Dangerous Liaisons
Women and Men: Risk and Reputation in Mumbai

Safety in public spaces has thus far been tied to the notion of state responsibility and client-hood. For women particularly, this status of client-hood is linked intimately with ideologies of protectionism and the need to demonstrate protection-worthiness through manufacturing respectability. This reduces rather than enhances women's access to public space. This paper interrogates the discourse of safety in public space to argue that making a claim to the right to take risks in public space rather than petitioning for safety might take women further in the struggle to access public space as citizens. Focusing on Mumbai's growing hierarchies of access to public space, the paper also argues that women's exclusion from public space is linked to the exclusion of other marginal citizens.

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Mumbai, the commercial capital of India, is a city that revolves around calculated and intuitive risk: what train to catch, where to invest, what kind of insurance, to travel with a railway pass or "free", how to save one's skin during bomb blasts or on days of torrential rainfall, are only some of the uncertainties that the average Mumbaikar takes on.

This is a city where people regularly travel in numbers of 5,000 in a suburban commuter train meant for 1,710 commuters, where it is not unheard of to have friends fall out of trains.[1] It is a city where people routinely choose to cross railway lines even though statistics demonstrate that almost 10 people die in the train-related accidents everyday with an annual average of 3,500 people. Despite these statistics, a large number of the women we interviewed acknowledged that they would rather cross the railway tracks and face the hurtling trains than use the foot over-bridges which are dark, threatening and full of unknown dangers.[2]

This essay focuses on questions of risk in relation to women's access to public space to ask: How is public safety defined for women in Mumbai? How is risk calculated and constructed? How are ideas about class, public space, safety and global citizenship implicated in the discussion on gendered risk?

In this paper, public space is visualised to be a deeply connected sub-section of public sphere and I am conscious that it reflects the divisions and hierarchies of the public sphere. Public space includes sites like streets, public toilets (in neighbourhoods, on streets, and railway stations), market places ('bazaars' and malls), recreational areas (parks, maidans, restaurants, cinema houses) and modes of public transport (which include buses, trains, taxis and rickshaws) as well as sites like bus-stops and railway stations.

This paper draws substantially on insights and findings of the research conducted by the Gender and Space project under the aegis of Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research (PUKAR), an urban research collective in Mumbai. This project sought to examine women's access to public space in relation to questions of citizenship, civic safety and sexual safety, risk and respectability.

In this research, over a period of three years, we studied 14 different localities in the city across geographical locations, class, religious and linguistic affiliations, and usage. Segments of these localities were also mapped architecturally. We also conducted ethnographic observations at five suburban railway stations, four parks, three shopping malls and four coffee shops. These were studied largely through in-depth and structured interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, during this time we also conducted three long courses and a number of short workshops and the discussions in these pedagogic contexts also contributed to our research.

This paper examines the limitations of the demand for safety and extends an argument I had made in an earlier essay that what women need in order to access public space as citizens is not so much the provision of safety as the right to take risks [Phadke 2005]. It elucidates why seeking safety is an unviable feminist strategy to enhance access to public space. It self-consciously focuses on middle class women to argue that even the most desirable of urban subjects are offered only conditional access to limited spaces, not the right to engage public spaces and risk as citizens. It examines ideas of contamination of both women and spaces and argues that both are rooted in the exclusion of marginal citizens from public spaces.

Before I more fully elucidate these propositions around safety and risk I would like to contextualise the gender politics of public space in 21st century Mumbai.

Gender and Space in Mumbai

Contemporary Mumbai is a city of 12 million people. Of this population, over 50 per cent are slum and pavement dwellers, occupying by many calculations a mere 8 per cent of Mumbai's land area. Economic and political changes since the early 1990s have rendered the urban environment in Mumbai both more conservative and anti-outsider. The communal riots that the city witnessed in 1992-93, when systematic pogroms targeted and attacked Muslims and destroyed their businesses, only underscored this. The 1990s saw the arrival of the most unrestricted globalisation that India's once semi-closed economy had seen. These changes and the fissures they have created have manifested themselves in a politics of morality and a deep suspicion of those seen not to belong. A growing body of critical scholarly work has profiled and analysed these changes even as Mumbai is sought to be remade (by planners and policymakers) in various ways

into a more sanitised place, by attempting to eliminate all those people and objects that did not fit in with its vision.[3]

If one is to query access for women in Indian cities, then beginning a study with Mumbai seems paradoxical – for in Mumbai women are visible – in buses and local trains, in bazaars and shopping malls, in multinational offices as managers and corner shops as saleswomen.[4] It was not until we actually began counting women on the streets of Mumbai that we realised how few women there actually are, never more than 28 per cent at any given place or time, according to our research.[5] Nonetheless, despite the low ratio of women in public space, we are aware that relative to our countrywomen in other cities, we are privileged in our access to public space. This is precisely why it is important to study Mumbai – for if this is the standard of access to public space in the country then perhaps we lack ambition or imagination, or both.

Elsewhere I have argued that for women, safety does not accrue from infrastructural or institutional factors but has to be actively produced. The production of this safety is linked to the manufacture of both purpose and respectability in order to legitimise women's presence in public space. I also suggested that Mumbai is a relatively safer city because of its large workforce of women, its history of social reform, its relatively well developed public transport system and the lack of modernist urban planning which means that residential and commercial areas are mixed [Phadke 2005].

Here I would like to extend this argument to suggest that all these factors in one form or the other represent a claim to public space – they legitimise women's access in public space. Safety, I argue, is linked directly to the level of claim that one feels to a space. It is more than the promise of not being physically harmed, it includes the knowledge that should one be harmed one's presence will not be looked at askance. It is this lack of claim that contributes to women's sense of anxiety and lack of safety in public space as much as the fear of assault. I argue that the recognition of the legitimate right to public space as citizens has the capacity to transform women's relationship to public space.

At the present time, however, what women get are contradictory messages of danger coded in various sub and super texts that women must read and negotiate. On the one hand, the city is constructed as a space dangerous for women, who stand to be contaminated by its disorder and must therefore be protected preferably in the private spaces of the home. On the other hand, there are the parallel narratives on the modern global city, where middle class women are visualised as important actors in the roles of professionals and consumers.

At this point I would like to take a moment to reflect on the middle-class, Hindu, upper-caste, heterosexual, married or would-be-married woman whose presence has significantly informed our research on public space. Middle class women are central to any discussion on safety both as desirable urban subjects and also as the symbols of national honour to be protected from the potential contamination posed by others in public space. I will return in some detail to the question of who constitute these "others".

The location of the middle class woman as the central protagonist of this essay and the focus on the middle class moral discourse of safety does not indicate a bourgeois slant but is a conscious choice intended to help expose both the inadequacy of the discourse in facilitating women's access to public space and also its subterfuge in masking other kinds of (class) exclusions from public space. The focus on the middle class woman allows me to demonstrate that, however conformist, even the most desirable of urban female subjects is unable to engage the city and to court risk and that for women even privilege does not ensure access to public space.

I am very aware that the category, women in Mumbai, encompasses a range of diverse identities that intersect with gender – class, religion, caste, age, educational status, employment situation, and physical ability – to create very different experiences for women living in the city. I also acknowledge that the term middle class today encompasses a vast range of groups quite different from each other. However, these differences, do not change the fact that though the discourse of safety is centred on the middle class women, the normative ideals that it upholds are equally applicable to women of other classes. Its focus on middle class women rather than working class or poor women allows the discourse to be only about women and therefore about gendered safety. A discussion on working class or poor women would compel an engagement with concerns of not only gendered safety but also class safety, one that would then mean contending with the question of working class and poor men's access to public space as well. Bringing the discussion to focus squarely on the middle class woman helps to unravel the fact that the discourse of safety is in the interests of not even the women for whom it is ostensibly meant but rather serves to reinforce the boundaries of class and gender in access to public space.

The discourse of safety is framed in relation to questions of risk and before we engage with safety it is important to situate the question of risk.

The Risk Question

So what is risk and how does modern 21st century urban living calibrate risk? Ulrich Beck (1992) suggests that we now live in societies where risk is manufactured and managed and even deliberately undertaken for the sake of benefits conceived of in advance. Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1991) suggests that the institutionalisation of risk is a fundamental character of modern society where risks are endlessly analysed, profiled and reflected upon.

The question here is how then can one situate the precise nature of the risk question in relation to women in public space? How are different risks understood and ranked in relation to women's access of public space. I would like to enumerate the various possible risks to women in relation to public space:

(1) The risk of potential physical assault when women do access public space. This includes the risk to life, the physical and psychological trauma of injury. (These are risks shared by men.)

(2) The risk to "reputation" of accessing public space against a normative order that defines women's proper place as being in the private spaces of the home. This includes the risks of loss of matrimonial opportunity and a questioning of sexual virtue.

(3) The risk of being blamed for being in public space at all if a woman is assaulted, particularly sexually assaulted, in public space. This includes the risk of the improbability of getting justice except in a few cases.

(4) The risk, should women choose not to access public space more than minimally, of loss of opportunity to engage city spaces and the loss of the experience of public spaces. It also includes

the risk of accepting the gendered status hierarchies of access to public space and in doing so reinforcing them.

The first three are risks associated with accessing public space, the fourth is a risk related to not accessing public space.

Another relevant question to ask in relation to risk in public space is when are risks imposed and when are they chosen? The line between imposed and chosen risks is rather ambiguous and in my perception constantly shifting. For instance, the risk of accessing public sense in a broad sense is chosen but the risks associated with a lack of infrastructure like good roads, street lighting and adequate public transport are not necessarily actively chosen but are factors (determined by flawed urban planning) that individuals are compelled to take into account in their calculation of risk.

More specifically, I would like to focus on the perceived risk to reputation for women when they access public space. The risk to reputation is ever present when women access public space. This is true even when women access public space both respectably (defined in patriarchal terms through clothing, symbolic markers of good womanhood, and temporality) and purposefully (for specific reasons related to education, employment or consumption). Choosing not to access public space without "adequate" reason does not free conforming women from the need to demonstrate their respectability and virtue over and again. This pressure, I argue, also constitutes an un-chosen factor that women must consider in their assessment of risk.

It is also important to note here, though I will not address this in any detail, that the focus on the public as a space of risk and danger also serves to render invisible the violence faced by women in their own homes. Making choices to only minimally engage risk in public spaces, does not offer any protection from those who are intended to protect you. In fact, in many cases, the norms of respectability demand that women remain silent about private domestic violence. The lack of a law on marital rape in India only underscores this. The threat of risk then is limited to that posed by the outsider or the stranger, while protection from the insider is not just unavailable but is also, more significantly, considered irrelevant.

Dangerous Discourse of Sexual Safety

The discourse of safety is laid out in relation to the questions of risk discussed above. The discourse of safety in public space is articulated as the discourse of a gendered safety. Concerns about violence in public space are expressed most often in relation to the woman as the vulnerable victim of attack. The discourse of safety for women is actually the discourse of sexual safety. The concern is not that women will be killed or even run over by vehicles but that they will be sexually assaulted. This focus on sexual safety is rooted in conservative class and community structures particularly those of sexual endogamy. This notion of safety encompasses not just sexual assault but also undesirable sexual liaisons even if they are consensual. Situating the discussion in relation to safety rather than "sexual endogamy" isolates the question of gendered risk, pushing the question of both class safety and (unwanted) cross-class-sexual-affiliations out of the frame of concern. The discourse of gendered safety then is inextricably linked to the manufacture of respectability and immediately excludes an overt discussion of the anxieties attached to a mixing of classes, especially to any association between lower class men and middle class women. This is an idea I will return to later in the essay.[6]

Staking a claim for safety is critically dependant on being able to demonstrate that one is worthy of being protected. This demonstration takes varied forms from the wearing of symbols of matrimony, to the presence of protective men and the carrying of bags and other parcels to illustrate purpose. As is apparent such demonstrations are symbolic rather than materially effective – for instance the presence of men in their roles as father, husbands or brothers merely marks women off as unavailable rather than provides them with the guarantee of physical safety.

The curious thing about respectability is that it begins to assume a value that supersedes safety – that is, from the perspective of communities and families, the preservation of women's respectability and honour implicitly outweighs the value placed on actual safety. Our research suggests that women then feel compelled to produce respectability and protect the "honour" of their families even at the cost of their own safety. The insistence on sexual safety then actively contributes to not just reducing women's access to public space but also to compromise their safety when they do access public space, by focusing more on women's capacity to produce respectability rather than on their safety. The discourse of safety then does not keep women safe in the public; it effectively bars them from it.

For instance, one young woman living in a predominantly Gujarati Jain building on Malabar Hill in south Mumbai told of how her boyfriend used to drop her some distance from her building since her family did not know that she had a boyfriend. She would then negotiate the distance of about 100 metres on foot, however late it was at night. The discourse of sexual safety demanded that she value her reputation over actual safety.

Respectability then is linked not only to the prevention of sexual violation but also in the policing of women's consensual relationships with men of their choice. Women's reputations are linked to their being able to demonstrate on a regular basis their conformity to social norms. The problem with valuing sexual safety over other kinds of safety is that when safety for women becomes exclusively sexual safety, it assumes the form of surveillance.

In an earlier paper [Phadke 2005], I had suggested that "concerns over reputation and honour are much more pressing among lower middle-class women, particularly those who live in localities where their arrivals and departures from their front doors are easily visible to neighbours" (p 45). While it is true that some kinds of architecture like chawls – which facilitate the now much romanticised community life – also allow for a greater policing of women, at the same time, I now extend this argument to suggest that all women are policed and that architecture is not the only contributing factor. Our research suggests that it is the composition of a neighbourhood that contributes significantly to the levels at which women are policed.

In neighbourhoods where people are less anonymous and more known to each other – especially neighbourhoods of homogenous communities – the surveillance of women is more stringent. Homogenous neighbourhoods of all kinds: housing societies, buildings, chawls and slum settlements that are composed of single or similar communities are far more restrictive of the movements of women than more heterogeneous communities.[7]

For instance, Gujarati Jain young women living on Malabar Hill, an upper class south Mumbai neighbourhood in those buildings occupied largely by members of their own community, record that they feel continuously the oppressive presence of the censuring panoptic gaze. This has important implications for their reputations which will directly impact on their future marital

prospects in a context where caste and community endogamy are strongly practised.

Women living in different kinds of neighbourhoods (distinguished by class and location) articulated that they were more likely to retaliate to an act of sexual harassment in a neighbourhood which was not their own. This seems contrary to what one might be tempted to assume – that women feel safer in their own neighbourhoods. Rather than empowering women, the presence of insiders (and the pressure to demonstrate respectability: "good women ignore sexual harassment") actually prevents women from acting in their own defence. A woman living in the eastern suburb of Mulund said that she would often retort in response to a sexually coloured comment on an unfamiliar street but would "hesitate to make a scene in an area where I am known because people will talk". This is often tied to the notion that women invite trouble or are in some way to blame when harassment takes place.

While women often record feeling physically safer in their own neighbourhoods, which are familiar to them and where they are known, this does not translate into increased access to public space. In fact, spaces in which women are recognised as wives, daughters and sisters often restrict access. Within these same neighbourhoods, women who were seen as transgressive: usually single or divorced women, or those who openly flouted social norms were subject to hostility and harassment – much more in their own neighbourhoods than outside – where they were comparatively anonymous.

Activist women living in Dongri, a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood, who were seen to be transgressive, articulated that they and their families faced jeers and harassment within their own neighbourhoods.[8] At a focus group discussion in Kala Chowki, in a predominantly Maharashtrian chawl, women indicated that they were uncomfortable if their daughters associated with women who had "bad" reputations as they felt this might "spoil" their daughter's reputations.[9] Clearly for women who do not conform, the spaces where they ostensibly belong are the most dangerous.

It is comparatively heterogeneous spaces that engender the greatest capacity to access public space.[10] For instance, single women who lived on their own in Mumbai away from families were the ones who experienced the greatest degree of unmediated access to public space. This came not from a sense of safety – for as single women they were compelled to negotiate the city entirely on its own terms and create their own support structures – but from the diminished need to manufacture respectability. This, however, is not intended to romanticise the lives of single women in Mumbai who have to often negotiate suspicious landlords and the judgmental scrutiny of neighbours and housing colony managements who are intensely curious about whom they meet and how late they return home from work.

In an earlier essay [Phadke 2005], I had argued that, "For professional, mostly upper middle class, women, confronting 'risk' and 'danger' by negotiating public space and transport at night, especially after work, is seen as a sign of their assumption of 'masculine' and therefore desirable work ethics and values" (pp 46-47). Further research has only strengthened my conviction that professional women are compelled to project gender neutrality as professionals (even as they perform femininity as women). At the same time, I now realise how significant the manufacture of respectability is in all contexts. Middle class professional women working in Nariman Point are no less free of the constraints of demonstrating their respectability and protection-worthiness than

saleswomen in the malls in Lower Parel.[11] In separate interviews, women lawyers in Nariman Point and sales assistants at a store in the High Street Phoenix Mall in Lower Parel discussed their negotiations with their families over the late hours they worked and the need to ensure that people in the neighbourhood did not misunderstand the "nature" of their work.

By creating an environment where women are forced to manufacture respectability, neighbourhoods actually reduce women's capacity to defend themselves lest they be seen as "loose women". The focus on sexual safety reduces women's capacity to negotiate public space actually placing them at even greater risk. In many ways then the diminished capacity to take risks may also mean the diminished capacity to produce safety and therefore unintentionally placing oneself at risks that are thrust upon one rather than chosen. In this sense then, conforming to ideas of sexual safety actually reduces women's access to public space.

Giddens (1991) suggests that, "The body is in some sense perennially at risk. The possibility of bodily injury is ever-present, even in the most familiar of surroundings" (p 126). At one level this is true in the sense that risk exists both privately (where one might face domestic violence or even slip, fall and break a bone while bathing) and in the public (where one might be sexually assaulted or fall out of an over-crowded train). At the same time, when discussing risk, one must distinguish between accidental and intended violence. For women the threat of intended violence is located in a politics of morality that reframes the context of risk, seriously reducing their capacity to engage risk.

The discourse of sexual safety then is dangerous not only in an ideological sense in that it perpetuates the idea of women's "proper place" in private spaces but also at the material level where it actively inhibits women from producing safety for themselves.

Middle Class Women, Consumer Visibility and Political Participation

The discourse of safety is not only about sexual safety, it is also interestingly about modernity. This part of the discourse is linked to the fact that a selective visibility of women as professionals and consumers is significant to the claims of a global city.

While it is true that women are barred from public space, not all women are barred in the same way. Through their access to both economic capital through private infrastructure and cultural capital through education, middle class women have greater access to public space. In this section, I will argue that the focus on the middle class woman as symbolic effectively hides an ideology of exclusion that encompasses class and community as well.

The middle-class, Hindu, upper-caste, heterosexual, married or would-be-married woman is significant not only because her body is the canvas on which narratives of modernity, honour and nationhood are simultaneously written but also because her identities mark her as privileged in every way other than gender. She carries with her no other identity, other than being a woman that would mark her as an outsider to public space. She is not lower class, not dalit, not Muslim, not lesbian – it is clear that a man with her set of identities would have open legitimate and unquestioned access to public space.[12] Relative to other women, in a hypothetical sense, she should be located in the best position to access public space.

The location of the discourse of safety on the bodies of middle class women is then able to account for the simultaneous

desirability of the middle class woman in public space even as it continues to reproduce the narratives of public space as dangerous for women. When there are battle cries to make the city safer for women, it is because a middle class woman has been sexually assaulted. This bring to the fore people's anxieties about both women's proper place (what was she doing there in the first place) and the presence of other marginal citizens in public space (who constitute the risk).

As suggested earlier, there are spaces where middle class women as consumers and professionals are welcomed such as the new spaces of consumption (shopping malls and coffee shops) where the presence of a certain kind of woman is a marker of the modernity of the city and its claim to global status. It is important at this point to underscore that these are not public "public" spaces, but privatised spaces that masquerade as public spaces, where entry is ostensibly open but in reality regulated through various subtle and overt acts of (intentional and unintentional) intimidation and exclusion.[13] The suggested safety of middle class women in these spaces defines particular spaces in the city as desirable places for the middle classes to live, work or be entertained. The presence and the performance of a class habitus of these women are very important in the construction of the global city.[14]

Simultaneous to the pressure of manufacturing respectability and ensuring sexual safety, it is also required of middle class women that they simultaneously demonstrate sexual desirability. Being able to carry off certain kinds of skin revealing or form fitting clothing is seen as a marker of a woman's confidence even "modernity". In our research we encountered often the opinion that those women who can carry off an attitude, clothing or demeanour with a certain confidence are less likely to be publicly harassed by men. It also assumes that women belonging to a certain class are more likely to look comfortable in jeans or a skimpy top than women who don't or are first generation wearers of jeans – the habitus that comes from possessing cultural capital. For instance, one woman in Lokhandwala, Andheri, articulated this when she said: "Wearing a noodle strap is ok for a smart girl but not for others who only look cheap".[15] The idea here appears to be that women who through their habitus can signal a social distance are not seen as soft targets for harassers.

I am more than a little sceptical of any notion that suggests that women and the way they hold themselves might be responsible for public harassment. My own discomfort here is that it appears as if the discourse of modernity then places on women not only the onus of manufacturing safety but also of assuming that when they cannot do so it is their own fault for being as it were inadequately "modern".

If a selective visibility of women as professionals and consumers is desirable to the image of the city then the question we need to ask is – how does this impact their access to public space? Our interviews and focus group discussions suggest that such access is limited to the privatised public spaces of malls, coffee shops and multiplexes within which also women feel compelled to manufacture not only femininity but also class respectability, that is, to look like consumers who can afford to shop. Young women often articulated that there was an unspoken, but no less real for that, dress code in these spaces.[16]

These spaces also manufacture the illusion of a public modernity. For instance, while couples in public spaces are censured for holding hands, and ostensibly threatening the moral fibre of Indian society, inside coffee shops, couples, particularly heterosexual couples, may cuddle without fear. As long as they dress class-appropriately, the presence of couples and even their displays of affection are not looked on in askance but in fact constitute part of the message these spaces are striving to convey: that these are global spaces with global rules where one can leave behind the city and its parochial cultural contexts.[17]

These are environments which create the illusion of public space, carefully protected through glass barriers from where the "risks and uncertainties of everyday life are carefully edited out" [Banerjee 2001]. These risks include the presence of the lower classes, particularly lower class men. Keeping out those deemed threatening however, does not take away the pressure to reproduce the structures of both femininity and middle-class respectability.[18]

Apart from these spaces of consumption, women are also visible in the public sphere: in the economy as professionals and in the polity as elected representatives. For instance, in the political arena, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments passed by Parliament in 1992, and ratified by all states in 1993, guaranteed the reservation of 33 per cent of seats for women in panchayats and municipal bodies. As a result women corporators have become more visible in Mumbai as in other cities and, despite the common perception that they are proxies for men, have gained a certain amount of recognition.[19] In the economic arena, women have become visible as white collar workers in a variety of fields, some even reaching top management levels and being publicly lauded. Unfortunately our research suggests that these changes do not translate into an increased access to public space for even these women, much less for all women. Nor does a greater legitimacy for women in public life guarantee their safety in public space.[20]

The lack of legitimacy for women's presence in public space is seen in the fact that women never feel an uncontested claim to public space and women continue to experience themselves as illegitimate users of public space. Political position or power has not had any direct link to women's sense of safety or even less to women's capacity to court risk. Privilege, then, does not bestow on even limited numbers of women unlimited access even to limited spaces.

Women and Men:
Exclusion and the 'Other' Marginal Citizen

The exclusion of women from public space cannot be seen in isolation. As I have suggested in the preceding sections, the exclusion of women from public space is linked critically to the exclusion of other marginal citizens. The lack of safety that is articulated for women is mirrored by the lack of safety and claim that other marginal citizens feel. Mumbai is less safe not just for women but for others, long seen as outsiders to public space, and in fact to the city itself – slum dwellers, hawkers, bar-dancers, sex workers, all poor migrants and Muslims across class. I would argue that the city is less safe not so much because instances of violence have occurred but that people feel more vulnerable and less safe because the city has become more exclusive and less welcoming.

Over time, given the increasingly narrow vision for the city's development, a growing number of groups are cast as outsiders to the city. As the city becomes more exclusive and aspires to be more homogenous, the exclusion of women from public space is mirrored by the suspicion with which other marginal citizens are seen/sought to be erased or cleared. Women are kept out

through narratives of danger about the Other on the streets. Slum dwellers are evicted on the rationale of rendering Mumbai a more attractive location for capital investment.[21] Hawkers are cleared on grounds of "zoning".[22] Poor people and minorities, especially young men are also seen as a potential threat in public space and watched carefully.[23] Even middle class Hindu men, the only ones who are not officially warned to stay away from public space tend to prefer the more privatised public spaces. That in the 21st century global city streets are meant for an orderly procession of cars rather than the disorder of people walking is reflected in the move to clear streets of people and move them into the obscurity of rapid transit. Mike Davis (1990) paints a frightening vision of modern day Los Angeles suggesting that from the perspective of the police – good citizens are off the streets, "enclaved in their high-security private consumption spheres; bad citizens are on the streets and therefore not engaged in legitimate business" (p 253).[24]

The discourse of urban personal public safety then is one of protection of one group of people from another, both of whom are rendered illegitimate users of public space by the same discourse that seeks to establish order. These of course are not necessarily clear categories – the lower class man encompasses all those who might threaten the physical safety or reputation of middle class women, hawkers, Muslim men, bar dancers and sex workers and all men who are seen as undesirable matrimonial or sexual partners. I argue that the politics that seeks their exclusion from public is directly linked to the exclusion of women from public space.

I had earlier argued [Phadke 2005] that "respectable" women stand the "risk" of potential defilement in public space while "non-respectable" women are themselves a potential source of contamination to the purity of public spaces. Here I would like to extend this line of argument to ask who poses the threat to good women and what it means for women's access to public space. While non-respectable women are a source of contamination to public spaces, in relation to respectable women, I argue that they merely muddy the context – they make it difficult to determine who is worthy of protection. The person(s) who are seen to pose the risk are men – of a certain class and occupation (or lack thereof). These ideas of risk make it clear that the definition of what constitutes "risk" itself is a mechanism of control that is used to define normative citizenship and to regulate access to public space.

This then sets up the central fallacious opposition around which people are excluded from public space – that between the "vagrant" man (read: lower class often unemployed male cast as migrant outsider) and our central protagonist, the middle class woman. The rationale for denying women access to public space is the danger posed by the lower class unemployed man. Both the person perceived to be the potential molester and the potential victim of the act of molestation are both denied legitimate access to public space on these grounds. This line of thinking casts both lower class men and all women as outsiders to public space and the anxieties attached to women's presence are simultaneously expressions of the anxiety attendant upon the presence of the lower class man.[25]

What is at risk here is not merely women's reputations or even sexual virtue but Mumbai's global aspirations themselves. The global city aspires to sterile and predictable patterns of inhabitation. The global claims of Mumbai are still new and fragile and therefore to be guarded zealously. One of the ways Mumbai's global claims can be buttressed is by clear definition of spaces as being inside-outside, public-private, recreational–commercial. The demand for both those at risk and those who *are* the risk to inhabit public space together offers the vision of a disorderly city rendering its spaces diverse and not open to easy interpretation. This lack of order and hierarchy is profoundly threatening to the vision of a controlled Mumbai.

The suggestion that the exclusion of women is inextricably linked to that of other marginal citizens is not a movement towards a more gender neutral stance but rather an acknowledgement that it is not only women who are barred from public space. I argue that the exclusion of women from public space cannot be viewed as separate from the exclusion of other marginal citizens from public space. While there are particularities to women's exclusion, women's safety or access to public space cannot be sought in the absence of a more general claim to city public spaces for all citizens. Implicit in this is the assumption that all marginal groups are not the same, and not necessarily friendly to each other. Nonetheless what we share is the experience of exclusion, overt or covert, enacted by our families, communities, the market and/or the state.

Risk and Reputation: Desexualising Safety

There is a public face to the insistence on sexual safety in the way in which questions of risk play out when women are actually assaulted in public space. Before we engage further in this discussion it is important to point out that the perception of risk has little to do with the actual possibility of danger. Statistics regularly show that when it comes to actual violence, women are victims of violence more in their homes than outside. Men on the other hand face far more incidents of actual violent behaviour in public space.[26] Yet the narrative of danger in public space is unequivocally centred around the figure of the woman. This might have something to do with the fact that non-sexual physical violence is seen as more acceptable than sexual violence which violates the respectability of the woman and in turn brings dishonour to the community. Furthermore, the overt attention on gender-based violence in public space, actively discounts class, caste and religion-based violence that takes place simultaneously.

When a woman is raped one finds that the concern is less about bodily or mental harm to the woman and more about its repercussions on her identity and relationships. Families appear to be more concerned with the "reputation" of their women rather than justice as has been demonstrated in numerous such incidents where women (and/or their families) prefer not to press charges.

For instance, in the early 1990s there was a rape in Elphinstone college in south Mumbai of a student by other students. The young girl was whisked away and never allowed to testify. In 2005, more than a decade later, when a young college-going girl was raped in broad daylight by a police constable at Marine Drive, there was a lot of public speculation about her companion, a young boy of the same age, who had been asked to leave by the constable. While on the one hand the constable had apparently used the fact of her being out with a male friend to threaten her, into the 'chowki'; her parents almost seemed to condone his initial behaviour of moral policing by insisting that their daughter did not know any boys. It seemed more important for them to prove that their daughter's actions had been "within the limits" of permissible behaviour than to demand justice irrespective of what she had been doing.[27, 28]

More recently a young woman was molested on new year's eve 2006 at the Gateway of India. This incident came to light because a newspaper reporter happened to be present and took photographs. It is unsurprising that the victim chose to remain anonymous and did not file a case of sexual harassment. In these incidents especially at night – society, which includes the police, find a way to "blame" the victim – and so inevitably there would have been questions of what she was doing at the Gateway so late at night (even if it was new year's eve) and what she was wearing.

A woman's sexuality is seen to be at the core of not just her own identity but that of her community as well. The fear underlying the concern with sexual safety is the possibility of rape. Yet rape trials make it clear that the victim's consent was never the real issue. Winifred Woodhull (1988) using a Foucauldian paradigm to understand rape suggests that Foucault spoke in "favour of desexualising rape by decriminalising it, making rape a civil offence akin to any other form of physical attack". She argues that it is possible that in Foucault's view this might "undermine the supposed 'prestige' of rape as a grand transgression" (pp 169-70).

Nivedita Menon (2004) suggests that we might do well to consider the "the feminist project to be not one of 'justice' but of 'emancipation'". She argues that, "It is assumed by all the discourses that circulate around and produce 'sexual violence' as category (including feminist discourses), that women can always be raped and that rape is an attack on the very selfhood of woman. … This leaves the ever-open possibility of other (all) women continuing to get raped" (p 155). She suggests that we might be better served emancipating ourselves from the very meaning of rape. She argues that feminist politics must move away from the discourse of "rape as violation", an understanding "perfectly compatible with patriarchal and sexist notions of women's bodies", to work towards transforming commonsense understandings of rape and sexual violence in general (p 161).

Extending this argument to the question of public space, safety and risk, one might argue that if we take as a self-evident truth that women should be protected and thus mount a demand for safety above all else, we would be placing the desire for protection above the right to access public space. Like the legal case for rape, sexual violation would be seen as the worst thing to befall women in public space. This might then neatly fall into the rhetoric of death before dishonour placing us on the slippery slope that will lead to endorsing honour killings. Safety that is linked to surveillance or protectionism can only be understood through sexist and paternalistic logic even as it attempts to prevent public violence against women.

If one were to turn the safety argument on its head, one might argue that what women need in order to maximise our access to public space as citizens – is not the provision of safety, for even so-called safe environments are not necessarily comfortable for women, but the right to engage risk. I argue that what women need in order to maximise their access to public space as citizens is not greater surveillance or protectionism (however well meaning), but the right to engage risk.

If we were to argue that the worst thing to befall women in relation to public space is to be denied access to it we would place ourselves and the debate in an entirely different discourse – the discourse of rights not protectionism. Seeking the right to take risks rather than making a claim for safety and protection would entail an altogether different kind of engagement. Given that for men, "risky" behaviour is seen as acceptable even desirable, claiming this right for women would undermine the very definition of appropriate feminine public behaviour.

As feminists while one seeks safety for women in public space, to seek it in relation to women's chastity or sexual virtue, can only provide conditional protection and not the right to public space. A feminist demand for public space located in an understanding of rights would clearly distinguish it from a more paternalistic claim to safety (therefore protection) in public space. What we might seek then is an equality of risk – that is not that women should never be attacked but that when they are, they should receive a citizen's right to redress and their right to be in that space be unquestioned.

At no point am I ignoring or even minimising the violence, both sexual and non-sexual, that might potentially take place in the public which has implications for both bodily and psychological trauma. Nor is it my intention to romanticise risk itself for as I have suggested "risk" is a term that is already value loaded in terms of good and bad, desirable and undesirable citizenship. Further, women's differential location does give them differential capacity to engage risks through differential access to the material means of producing safety for themselves like access to transport.

It is more important than ever before to assert that where "possible risk" should be a matter of choice and not thrust upon us through inadequate or short-sighted planning. While this paper is not focusing on infrastructure, at no point am I suggesting that it is not the responsibility of the state to provide infrastructure like public transport, public toilets and good lighting. All of these must be provided as part of a generalised claim that all citizens have to good infrastructure. Toilets for women for instance should stay open all night and every effort should be made to design these well and locate them in spaces where they are accessible and as safe as possible in terms of lighting, access to transport, access to escape routes, and so on. Keeping toilets open all night for women would send the significant message that women have every right to be in public space. This is a far more significant step than say the provision of increased policing though the presence of a sensitised police force would contribute greatly to enhancing women's access to public space.

As we claim the right to take risks as citizens, I argue that we must lobby for the infrastructure that will make this possible. At the same time the demand for infrastructure that reduces risks and enhances access should not be seen as an indictment of those who then choose to take other kinds of risks which are not dependent on infrastructure.

Implicit in this argument is the claim that risk should be equalised – that is everyone across community, class and gender should assume the same risks when they access public space. The fact, however, is that as things stand risks are not equal. For women, the anxiety is intensified by the fear of loss of reputation and the pressure to maintain respectability. For lower class men the anxiety is exacerbated by the fear of being seen as potential assaulters or simply as loiterers who should not be there. For hawkers, bar dancers and sex workers the anxiety is linked to the reality of often living on the margins of the law. For Muslims, the underlying fear is always that of being mistaken for terrorists. These are the risks we must address – these unchosen risks ensure that all marginal citizens experience themselves as illegitimate users of public space, forced to confront risks that accrue simply from their identities, from being who they are.

What would happen if we were to envision city spaces where the predominant discourse is not safety but inclusion? What if

we imagined a city where there were no hierarchies of access to public space? Some might see this vision as portending anarchy but in my perception it holds possibilities for democratising space and fundamentally questioning the discriminations within class, community and gender. A further exploration of these possibilities will have to wait for another paper.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The right to access public space is linked closely to the provision of public spaces. Don Mitchell (2003) argues that the right to the city and its public spaces should remain a core objective of social justice movements. From his perspective, the right to the city means a right not only to inhabit urban spaces but also to participate in a city as an ongoing work of creation, production, and negotiation. He perceives the constriction of public space as reflective of attacks on civil liberties and progressive politics of all kinds. He suggests that battles over public space reflect struggles for a just and democratic polity.

The struggle for the right to public space then is not only about individuals or even groups but also about our vision for the future of our cities and our ideas of urban democracy. A movement towards a more inclusive stance in relation to public space would not be an act of altruism but based on the understanding that homogenous and sanitised cities far from providing us with productive, and creative spaces for negotiation, in fact give rise to an environment that is deeply fissured and fraught. Public space that is based on the principle of exclusion might allow for some to enjoy gated "high security" spaces but in a larger sense do little to expand people's access to the city as a whole.

The women's movement in India and elsewhere in the world has always connected with other movements: the environmental movement, the movement of gay and lesbian rights, and the many human rights movements. This work follows this line of reasoning – women's liberation can never come at the cost of the freedom of anyone else. Translated into public space terms this means that the right of every person – across class, caste, and gender, regardless of both the kinds of and the strength of religious and sexual persuasions to public space as citizens. For it is only when the city belongs to everyone, that it can ever belong to women. **EPW**

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Notes

1 This situation is called "Super-Dense Crush Load" that is – with 14 to 16 standing passengers per square metre of floor space. http://www.mrvc.indianrail.gov.in/intr.htm accessed on March 15, 2007.

2 A questionnaire study (116 respondents) with women who travel by train indicated that lighting was an important concern.

3 See for instance the work of Appadurai (2000), Adarkar and Menon (2004), Banerjee-Guha (2006), D'Monte (2002), Hansen (2001), Patel (2003), and Varma (2004).

4 To most people Delhi seemed to be the logical city to study when it concerned public violence against women, see Viswanath and Tandon Mehrotra (2007) on questions of safety in New Delhi.

5 According to our mapping counts in the localities of Chembur, Pydhonie and Nariman point, the maximum women at any given time were 28 per cent around noon in Chembur, and the minimum were 2.5 per cent at 9.30 pm in Pydhonie, see Ranade (2007) for a detailed discussion on a mapping of women in public space.

6 For instance, our research demonstrated that in an industrial belt in Andheri (east) the anxieties about women safety were heightened by the large presence of working class men. These anxieties were very different from those in Nariman Point where most people are white collar workers.

7 Safety that is linked to the sexual control of women in families and communities has even more adverse implications for those women whose communities are under threat or surveillance themselves, see Khan (2007) for a detailed discussion of Muslim women in Mumbai.

8 Dongri is a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood in southern Mumbai.

9 Kala Chowki is an old working class area in central Mumbai and its architectural form is a mix of the industrial and the residential. This area is now in the process of transformation with a number of high-rises and up-market shopping centres coming up. Kala Chowki is interesting because though it is surrounded by these changes, at the time of the study, the mills in this area still retained their old built form though there is an air of decay and disillusion.

10 This is not however to suggest that heterogeneous spaces by themselves are adequate to facilitate women's access to public space. Elsewhere I have argued that despite the fact that heterogeneous space promotes women's access to public space facilitated by anonymity, this does not in any way further women's claims to public space as citizens. I suggested that the potential longer term risk of seeking anonymity rather than making a political claim to public space could well mean that women will continue to be seen as outsiders to public space [Phadke 2005].

11 Nariman Point is a business district in south Mumbai, that houses several multinational corporations in high-rise buildings. Lower Parel is a former mill area in central Mumbai now being redeveloped into largely high rise residential apartments and shopping malls.

12 At the same time, middle or upper class dalit or Muslim women who are not marked by community or femme lesbian women might also have similar access. However, their anxieties in relation to situations of riots for instance might be very different.

13 Scholarly work on the growth of malls has focused on their capacity to draw boundaries, create artificial environments and supplant democratic public spaces, see for instance, Conroy 1998, Crawford 1992, Friedberg 1993, Goss 1993, Kroker et al 1990, Mitchell 2003, Morris 2000, Sorokin 1992.

14 I use "habitus" as suggested by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to a socialised subjectivity, a way of theorising the socially produced self and of understanding how social relations become constituted within the self but also how the self is constitutive of social relations. Habitus is also visible in the way one stands and walks and inhabits space, in manners of speaking both of accent and idioms, in styles of dressing [Lawler 2004]. Though for my purposes I refer to habitus in relation to the body, the term extends beyond embodiments to include attitudes and tastes as well often carrying with it the weight of individual and collective history.

15 Lokhandwala is an upmarket area in Andheri (west) built in the 1980s.

16 The mall and coffee shops might be seen as sanitised spaces where one encounters strangers but without the strangeness that might make them threatening. Sennet (1974) suggests that fashion is an important way of signalling particularly class and status in public places thus taking the sharp edge of the sense of anonymity and disorder.

17 In the last decade in Mumbai there has been a policing of couples in public space, most notably during the tenure of the BJP-Shiv Sena government in the mid-1990s but also subsequently. In December 2005 in Meerut, police roughed up couples in a park in full view of the media and cameras, clearly demonstrating the kind of legitimacy these actions have.

18 It is important to note here that the tools of modernity in the shape of attire and often demeanour do not replace the traditional, they merely modify and mediate its expression. There is a whole new trend where women wear western outfits that are the height of fashion accessorised with their, 'mangalsutras', 'sindhoor', 'chooda' or other signs of Hinduness, particularly Hindu marital status. In a pan-Indian way – sindhoor, mangalsutras, choodas have transcended their regional and community locations and may even be worn as accessories. But before one is tempted

to view these acts as subversions, it is important to note their role in women's efforts towards manufacturing respectability. These visible symbols of marriage in the public space act as "keep-off-I'm-taken" signs for a public that is well able to decode them. I would like to argue that these function as barriers as effectively perhaps as veils establishing women's private location even as they enter the apparently public.

19 See Bedi (2007) on women in the Shiv Sena and issues of political participation.

20 Susan Faludi (1991) for instance suggests that the more visible women were in public life the more they would be undermined in various ways especially in the media.

21 The huge slum demolitions of December 2004 and January-February 2005 are testimony to this. In this period the NCP-Congress government in Maharashtra permitted a large-scale demolition of slums rendering almost 3.5 lakh people homeless. The language used to describe them is one of "encroachment" casting them immediately as less than full citizens.

22 For women, hawkers often represent friendly and familiar "eyes" on the street that urban writer Jane Jacobs alluded to in the 1960s. For instance one woman pointed out that the hawker who sold 'bhel', a savory snack, across from her apartment building had been there for several years unlike the security guards who changed every month. Similarly women commuters who navigated the area between the office district of Fort and the Churchgate railway station pointed out that ever since the hawkers vending books on the pavement were cleared off in 2005, that particular area in the late evening seemed unfriendly, dark and threatening.

23 The success of this narrative is apparent from our interviews with women across the city where poor men and Muslim men are viewed as the threat, despite the fact that when probed further most women admit that the sexual harassment they face is most often from men of their own class.

24 The idea of walking as potentially threatening is reflected in arguments made by Kroker et al (1990) who in the context of the US suggest that walking seen as something that only the dispossessed do. They argue that walking in America puts you in the position of Simmel's stranger, the person who by their very presence disturbs the field, summoning forth judgments on their conduct (p 450).

25 Nivedita Menon (2004) for instance cites the guidelines from *A Draft Report on Guidelines against Sexual Harassment in Delhi University* (May 1999) to prevent sexual harassment which suggest that "No hawkers, shops/dhabas or rickshawwalas/autos should be allowed within 100 yards of colleges, libraries and hostels" (p 152).

26 For instance, the Personal Safety Survey conducted in Australia in 2005 demonstrated that while 40 per cent of adult women and 50 per cent of adult men have experienced at least one incident of violence since the age of 15, women were more likely to be assaulted at home and be victims of intimate partner violence while men were more likely to be assaulted in public and be victims of stranger violence.

27 The young woman did give evidence to the police that enabled them to prosecute the man but this was partly due to the involvement of a man in uniform and the large media and public outcry following the crime.

28 The fact that the discourse of safety is focused on middle class women is borne out by the fact that only some months later, the rape of a rag-picker by a police constable near the international airport received much less attention and caused much less furore.

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