dynamics in Kathmandu, Nepal, that may also be taking place in urban India. Liechty found that men's use of foreign pornography increases the demands that they make on women.

One woman commented on the sexual aggression induced by foreign pornography:

> I mean, while watching these films, in what a bad manner [men] think of others! Even their own sisters they begin to look at in this way! This is what they do once they have become like that. (quoted by Liechty 2001, 46)

Rather than successfully introducing new cultural blueprints, then, cultural globalization may more often offer new resources that intensify the attraction to existing hierarchies. Pornography and the intensified celebration of male violence influenced by foreign media reinforce the ways that popular culture has long contributed to male dominance in India.

Conclusion

The divergent cultural practices of the middle-classes in India reflect divergent structural positions in the global economy. With economic liberalization, affluent English-speaking Indians do in fact operate on a global field, selling their labor on a global market. With income and an opening market, they have new opportunities to buy global goods. But most ordinary Indians remain limited by local markets of consumption and employment. 95% of Indians lack the English-language skills that allow them to hitch their dreams to the global economy. Hundreds of millions of Indians have become aware of newly available global goods, but lack the means to purchase them. Despite economic and cultural globalization, then, most Indians remain oriented to local Indian horizons. Globalization, then, has produced affluent Indians who see themselves as a transnational middle class but has reaffirmed the local orientations of a local middle class that sees itself as distinctively Indian

My 2001 work with Indians in Dehra Dun, India, is consistent with a number of other recent ethnographies—Chin's (1998) ethnography of the Malaysian middle-class, Dickey's (2002) ethnography of the Tamil middle-class, Saavala's (2001) ethnography of the Telugu middle class and Liechty's (2003) ethnography of the Kathmandu middle class. All of these ethnographies demonstrate this focus on defining identity in opposition to class others through its orientation to cosmopolitan goods and cosmopolitan gender arrangements (whether embracing or rejecting them). This suggests that the dynamics I discovered may be fairly widespread. It is significant that this emerging rethinking of class analysis came out of ethnographic data which focuses on cultural meanings. None of these accounts appeared to be limited by theoretical assumptions rooted in traditional Marxist analysis. These accounts, along with my own, suggest that

to understand class dynamics today, we must see class as operating on a global scale and rooted in consumption practices and gender arrangements.

When it is successful, then, it appears the transnational capitalist class produces a transnational middle class that finds its identity by defining itself to class others on a global scale, advertises cosmopolitan discernment through consumption and embraces distinctively cosmopolitan gender arrangements. But in the process a local middle class is also created—a middle class that defines its identity on a local field, enjoys new opportunities for consumption, but roots its identity in distinctively local gender arrangements.

References

Abraham, Leena. 2001. Redrawing the *Lakshman Rekha*: Gender Differences and Cultural Constructions in Youth Sexuality in Urban India. *South Asia.* xxiv: 133-156

Chin, Christine B.N. 1998. *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian "Modernity" Project*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derné, Steve. 2000. *Movies, Masculinity, and Modernity: An Ethnography of Men's Filmgoing in India*. Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

—. 2008. *Globalization on the Ground: Media and the Transformation of Culture, Class, and Gender in India*. New Delhi: Sage,

Dickey, Sara. 2002. Anjali's Prospects: Class Mobility in Urban India. Pp. 214-226 in *Everyday Life in South Asia* (eds. Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gupta, Dipankar. 2000. *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India.

Liechty, Mark. 2003. *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

—. 2001. Women and Pornography in Kathmandu: Negotiating the 'Modern Woman' in a New Consumer Society. Pp. 34-54 in Shoma Munshi. ed. *Images of the 'Modern' Woman in Asia: Global Media, Local Meanings*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.

Mies, Maria. 1986. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor*. London: Zed

Nandy, Ashis. 1989. *The Tao of Cricket: On Games of Destiny and the Destiny of Games*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Susan Parulekar. n.d. Transforming and Imagining Elite Femininity: Globalization and the Elite Female in Bombay India.

Puri, Jyoti. 1997. Reading Romance Novels in Postcolonial India. *Gender & Society* 11: 434-452.

Saavala, Minna. 2001. Low Caste but Middle-Class: Some Religious Strategies for Middle-Class Identification in Hyderabad. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.) 35 (3): 293-318

Sengupta, Hindol. 2001. Valentine's Day: Time for Expressing Feelings and Making Choices. *India Abroad* February 16, p. 51.

Shurmer-Smith, Pamela. 2000. *India: Globalization and Change*. London: Arnold.

Sklair, Leslie. 2001. *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Uberoi, Patricia. 1998. The Diaspora Comes Home: Disciplining Desire in *DDLJ*. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.) 32: 305-336.